

## **Appendix 1: Bottled Emotions Case Study**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This is the first MoS case study project of those conducted in April-June 2013. The main aim of the case studies is to supplement the main study by adding outcomes of qualitative research into the different contexts in which the projects were carried out. The focus is still the impact of MOS projects on creative writing. It is not possible to measure this longitudinally, as with the main study; but we expect to obtain useful qualitative data about motivation, the nature of creativity in writing, the pedagogies which support it, and the factors in the MOS approach which promote it. We also expect to be able to work as a 'critical friend' in these projects, identifying productive elements in the projects and making constructive suggestions for improvements.

Bottled Emotions combines the creative work of advertising copywriters with the processes of poetry writing. The 'pitch' is writing adverts for imaginary products to counter troubling emotions, aimed at the 'monster' customers of the Hoxton Street Monster shop.

The process involved a central tutor, Martin, a professional advertising copywriter from a successful London agency; a number of volunteers, in many cases different people at each session; Vicky, as the MOS leader; and the teacher of the Year 7 class at Grove Academy, Jessica Lindsay. The project was conducted over six 90 minute sessions. The first and last were held at the MOS. The intervening sessions were held in the teacher's usual classroom, between 1.55 and 3.20 pm on Tuesdays.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Four kinds of data were considered.

- Pre-interviews with teachers and a sample of six children, three boys, three girls. The teacher's interview focused on the writing histories of the six students, and included her records of NC-related scores for Reading and Writing. The student interviews focused on their perceptions of their reading and their writing, both at home and at school; their expectations for the project; and their motivation for writing.
- Observation: half of the first session at MOS was observed; then three classroom sessions. The observation data includes field notes, photographs and videos of presentations.
- Post-interviews with the sample of students. These were quite brief (about 10 minutes each) due to time constraints in the school, but provided an opportunity to ask the students how they felt about the writing they had done during the project, and make suggestions about how the project might be conducted in future.
- Writing by students in the sample. The intention here was for the researcher and the teacher to assess writing by all six students, comparing writing from English books from before the project with writing completed during the project. This was also intended to test and refine the 'consensual judgment' tool for evaluating creativity. In the event, limitations on the teacher's time allowed for discussion of only one student's writing; but this was valuable in itself in terms of the kinds of issues raised and the effectiveness of the tool.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE CLASS AND THE SIX STUDENTS

The class was a Year 7 set 2 English group, in an Academy status comprehensive school judged as 'good' by Ofsted in January 2013. In relation to literacy skills, Ofsted reported that 'Students' literacy skills, particularly in reading, are well supported, and this enables them to make good progress in a range of subjects'. In relation to achievement generally, the assessment was that 'Though students enter the academy with starting points that below average, their results at Key Stage 4 match national averages, indicating that many students make better than expected progress'. The school serves an area with a degree of social deprivation: 'The proportion of students known to be eligible for additional support through the pupil premium is well above the national average', Ofsted); and a mix of ethnic groups, the largest of which in this class was observed to be Turkish. The sample of six were chosen to represent a range of writers, enthusiastic and reluctant, successful and challenged.

Beyaz – Loves writing and reading. Teacher assessments are 5B for writing, 5C for reading. She writes in her own time. Needs to think more carefully about the writing. Good at sentence structures, spelling. Quite babyish. Congolese.

She enjoyed reading the Diary of Anne Frank at home. Enjoys writing adventure stories at home. Recounts one about a girl writing her diary about how her mother has been taken into a mental hospital. Wants to be a writer. Says her primary school Year 4 teacher said she could be a writer if she got into the top sets in secondary school. Writes in her bedroom – and at MOS – regular attendee on Tuesdays.

Alice – described by the teacher as the 'lowest girl'. She was assessed as 5C for writing. The teacher emphasised the need to focus on punctuation and accuracy, the 'building blocks'; but said she often generates 'really nice ideas', contributes, writes quite a lot, but can be quite incoherent. Her target is 5B. She was recorded as 4C when she joined the school.

'I like reading books with pictures' – she cited The Story of Tracy Beaker. Recounts a story she wrote at home, about statues that moved when you weren't looking. She recounted it in some detail, with descriptive embellishment, emotional content. 'Most of the stories I write are inspired by something else – stories I write in school are inspired by television' – she cited Eastenders, Coronation Street, and Holby City. She hopes the MOS project would help with writing stories; she used to go to MOS in Year 6.

Dilek [no teacher interview data]

Born in Turkey. Likes Jacqueline Wilson books at home. Writes in her diary every day – she has a book, but if not at home, she writes in Notes on her phone. Writes comments on Facebook and tweets. "I write when I get angry at people but I don't mention their names." Remembered a story she wrote in Year 6 with a friend, called A Fire Girl. Adopted by a rich family after her parents split up. "We took two books to write it ... we got it from our imagination and from some books that we read." Plays Sonic, racing games and Hello Kitty on PS. In school – "Miss showed us a picture of a caveman and we done a story about that caveman". Went to MOS after school. Describes a group character-making exercise leading to individual story-writing, which she enjoyed. MOS "different because there's loads more people to help you." "The children can get ideas from him [Martin] to help you write persuasively. Because we're writing a story about our monster and we're trying to persuade them to buy the bottled emotion."

Denzil – ‘higher ability student ... but slightly regressed ... others have overtaken him recently’. Want to get him to consider his work more carefully in this project. 5C for writing. Target 5B (didn’t record a reading level).

Influences from reading? Comics – ‘there’s a comic with Spiderman ... he’s funny, the action’. ‘I also like shooting, I like war ... I have some Call of Duty games, and that’s based on war. I’ve got Black Ops 2’. Once I’ve played the missions, I just make a story on Word, Microsoft.’ ‘There’s a story called ‘Tears of Death’ (recounts story of Captain George, based on COD). Likes America – has visited Washington DC and New York. Played games in primary school based on shooting games. Mentions the Gothic project in school, and a project analysing movies. Describes the story he wrote in Gothic – a scientist making a project he thought would help the world, but it went wrong. Went to MOS in Year 6 with primary school. ‘I learnt lots of vocabulary and ideas. ... The Ministry of Stories have lots of decorations so that I can look at it and think of things and I have a very good imagination there, but my house is very plain.’

Turgay – bilingual Turkish/English. Middle ability; level 4A reading, 5C writing – lower end of the class. Turkish; MLD. Behaviour issues. Really enthusiastic; ‘bit of a show-off’. Really creative – needs to be guided, ‘to craft’ more carefully. School records suggest that work should be differentiated and scaffolded for him.

Born in Turkey; reads Turkish Gazette, writes in Turkish. Likes Harry Potter – got the DVDs, played the videogames, collects the figures. ‘I like the way he acts – his role – he never gives up.... I like JK Rowling’s books – I open the same books and the film and see what’s different... The games are similar to the films, but you can literally do the spells on the controller.’ ‘To be honest I don’t like writing ... Once I wrote a story on my own when I watched Harry Potter, the last one, the Deathly Hallows.... I used ambitious vocabulary and fullstops. ... I write it when I was ten, I kept it till I was 11, but my mum thought it was rubbish and threw it away.’ Gothic – ‘mine was a Gothic house, full of ghosts, and the kids were allergic to light. Have you watched the film The Others?’ From MOS – ‘it’s gonna improve my writing. More ideas’.

Volkan – Turkish/English (family from Cyprus) – ‘one of my lowest ability students’. 4B reading; 5C writing. ‘Doesn’t seem to enjoy writing much ... one of the naughtier lads in the class’. ‘Produces the least amount of work, and I want to know why’.

Doesn’t read books at home; reads comics. Likes films; and games. Plays FIFA and shooting games – Black Ops 2. Doesn’t write at home. Couldn’t remember the story he wrote for the Gothic project. Ranked videogames and football as more important to him than writing.

### **Themes emerging**

The sample group showed a general enthusiasm for writing, with the exception of Volkan. They also felt very positive about the MOS, in four cases based on previous experience of attending.

There was some evidence of enthusiasm for reading, both in school and at home. However, it may be that a stronger cultural resource for writing comes from a wider experience of narrative on a range of media: they mention specific films, comics and videogames. The books mentioned are children’s books and popular cultural texts, with the exception of The Diary of Anne Frank.

Enthusiasm for writing varied, between Beyaz, who indicated an interest in being a writer, to Volkan, who disliked writing. In this respect, the aspiration of the teacher and MOS to develop a love of writing offers the possibility of a change in levels of motivation; or at least a maintenance of existing enthusiasms.

There is something of a contrast between teacher's verbal assessment of students' writing and the NC levels attributed to them. All six students except Beyaz were recorded as 5C for writing, though Volkan was judged to be low ability, Denizil as higher ability, Turgay as middle ability, and Alice as lowest ability of the girls. Two possible explanations are that the verbal judgments indicate finer evaluations of writing attainment than the NC levels are able to show; or that the setting system is producing a bunching effect across the year group. In any case, this suggests that use of the NC levels in considering progress in writing competence for the purposes of this project should be qualified.

## 4. DISCUSSION OF DATA

An initial assessment of the data suggested a number of themes. These are used as headings in this discussion, as a way of responding to the core questions about developing creativity and motivation for writing; but also in order to organise more specific outcomes which might helpfully inform future practice.

### 4.1 Increasing motivation to write and love of writing

Before the project, we knew that Beyaz and Denzil were enthusiastic writers. Beyaz had written stories at home and wanted to be a writer when she grew up. She was also a voluntary attendee at MOS after school sessions. Denzil also wrote at home, describing his story 'Tears of Death'. Dilek, though she could remember writing stories with a friend in primary school, and though she kept a daily diary, scored writing at only 5 compared with Maths (8) and Art (10). Alice was enthusiastic about writing, but judged to be weak in some respects by her teacher. Turgay claimed to dislike writing, though he remembered clearly the Harry Potter-inspired story he had written at home, and the story he had written for the Gothic project in English. Volkan was inhibited in interview and clearly uncomfortable, but his answers suggested disaffection with writing in school. However, he was also known to be enthusiastic about rap and hip-hop, and relied heavily on rhyme in the writing he did during the project.

At the start of the project, it was clear that the initial stimulus – examples of creative use of language in advertising – was motivating, new and inspiring for the students. The presence of Martin, the knowledge that he had actually written the copy for the adverts they were watching, and which they recognised from their TV viewing, held their attention and interest. The Q & A session led by Martin succeeded in connecting with memories of classroom learning about effective creative writing, with students recalling the "AForest" mnemonic.

In subsequent sessions in the classroom, the picture was more mixed, partly because of factors related to location and timing, which are addressed below. In positive terms, there was a good deal of evidence of sustained motivation. Beyaz enjoyed the writing tasks and the collaborative work, contributing to the imaginative effort of her group during the lessons, and emphasising her appreciation of the groupwork in her post-interview:

.... [enjoyed] selling a product cos it gives a perspective if in the future you become a business person it tells you have to sell it. you always have to have a brief. Your whole team has to be included not just yourself. Your team's opinion comes first. [How does it compare to school?] you do your school work but it doesn't really work as well as the project we did. When you do team work in school people often very lazy. This project gave us a perspective how to work together.

Denzil's motivation seemed to vary. On one occasion he and his group were noticeably distracted, and the volunteer working at their table expressed concern in the debrief about their 'apathy'. However, in other sessions he worked quietly and committedly, and in his final interview also emphasised what he had learned about groupwork:

... contributing with my teammates and share my ideas. i learned how to contribute more cos before i keep my ideas to myself.

Denzil also suggested that the monsters theme was a little 'childish' for him, though still claiming to enjoy it. This does raise the question of how appropriate the

monsters' shop as the fantasy context for exploring emotions through poetry really is for this age group. Some children seemed quite happy with the fantasy material of childhood culture; others aspired to the themes more typical of teenage culture. In his initial interview, he cited the Call of Duty franchise as an influence on his writing at home, for example.

Alice was described as enthusiastic but immature by her teacher in the initial interview. She maintained this enthusiasm through the project, and her engagement with the fantasy theme of the monsters' shop was sustained in all sessions. She enjoyed the topic:

I think it was an actual good topic to do, because sometimes i don't understand stuff but this one you could understand the tasks [better than school].

Her teacher judged that she had benefited from the project in terms of motivation, feeling more confident and that her writing was valued.

Volkan was described by his teacher as poorly motivated: he doesn't enjoy writing, can be 'naughty', and is under-confident. This was borne out in his interview: he doesn't write voluntarily, doesn't enjoy writing, can't recall stories or poems he's written in school. He ranked writing as a preferred activity as 5, by comparison with games at 8 (he also cited Call of Duty Black Ops); and football at 6. During the project, however, he was engaged for a good deal of the time, appearing to enjoy the fantasy and the wordplay it suggested. On one occasion, he was observed listening intently while Martin read a story written by another group. On another occasion, he was maintaining eye contact with Martin though many others were distracted; and later volunteered to read the poem on the whiteboard. As his teacher pointed out, he does have an interest in poetic form from his love of hip-hop, though quite how this might shape his writing in school or in the MOS project is unclear. Generally, the observations suggested that the project had increased his motivation and confidence.

Dilek was something of an enigma during the project, as she was in school more generally. Though she was a strong and engaged writer, she could be distant and even unco-operative; and this was apparent also during the project. She was the least engaged with groupwork on her table, and often appeared preoccupied, even unhappy.

Turgay was also hard to describe in terms of motivation. He was described at the beginning of the project as enthusiastic and creative, but sometimes poorly-behaved and even confrontational. The field observations suggest that this continued to be the case throughout the project. At times he was clearly interested, eager to volunteer ideas or to read aloud; at other times he was easily distracted, bored, mildly disruptive.

The picture was, then, mixed. There is good evidence here of the project's positive intervention: providing imaginative stimulus material for some children; valuing collaborative work and individual children's writing; supporting the writing process with more intensive intervention by mentors than would be possible in ordinary lessons. All of this clearly had an effect on some students. At the same time, the problems with space and time, the discontinuity of mentors, and other factors discussed below made it difficult to sustain this impact for all children.

## **4.2 Improving creativity in writing**

There were plenty of examples of committed, imaginative, well-crafted writing in different genres: letters, stories, poems. Figure 1 shows a story written by Alice in

the third session of the project (7/5/13). It displays a number of creative qualities: the narrative voice suggested by "... some say"; the interior monologue ("Why did I pick this night to work?"); dramatic dialogue orthographically representing stammering; varied choice of verbs ('stormed'; 'roared'); effective, alliterative string of adjectives ('bigger, better, bolder'); a partially successful construction of complex sentences. It also shows an effort to be attend to accuracy of punctuation: speech marks are used correctly, fullstops in places, triple dots to perform aposiopesis. In these respects, it may be that the writing is an improvement on the prior work described by the teacher in the initial interviews.

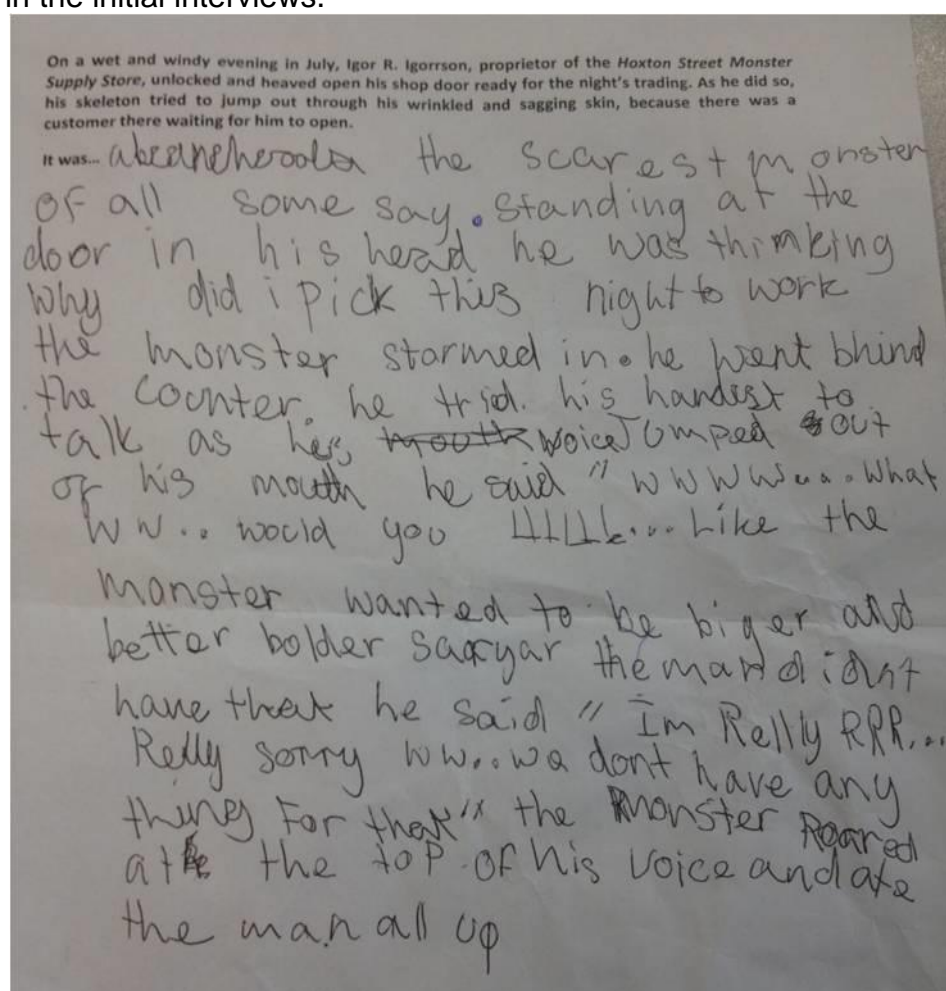


FIGURE 1

Figure 2 shows a letter written by Beyaz from the same session (7/5/13). Again, there is good evidence of creativity in writing. The invention of the name The Worricist was Beyaz's idea, a portmanteau of 'worry' (the emotion allocated to her group) and the Exorcist. The persuasive language constructs the appeal of the product, describing its packaging ('a dark blue and back rectangular tin'); representing the audience's power of choice through an 'if' clause ('If you send this letter ...'); inventing imaginative mock-advertising elements ('six free mini-zombie mints'); and performing the persuasive function of advertising through imperatives ('Just remember to buy ...!').



Dear Monster

I am writing this to you to inform you that Me and my team have ~~just~~ launched our product 'The Worricist'.

The Worricist is Product to Cure of Being Worried and being Scared. It is Made Mainly for Monster who are Worried.

The product is a Dark Blue and black Rectangular Tin. And comes with a drink with the drink also called the Worricist. Attached to the tin is a key that you can wear. If ya

If you send this letter to other Monster Friends you will get 6 Free Mini Zombie Mints to make your breath gruesome and smell that will make you so scary to other Monsters.

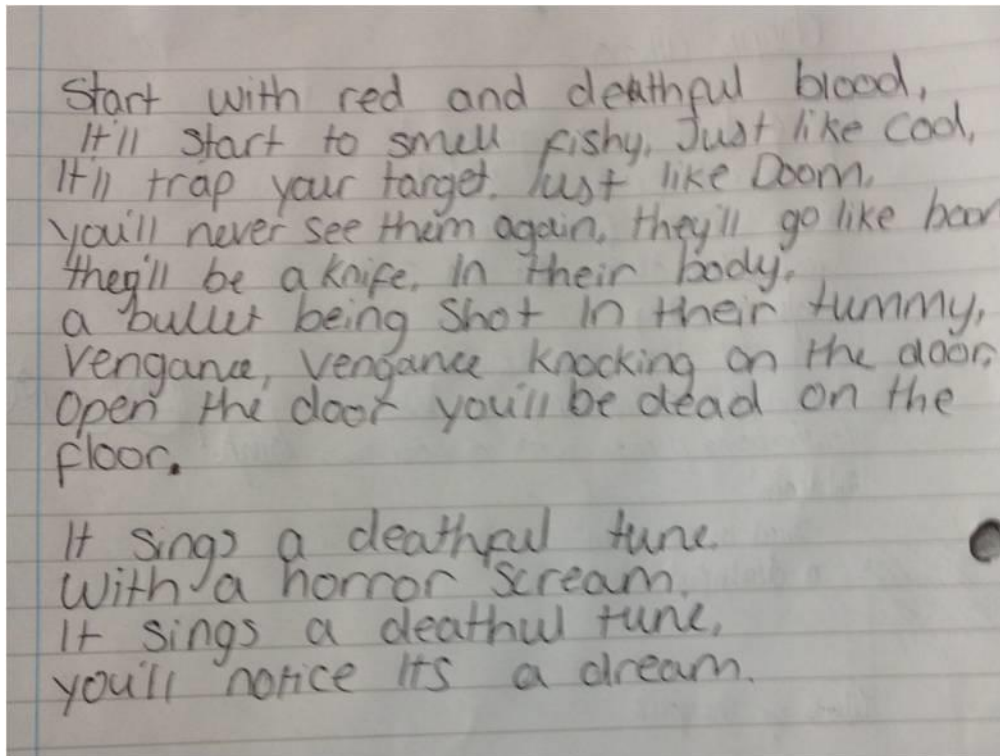
It is available in Hoxten Monster Supply Shop you can get there by bus, tube anyway you like Just Remember to buy The

**WORRICIST!!!**

From the CCSM team

FIGURE 2

Figure 3 shows Denzil's poem about his group's emotion, Vengeance. Once again, the creative qualities are clearly in evidence. Though the poem begins with the 'recipe' formula that Martin had proposed to the class ('Start with red and deathful blood'), it moves into a future tense narrative: 'It'll start to smell fishy ...'; 'It'll trap your target ...', and this is sustained through the first verse-paragraph. There is an effective use of repetition in the refrain-like second section, including repetition of the unusual adjective 'deathful'. It seems reasonable to suggest that, among other cultural resources Donny is drawing on here, his interest in shooting games plays a part. Death, blood, shooting, weapons are all themes he has mentioned in interview, both in relation to videogames and his own stories. At the same time, the mentor on his table, as well as Vicky and Martin, all helped to shape and redraft this poem; so that the work of transforming these cultural resources into something new and valued was strongly supported by the MOS team.



**FIGURE 3**

Figure 4 shows a summative table of the Creativity Assessment tool, applied to three samples of writing by one of the sample group, Dilek. These scores are the result of the consensual judgment process applied by the class teacher and the researcher in a discussion lasting approximately 30 minutes. The first two samples of writing are from the student's English work earlier in the year; the third was completed as part of the Bottled Emotions project

The first is a story in her English exercise book, from January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The task was to write in response to a visual stimulus: a picture of a creature, half-man, half-beast. We agreed about her ability to empathise with the creature: 'Nobody likes me, nobody comes next to me, because I'm a ... A BEAST!' We agreed that she imaginatively framed the story, first as a diary entry ('Dear Diary – perhaps influenced by her own diary-writing'); and second in constructing a flashback for the remainder of the narrative. We also agreed that there was some incoherence: the protagonist unaccountably appears at his uncle's funeral, which appears to have nothing to do with the beast theme; though this is imaginatively returned to at the end, as he draws out a mirror and sees his horrific reflection. The piece was marked by the teacher in the book as '4A, almost 5C'. The total score from the creativity tool was 18.

The second piece of writing was a response to a scene from the film *The Hunger Games*. It describes the heroine's state of emotion as the games are about to begin. We agreed on the careful use of descriptive language, the representation of intense emotion ('her hands were clammy .. she looked viciously at everyone'); and about some unusual choices of words: 'she takes small, slow and stubby steps'. However, some of the adjectival elaboration seems dutiful ('the big anxious blond-haired man'), and the tense is not consistent. Our judgment of this piece was very similar to the first, with a total of 19.

The third piece of writing was written in the third session of the MOS project. We agreed that this was evidence of progress. It develops an intriguing narrative of a man in a luxury sports car who picks up a hitchhiker, takes him to Birmingham, and treats him to a coffee in a 'luxury cafe', leading to the eventual recognition that they are actually cousins who had been prevented from meeting 'for family reasons'. We were impressed in particular by the political conscience of the piece: 'Fred could never pass by without stopping for a hitchhiker because he knew just as well how awful it was when people in luxury cars wouldn't stop for him but old, rusty or full of people cars would say, "We can fit another one in there."

However, a puzzling feature of the story was that it began with the stimulus starter provided by the Bottled Emotions project, in the Monster Shop; developed this a little way, then abruptly cut to the hitch-hiker story. This raises the question of how far this story could be considered a direct outcome of the project, especially given Dilek's private, quiet manner of writing.

	story 1	story 2	story 3
The sample of writing demonstrates imaginative adaptation of existing ideas	3	3	4
The process of writing demonstrated imaginative adaptation of existing ideas	3	3	4
The sample of writing demonstrates newness	3	3	4
The process of writing demonstrated newness	3	3	4
The sample of writing demonstrates value	3	3	4
The process of writing demonstrated value	3	4	3
TOTAL	18	19	23

**FIGURE 4: Summative table of the Creativity Assessment Tool applied to three samples of writing**

Nevertheless, there is clear evidence here of some kind of progression over the year, and into the MOS project. Taken together with the other samples of writing here, the evidence suggests that the project successfully fostered an enthusiasm for writing, made time and space for writing, provided productive stimuli for children's ideas, supported drafting and redrafting through mentor and teacher intervention and through celebratory performance and reading-aloud, and helped children to feel secure and confident in their writing.

### 4.3 Adult Roles

There were five distinct adult roles.

**M, the leader**, a professional advertising copywriter, led all the sessions. The children manifestly admired his creative ability and his professional credentials, and referred to this in interview, as well as generally attending to his presentations and interventions. His manner with the children represented well the MOS ethos of respecting children as creative writers, and this respect was sustained unflinching. There were times, however, when his lack of teaching experience showed: not knowing about extension activities, for example, which left some children unoccupied when they finished a task; and a lack of pace at times.

**V, the MOS leader**. This role complemented Martin's in providing pedagogic experience and expertise, handling whole group discussions, organisation of groupwork, collaborative writing and planning of sessions. The combination of these first two roles seems generally to work well, though perhaps the distribution of labour between them could be reviewed.

**J, the teacher**. This was the least clear of the roles. The observation and interview data suggest that too often the teacher's role became preoccupied with behaviour management, and it was unclear how her experience of teaching creative writing,

evident in the daily class work represented in the students' English exercise books, was recruited to feed into the project.

**The mentors.** There was plenty of observational evidence of supportive intervention in writing, of acting as an encouraging listener, of working as an amanuensis on occasion, of peacekeeping and social management of groups. There was also evidence of the contribution of particular skills, such as illustration, which impressed and motivated the students. There was one structural issue to attend to, which was the lack of continuity and the frequent changes. At times this did not seem to matter, and indeed sometimes a fresh pair of eyes was productive. Generally, however, continuity would seem to be a better option if possible, given the aim to develop progression in the students' writing over time.

**The LSAs.** There was support from an LSA. As with the teacher, it was unclear how much he had been involved in the planning, preparation and delivery of the project, to maximise his intervention. It was even unclear whether he was designated to support a particular student.

#### **4.4 'Making It Real'**

While the focus on creative writing was laudable and in many ways successful, the question arose about how writing might be balanced against other expressive forms, modes and media. It has already been noted that the children in the sample cited comics, films and videogames among their most potent cultural influences, and there is a good case for these popular cultural media to be recognised and built on. There were also suggestions on the interviews that visual modes were important to the children: two identified their pictures as the 'best piece of work' they did in the project; while the work of professional illustrators in the project was obviously appealing and motivating for them.

The use of advertising as a general stimulus for writing also raised this question. Of course copy-writing is in many ways a poetic form, and the exploitation of this worked well in the project. However, the medium of television adverts is multimodal, combining writing with speech, drama, visual design, music and the language of the moving image. An obvious question to ask is whether making an actual advert would have added value to the project, extending the particular literacy of creative writing into the multimodal model now well established in educational research. The followup group discussion between MOS and the teacher picked up this point in fact; and it was also forcefully made by one of the ample students in interview:

You could improve it like ... you could take us to an advertising company cos the first session we did it said Martin was an advertiser so he could've taken us to his business place to show us what it was like. One more thing, we could actually make an advert so it was real, real to the students.

#### **4.5 Bilingualism/Biliteracy**

A considerable proportion of students in this class are Turkish, and both bilingual and biliterate. In one session, one of the mentors was concerned that the students on her table were talking in Turkish, and felt this to be problematic. The teacher emphasised that they were not supposed to talk in Turkish during lessons.

An obvious strategy here might be to build in opportunities for bilingual writing: poems in Turkish and English. There are well-known advantages for language development in raising explicit awareness of linguistic structures across different languages, in addition to the cultural benefits of such work. In practical terms, trying

to secure support from bilingual LSAs and mentors would be an obvious way forward.

#### **4.6 Time And Place**

There was a general consensus among adults and children that neither the location nor the time of day were ideal. The classroom was hot and made the project feel more like 'school', contrasting sharply with the first and final sessions at the MOS in Hoxton Street. The afternoon slot was more prone to restlessness and distraction, while the decision to extend the sessions beyond hometime was predictably unpopular with the students.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The qualitative evidence collected during the Bottled Emotions project supports the view that the MOS intervention supported the development of creativity in writing in many ways. Among these were imaginative stimuli, the effective use of professional writers and illustrators, the sustained support of sympathetic and attentive mentors, the creation of time and space to value, develop and celebrate children's writing, and the provision of a stimulating and exciting environment for the first and last sessions of the project. Furthermore, close analysis of samples of writing across the project and beyond suggest the development of specific forms of creativity in writing, among them: careful attention to structure, effective use of rhetorical forms; considered selection of vocabulary; imaginative and original representations of emotion.

Questions to consider in planning the next version of this project include: how to recognise and incorporate children's media and popular cultural experiences; how to focus on writing yet still create opportunities for multimodal forms of expression; how to make the creative production as real as possible, including visits to workplaces; how to include bilingualism; how to balance the roles of the adults, in particular the teachers and LSAs; and how to improve the continuity of support from the mentors.

## **Appendix 2: New Horizons Case Study**

### **Introduction**

This report represents the 'New Horizons' project at the Ministry of Stories, conducted in collaboration with Hackney Community College. Three groups from Hackney Community College (in the immediate locality) visited the Ministry of Stories in consecutive weeks in June – Monday/Tuesday (3/4; 10/11; 17/18). A celebration presenting an edited video of all three groups' work (6 minutes) was shown to students and staff on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> June (1.00-2.00 pm). The age of the students in these groups ranged from 16 to 24 – though students over 20 were in a small minority. The students have learning difficulties and the groups, though each very varied, were differentiated (the week 2 group was referred to as the 'top' group).

Unlike other aspects of the Ministry of Stories' work (and somewhat beyond the focus of the IOE research) this project was not centred in the production of creative writing. The project involved visits to three facilities in the wider neighbourhood preceded by an introductory 'framing' talk by the volunteer workshop leader, Martin Ransley, an experienced (mainly Islington based) teacher. The visits took place on Monday mornings between 10.00 and 12.00. On Tuesdays, between 10.00 and 3.00, the students worked on recalling and representing their experience. Three main activities were pursued – making a flip-book (drawing), a story board (mostly drawing), viewing and selecting video footage (preliminary editing). Writing was a minor component in the second activity. Some work on producing a collective poem took place on the Tuesdays. Martin, leading the groups, elicited words and phrases that could be assembled to form a poem consistent with the theme of the 'five senses' – which he introduced on each occasion.

In addition to Martin, Vicky took a very active role and there were enough mentors to allow at least one adult to attend to each student consistently through the two days. Mentors were not necessarily present for both days. Hackney Community College staff (the lead teacher and at least two assistants) was present throughout – though with widely varying degrees of involvement.

Group 1 June 3/4 - visit to St Mary's Secret Garden  
Group 2 June 10/11 – visit to the Open Kitchen (to make pizza)  
Group 3 June 17/18 – visit to Hackney City Farm

### **Methodology**

I was able to observe the second and third groups (June 10/11, June 17/18) and the celebration (June 28). Each day began with a 30 minute meeting with the mentors to explain what had been planned and to briefly discuss the students' needs and their profiles. The arrival of the students, the initial presentation, the visit and the follow-up activities on the second day were all observed (including the end of session discussion with the mentors). Documenting these activities was not straightforward. The main data produced during the two events I observed included:



1. field notes
2. photographs
3. short video clips
4. video interviews with staff (Martin and the two Hackney Community College lead teachers).

Interviewing students was difficult. I was not able to establish the kind of working relationships with the students achieved by the mentors – their commitment to working with often quite uncommunicative students was impressive. In effect, as a non-participant, I could not expect to take students out of the flow of work and talk sustained by the mentors and conduct interviews asking for reflection and commentary on what was taking place. The days were conducted with considerable efficiency – the students' activity was consistent, purposeful and focused (especially with the second group (June 10/11) and few opportunities to interrupt were available. So, from the second group, I conducted one interview with one student – Jessica – who was notably well acquainted with, and confident in, self-presentation to camera. The third group (June 17/18) was considerably more challenging and I made no attempt to interview any of the students – though brief conversational remarks were noted.

### **The structure of the event**

The main focus in this project was, effectively, on item 4 (see below - “broader expressive and communication skills”) with some, but not central, concern to address 1 and 2.

1. To increase their motivation to write and love of writing
2. To improve their creativity in writing
3. To improve their attainment in writing
4. To improve their broader expressive and communication skills

Though emphasizing that there were significant differences between the students, Donia Jud (HCC, interviewed 11 June 2013) described their work in college as “all linked to life skills and independent living – so they might be doing some cooking, some sport, using computers quite a lot,” She added that “every week all the groups use the high street to go shopping, take stuff back and cook something” and that a priority is to build up “confidence, confidence to go out into the community” and to develop “communication skills”, “everyday life skills”.

The first day began with an introduction and explanation of the planned visit, a discussion of the MoS ground rules and some attempts to elicit expectations in anticipation of the visit (this was somewhat extended for the second group as, apparently, the visit had not been entered in the diary at the Open Kitchen). The visit occupied the rest of the morning and students returned to the college not to MoS. The second day, from 10.00 to 3.00, involved work on the activities, preceded by an introduction and ending with a group presentation of examples of work with a strong emphasis on the students' efforts and achievement across the two days.

The rationale for this structure appears to be that literacy (in this case arguably more visual than verbal) can be enhanced through carefully framed experience in an unfamiliar setting followed by discussion, reflection, recall, examination of visual records and production of flip-books, story-boards and selection of video footage. The emphasis on anticipation (imagination prior to the experience) with the second group was perhaps slightly exaggerated because of the particular difficulties on that occasion – though Martin (interview) did also argue for the importance, with support, of anticipatory imagination. The main intention appeared to be to build various forms of literacy work through, and after, the experience of the event itself. However, there were significant additional reasons for the students to engage in these visits – to become more familiar with the neighbourhood and to work with a variety of adults previously unknown to them.

### **The second group (June 10/11) – visit to the Open Kitchen**

Students: Suleiman, Maya, Delilah, Jessica, Annie, Cheryl, Sajan, Nokhez (Monday, 8). Delilah, Jessica, Annie, Sajan, Nokhez (Tuesday, 5) [Suleiman pm only]

Mentors: Martin (lead, both days), Chris (both days), Heloise (both days), Julee (Tuesday), Heide (Tuesday)

HCC: Donia Jud (lead teacher) and two assistants

MoS: Vicky

Open Kitchen: various staff – one in charge – “chef”

Martin’s opening talk with the students invited them to work in small groups (3 or less) to ‘take paper and make pictures (or words) about what you think is going to happen this morning’. It was suggested that they make lists of ingredients, or the order of actions (e.g. wash hands).

Martin emphasized the potential differences between expectations and outcomes (‘but, whatever, that’s OK’). He also talked through the ‘ground rules’ – respect, listen to each other, don’t say anything horrible to each other, be careful in the kitchen – refers to poster – your respect, your courage, your imagination. So, summing up, he emphasized that support, then imagination (expectation, anticipation) – ‘will bring victory – success – a beautiful, tasty, delicious pizza’.

The visit to the Open Kitchen involved the students in further negotiating relationships with MoS staff (Vicky) and mentors and with kitchen staff. The college staff remained in the background, on the whole. This was an important opportunity to make something (a pizza) in a setting that had some of the characteristics of a workplace and though convivial and informal, some need to negotiate ‘working relations’ with an enlarged circle of adults.

Interviewing Martin at the end of the morning, he justified the preparatory discussion at MoS (though acknowledging that it was a little longer than usual) with an emphasis on imagination – “with support you can prompt, prod, them” – but also on the scope for examining to what extent, and in what ways, their expectations, articulated in advance, were met. He also drew attention to the social benefits of “chatting while they’re eating instead of eating on the hoof, chucking it back.” There was some discussion of Master chef and the suggestion that they think of what they’re doing as playing. In anticipation of the following day (and with some comment on the previous week) Martin suggested that there was some potential in their poem to explore it more rhythmically, with a degree of physicality, “experiencing those words in a more sensual way.”

On the Tuesday Martin again led the session (with just five students present), explaining what’s going to be done and reminding them of the ‘ground rules’ – respect, courage, imagination: victory, success, achievement.

Vicky showed video clips to help with recall of the visit to the Open Kitchen – sequences from arrival to each stage of food preparation, then jumping to the trolley of pizza wheeled into view.

Martin resumed with further emphasis on imagination, memory and the five senses – asking for one, two or three words to be written on post-it notes. Vicky intervened to say ‘push yourself to go beyond the easiest, most obvious, words’. They were then given a few minutes to think about it. Martin, Vicky and Heloise worked with individuals to elicit responses – often talking in terms of contrasts e.g. soft/sharp. HCC staff were in the background, not really involved. The additional mentors – Julee, Heide – were more peripherally involved at this stage. Martin got Sajan, then Jessica, to help with readings – from post-its. They assembled eight post-its on the flip chart. Chris (mentor) typed the chosen words to appear on screen (in different colours).

### **Crumbling noisy pizza**

Soft dough

Sticky

Tomato

Fantastic work with others

Taste like salty

Crumbling noise

Nice

New experience

Martin got them to read and clap along to create a rhythm – and asked them to do it again...faster, with Jessica to start the rhythm. Martin chanted out the lines and others followed. There was applause for all at the end.

Through the remainder of the morning they worked with mentors on the three activities.

After lunch, Martin resumed with some questions about what they ate for lunch. He encouraged them to come up with 's' words – salty, sticky, savoury. He showed a video of a professional baker making a sweet dough. Vicky re-arranged activities, among the group allowing time for completion as well as variation.

In an interview with Jessica (student) she gave an account of her previous visits to MoS – in particular the collective writing of stories about, for example, monsters. She also spoke vividly about her enthusiasm for making the pizza on the previous morning: "It was really fun playing with the dough, mashing it and putting our anger on it."

To some extent, though everyone continued to be active, the structure of the day (and its length) seemed very similar to that of a college/school day. Perhaps this was less challenging – and less productive – than the more situated activity of making pizza the day before? It may be that more detailed attention to the video materials would have provided a sharper focus for the second day activity - as a reflection and development of the first.

Martin closed the day with considerable emphasis on how successful they had been and with much effort to elicit mutual congratulation.

With the students sitting in a circle (on chairs) – Martin addressed everyone - "well done everybody, give yourselves a clap".

"Who would like to show and maybe tell something about their work?  
What's the best picture?  
Would you do it again?  
What was the best bit today?  
Would you like to go to the Open Kitchen again?"

The response from the students was very positive – though Jessica was less than happy with her work.

After the students had returned to the college, a half hour 'debrief' session was held. The mentors were very engaged and had established very good working relationships with the students – and as something of an 'outsider' to these working relationships it was difficult to intrude or interrupt to ask questions. Clearly one of the main benefits for these students was the opportunity to work, often on a one-to-one basis, with a variety of adults.

### **The third group (June 17/18) – visit to Hackney City Farm**

Monday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2013

There were five students and ten staff (Vicky, Martin and five mentors; three HCC staff). HCC staff were much more involved with their students on this occasion.

In the briefing (9.30-10.00) – Vicky highlighted the varying abilities of the students and their probable responses to situations – though each had different problems the

main concern was to help them stay focused and to concentrate. She stressed being friendly, smiling, asking simple direct questions.

As in the previous week, Martin suggested asking questions in terms of the five senses ("though not taste today" – visit to Hackney City Farm).

It was emphasized that the students should be encouraged to use the camcorders at the city farm; also to draw and write things down. The students would be provided with an envelope containing various tasks.

Again, Martin led when the students arrived. He referred to "Monday morning, another week, a mountain to climb" and asked "Where are we going?" He talked through the ground rules – respect, courage, imagination. Martin asked further questions – "What might you see?" Vicky crouched down at eye level to elicit responses, addressing them in turn by their names. Further questions: "Do you think anything will be growing there? What smells on a farm? If you did touch a pig, what would it feel like?"

The visit to Hackney City Farm involved a walk taking around twenty minutes, passing Hoxton station and continuing along Hackney Road – including a lot of elaborate graffiti on the way. The visit included some time looking at the various animals (pigs, chickens, ducks, goats, a donkey) but was less anchored than the Open Kitchen visit – with no single major task to complete. The students seemed very distracted by the smells and slightly unnerved by a loud bang from the nearby main road. One or two students seemed anxious – around animals. Some time was also spent in the adjacent garden, looking at flowers and vegetables. The students walked back to the college at the end of the morning. There was some potential in this trip to construct a narrative of the journey from MoS to the farm and back to HCC. The use of camcorders en route might have provided helpful material for such a narrative. This might have served as an overarching structure for the visit and could have included some emphasis on local mapping and recognition of key points on the route (on the return). But it might also have supported a more focused engagement with the farm itself – with what was seen, heard, touched and smelt incorporated into the narrative. Again, more emphasis on the construction of a video record would have been worthwhile. But the trip might also have been recounted as a kind picture book for younger children.

Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2013

Mentors – Tim, Matt, Marta, Heide, Julee, Martin and Denise.

Students - Andrew (not present for the visit on Monday "wouldn't come...doesn't like walking places"), Joy, Samira, Paul, Adebanye, Sukhpal, Terry.

The briefing began at 9.38, with a reiteration of the need for patience. At least four of the mentors present on this second day were not involved in the visit to the farm on Monday morning. This lack of continuity did not seem to be especially problematic and, in fact, the mentors worked very successfully with the students throughout the

day. To some extent, it seemed that the need for students to explain what they had done to adults who had not been present at the farm was quite productive.

The briefing included emphasis on writing and drawing and using judgment in framing questions. Vicky explained that Martin had a background in working with young adults with disabilities.

When the students arrived, Martin led the session. He encouraged the students to look back to the list of key words from yesterday's discussion of their expectations:

Cold - Pigs (baby pigs, mother pigs, feel warm)

Wood – Cows

Animals – Babies (crossed out)

Birds – Grass...sun

Sheep – Water

Flowers – Cat

Milk – Soft – grass and sheep

Poo - safe

Martin then reiterated the ground rules and the main focus for the day. He emphasized showing respect, listening to each other, talking to each other; but also being brave, showing courage and using imagination (pictures, impressions – things that we see, hear, taste). All of this would lead to - victory – referring to the poster displayed on the wall.

He asked "Who remembers what we did yesterday?" This was followed by a brief screening of clips of video from Monday morning. Post-its were then handed out and the students were given three minutes to come up with memories/impressions. The HCC staff were very much involved, thus allowing one-to-one staff support to students. For this group of students, this level of support was probably essential.

The students were then gathered as a group and the 'post-its' read out and stuck on the board along with some drawings. Martin announced that "We're going to write together - a little poem."

As in the previous week, the construction of the poem proceeded by group voting on preferred lines:

### **Farm Stink Animals**

Shampoo flowers

The pig sty stinks

Chickens everywhere

I saw a goat that was brown

Flowers smell

Yellow grass oink

Cluck, quite nice to stroke

Cat

Bad smell of pig poo

The chicken smells of poo

After the completion of the poem, the students were divided up among the mentors and HCC staff. They worked on the following activities:

1. 'Story-board' - New Horizons – What did you do yesterday? [see brief video of Joy's work]
2. Flip books [brief video]
3. Film footage log sheet [brief video]

They had a break at around 11.12, and were back in just before 11.30.

In an interview with Gillian Adamson (HCC, lead tutor) there was some discussion the various groups' 'levels' and needs. The previous week's group (week 2) were referred to as "top achievers" and those present on this occasion as a "mid" group. There were groups in the college who would be unable to deal with the kind of work being done at MoS and their activities there centred very largely on "lots of sensory stuff... a lot of music, a lot of visual, cooking as well." Like Donia Jud, cited above, the emphasis here was on giving these students the skills to be independent, to deal with "everyday life, shops, transport." In her view, many of these students needed a lot of visual resources ("signs, symbols, visual material") and found it difficult to "picture" things from words alone or to see things "from anyone else's perspective." To some extent, it seemed that different approaches to the 'scaffolding' of students' 'imaginative' work were a matter for debate – and that it might be beneficial to acknowledge this more explicitly and to plan additional strategies for those students finding the largely word based introductory phase too difficult. However, she emphasized also how much the students liked working with the staff and mentors at the MoS and that the conduct of these projects was planned collaboratively and in some detail.

Students returned after lunch at 1.15 – a little late.

The afternoon's work was documented mainly with photographs showing work-in-progress – both of the work itself but also student=mentor interactions.

Martin concluded the day but did not return to the poem. Once again they were congratulated and encouraged to congratulate themselves on what they had achieved.

The 'debrief' began at 3.00. The mentors were very successful in their work with the students – displaying impressive patience and commitment even with the most difficult students. I commented that the trip to Hackney City Farm included quite a lengthy and interesting walk and that perhaps more video filming by the students would have provided a resource for a more narrative account of the visit. I also suggested that there was some potential for supporting their 'mapping' of the area – things seen on the way, street names, key sights and landmarks. However, given the difficulties faced by these students, it may be that such an additional 'layer' of activity was beyond the focus of this event. The issue of more narratively structured

activities does remain an important consideration – and might also be used in developing the poem further – beyond a collection of sensory impressions.

### **The celebration – Friday June 28 (1.00-2.00)**

The students (those who were able to attend), several mentors, HCC staff and others gathered for a presentation of a short film (just over six minutes) representing the three visits. The film was edited (credited to Carl Stevenson as film maker) from material shot by the students (credited as camera crew, artists and writers) with drawings superimposed and student voice-overs from Sukhpal, Terry, Paul and Adebanye. The film was very well received by all. The mentors were also credited as 'volunteer writing mentors' or named (and thanked) along with HCC lead teachers. The inclusion of some writing and some drawings from the students did contribute to the perception that the film was their work. However, it might have been worthwhile to modify the various follow up activities so that they more directly contributed to this main (public) outcome. For example, the flip-books seemed to have little part to play. Also, to reiterate, more emphasis on student filming and editing throughout would be helpful.

The screening and subsequent social gathering was very positive and rewarding for all.

### **Conclusions**

The commitment and sensitivity of those (staff and volunteers) working with the students were impressive and could hardly be improved upon. With these students, with histories of significant learning difficulties, the development of creativity in writing was evident but constrained – to what extent any more challenging writing projects might be attempted with them is uncertain, though HCC staff appear to feel that what is achieved in collaboration with MoS is more than satisfactory. Some more substantial use of visual resources to support students was advocated by Gillian Adamson, especially for those groups, or those students, whose abilities to imagine with only words as a resource were very limited. In introducing the visits on each occasion, some visual material – video, still images, physical props where appropriate – might well have helped some students to engage – at this anticipatory stage – rather more fully.

The scope for narrative development – in modes other than or additional to writing – was under-explored. An emphasis on narrative representations of their experiences might provide a productive framework for both documenting and reflecting upon the visits and the activities they involve. In particular, the more sustained use of camcorders and of video editing might facilitate the development of visual narratives. Though there was enjoyment in making flip-books and in doing drawings for the 'story-board' these activities might be modified or more explicitly related to the production of a video film representing their experience. It might also be of some value to introduce the question of to what audiences their work might be shown.



Again, whether or not this is within the capabilities of these students is uncertain, but introducing specific, concrete, ideas about who is being addressed (other students, younger children, HCC staff?) might be possible and helpful.

As noted in the conclusions to the Bottled Emotions case study, there might also be some further consideration of how to “recognise and incorporate children’s media and popular cultural experiences” (television cookery shows for example) and of how to include bilingualism, where appropriate (several students in these groups seem likely to have been bi or multilingual). However, there are clearly very marked differences in the approach taken with these students (by contrast with so-called “mainstream” students) that make this aspect of the MoS’ work a little difficult to compare with its other activities.

### **Appendix 3: *Planting Poetry* Case Study**

#### **Jane Coles**

The MoS Planting Poetry Project was carried out between April and June 2014 with a year 5 class from Oldfield Primary School<sup>1</sup>. The project took place one afternoon per week during the normal school day over a period of five weeks. Workshop sessions were situated in a local community garden (weather permitting) as well as various locations within the school. Workshops were led by a professional storyteller (SC), with additional support provided by VP from the MoS plus a core group of three or four volunteer mentors. Other adults closely involved were Lynne, the class teacher; and two regular support workers, the general TA and an LSA assigned to support a child with a statement of special educational needs.

The workshops covered the following main activities:

1. Exploration of the five senses through storytelling and drama; evocation of a sense of place through an introduction to the community garden. SC read her own 'invocation' poem and invited children to write one of their own during the week.  
Venues: roof-top playground and community garden.
2. Exploration of nature-themed language through scrabble-type games and moving tableaux. Introduction to mesostic poetry, writing in pairs. (SC away so session taken by VP.)  
Venues: classroom and hall.
3. Thinking about individual plants' and creatures' experiences of nature: use of personification poems; games and (group) role play to solve environmental problems. Sharing of personal stories connected with nature, including a guest speaker (MK) with personal connections to and memories of the community garden.  
Venues: classroom and hall.
4. Storytelling about creating a community garden and building bridges for peace. Planting of seedlings and 'wishes' in the garden. Individual exploration of the garden, consideration of a focus for writing poetry on the theme of gardens and peace/community.  
Venues: classroom and garden
5. Practising of performance skills through video of performance poet, drama games and group reading of published poems. Session started with time for quiet, individual reflection/writing in garden.  
Venues: garden, classroom and hall.

Additionally, there was an end of project celebratory event held in the garden to which parents and carers were invited and at which children performed poems they had composed. Some of the children's poems had been converted by an artist (commissioned by the MoS) into a semi-permanent installation. SC visited the school prior to the event to support the children in their performance preparation.

---

<sup>1</sup> The school has been anonymised in this report, as have teacher and pupil names.

This report is based on the evaluation carried out by Jane Coles of the IoE.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The following data were analysed for this case study:

- Pre-project interviews with the class teacher and a sample of six children from the year 5 class. The sample of three girls and three boys was selected by the class teacher to represent a range of National Curriculum attainment levels in Literacy, whilst also reflecting the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the class as a whole.
- Observation of three out of the five formal workshop sessions (sessions 1, 2 and 5 – see above), recorded through a combination of field notes and photographs. Observations included the accompanying mentor briefings/debriefings led by SC.
- Post-project interviews with the class teacher and four of the six children (two children were absent from school when the final interviews were carried out).
- Writing by children in the sample.

Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed. Themes used arose out of the overall MoS evaluation research questions, with additional themes emerging as the data were analysed. The two teacher interviews were each of approximately an hour and mainly focused on the six sample children. The post-project interview assessed the writing of three children (using headings from the consensual creativity assessment tool), including comparison of creative writing children had completed in class prior to the project with poems completed during the project. Limitations of the teacher's time and some problems with accessing samples of writing meant that it was only possible to apply the consensual creativity tool to two pupils' output in detail (Sammy's and Samira's).

Individual pupil interviews were relatively short (approximately 10 minutes). Pre-project interviews focused on each of the children's attitudes to writing (both in and out of school) and their expectations of the project. Post-project interviews invited children to reflect upon the project as a whole and to talk about writing they had undertaken.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Developing Writing**

SC and VP made use of a wide range of strategies to develop ideas and to develop writing. These included: drama, storytelling, games, word puzzles, personal anecdote and group reading. The pupils were able to write together in pairs as well as individually. In the initial stages frames were provided (e.g. grids on A3 paper to help the children grasp a basic 'mesostic' structure), but children were not restricted to this as the project progressed. In fact a key feature of the project overall was, according to Lynne, that children were 'independent in their decisions and took ownership of their material' and several children commented at the end that they had enjoyed an unusual degree of choice over their writing.

When reflecting on the project Lynne suggested that poetry was a good topic particularly for those children who did not find writing easy, because poetry at

this level generally has a shorter length than story writing ('they know when it ends') and a 'finite structure', making it 'less scary'. The poetic structures on offer during the project included SC's 'invocation' poem which viewed nature from the perspective of an object found in the garden (making use of patterned line openings 'I am...; I have been; I know...'); and mesostic poems where the title or theme of the poem runs vertically through the middle of the horizontal lines, a form which is sometimes compared to branches growing out of a central trunk and therefore appropriate for a garden-focused project – moreover it converts successfully into wooden signage. From observations of the children at work during workshop sessions, mesostic poetry appeared to have offered them a certain freedom from formal grammatical structures in that they could play around with a series of (semi-)connected ideas and phrases, enabling a pupil such as Sammy, for example, to become imaginatively engaged at a more conceptual level (see below).

It was important that the class teacher was able to make space for continuing writing during the school week. This meant that SC had greater scope for exploratory activities during her workshop sessions and did not feel that she was tied to written outcomes. For example, at the end of the first session she read her own 'Sun Star Opening' poem to the children whilst in the garden and invited them to write as if from the perspective of their chosen object before the next session. SC emailed a copy of the poem to Lynne so that she could use it 'as a starting point' with the class the next day. In Lynne's words, the pupils responded positively because the poem 'was imbued with the magic of the garden', and because they had met the author in person. The garden was cited as a genuine source of inspiration by all four pupils interviewed at the end of the project. For example, Tomek said: 'It helped going to the garden itself because you could see the plants and you could ... actually visualise how to describe it.' Aminah talked about the combination of being in the garden and being supported by SC as helping her engage imaginatively in the writing process:

When I went [to the garden] and I couldn't find a plant to do it, and I was really sad and then [SC] came up to me and she said, what plant would you like and I said I don't know. And she said look carefully. And I found a little black grassy type of plant, and I said I wanted to do that...And she said what's it called? And I said midnight because it was black. That was my middle word. And she helped me.

Later in the interview Aminah attempted to describe the way SC worked with them: 'She says things in a tone, like she really wants to know what you're doing'.

### **Motivation for Writing**

In pre-project interviews all six pupils claimed to be looking forward to Planting Poetry (PP). The majority said they enjoyed writing stories and poetry both at school and to a lesser extent at home. Only Sammy and Tyler admitted a dislike of writing, both stating a preference for working with numbers. Both said that they were looking forward to PP primarily on the basis that it was going to rupture normal school routines and get them out of the classroom. Sammy was selected by Lynne as a high achieving pupil who was nevertheless finding it difficult to engage fully in using his imagination in order to develop his writing and move onto the next NC sublevel. Tyler, on the

other hand, was described by Lynne as a pupil whose behaviour and attitude were causing real concern around the school and who she was struggling to help make progress in his writing (he was achieving low levels in Literacy), despite his 'potential to do so well'.

It is a shame that it was not possible to track Tyler's progress through the project. Whilst observations during the first two sessions suggested that Tyler was largely engaging positively with PP, his behaviour around school at other times earned him an exclusion from the remainder of the project (sessions 3 - 5) under the supervision of the deputy headteacher. However, it was noticeable that, although Lynne had felt it necessary to monitor his behaviour closely during the more unstructured activities during session 1 (when she was observed making several low-key interventions), he was fully engaged in the initial word games and mesostic poetry activities during session 2, at one point working with a partner on a poem organised around the word 'wondrous'. Tyler played a key role in the composition, transforming their original idea of 'winning coupons for anything you desire' by prefacing the finished poem with the word 'Imagine' (see figure 1 below), a crucial revision to the meaning and import of the whole poem.

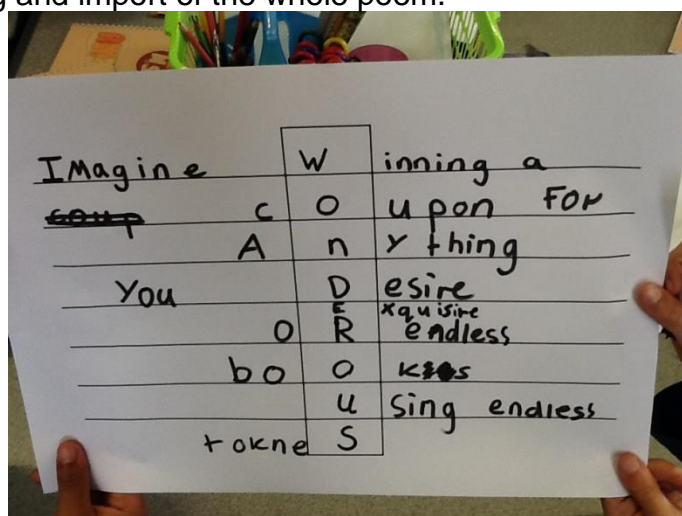


Figure 1

Unfortunately Tyler was not allowed to play any further part in the project until participating in the final party preparations. His exclusion, perhaps, begs a number of questions about the perceived role of special projects and their function in relation to young people who are becoming alienated from formal school structures.

By the end of the project Sammy's attitude to writing appeared to have undergone the most change (discussed under Enhancing Creativity, below). Both Aminah and Sammy said that the project had changed their view of poetry for the better. In post-project interviews all four pupils (Sammy, Aminah, Samira and Tomek) said that the project had lived up to their expectations and all four mentioned the 'poetry party' as a highpoint of the experience. Lynne's view was that 'showcasing' at the end of the project was 'crucial' to the project as a whole; she said that the performance at the end gave their writing 'real value'. The children organised it, designed invitations, made lemonade – activities which made them very excited. Aminah gained self-esteem from seeing her poem as part of the installation:

I came in the garden, and I was walking around...and then I saw it! A pink one [ie colour of signage], and then I saw it was exactly the same, and it was mine! And I was shocked because I thought mine was rubbish...and I felt really good.

In interview Lynne felt that SC's one-to-one support at the end in preparation for the party had a 'very positive impact' on the children in terms of their motivation. Aminah described the way in which SC helped her overcome her customary stage-fright, clearly deriving a new sense of self confidence from the experience. Aminah ended her post-project interview by telling me that as a result she had even started to write poems at home: 'My mum knew I hated poetry and she was, like, wow, you've really improved'.

In his pre-project interview Tomek talked enthusiastically about science and maths, his favourite school subjects. Although his liking for writing was qualified ('Well, I do like it sometimes'), the PP project appears to have successfully linked together his scientific interest ('I like making experiments and lots of fun stuff'), previous curriculum work covered by Lynne on life cycles, and his creative impulses (making his own creations out of Lego at home). In his post-project interview Tomek hinted at this convergence of interests:

JC: Do you think your writing has changed in any way?

Tomek: Kind of because I was good at poem before the workshop but I think it got me kind of more creative...just writing about a place and like real living things. And when I was writing other poems they was about made up stuff, but now I write real poems about stuff that exists.

By chance, the class went on a visit to Kew Gardens as part of their science curriculum during the period of the PP project. Tomek was one of a number of pupils who felt inspired to voluntarily write a poem about the trip when he got home. He picked this out as one of the pieces of writing he was most proud of, along with the poem he performed at the poetry party: 'I really liked them because they weren't just poems, they were about the garden, about nature and they were really good written'. Previously Tomek had been described by Lynne as a boy who 'is fascinated by the world around him, and stuff, and facts. But writing: he's one of those boys who can pull it out of the bag sometimes – but he'd rather not'. For Tomek the PP project provided him with a purpose and a context for his creative writing.

### Enhancing Creativity

The consensual judgements of Samira and Sammy's writing suggest that for both of them creativity was enhanced to varying degrees by the PP project (see Table 1). The class teacher and I compared a piece of formally assessed school writing (a story entitled, 'A strange occurrence at playtime', completed before the project began) with two poems each pupil had written during the PP project.

Table 1: Consensual judgement of creativity in Sammy and Samira's writing

Creativity Assessment Tool	Agreed scores			
	1 None	2 Some	3 strong	4 Very Strong

The sample of writing demonstrates <b>imaginative adaption</b> of existing ideas		Samira		Sammy
The process of writing demonstrated <b>imaginative adaption</b> of existing ideas		Samira		Sammy
The sample of writing demonstrates <b>newness</b>		Samira	Sammy	
The process of writing demonstrated <b>newness</b>		Samira	Sammy	
The sample of writing demonstrates <b>value</b>			Samira	Sammy
The process of writing demonstrated <b>value</b>			Samira	Sammy

In Samira's piece of school writing the narrative is weighed down rather heavily by the minutiae of conventional playground protocols (manifested almost entirely through dialogue), so that the 'mystery' has to be introduced and resolved in a few lines at the end. As Lynne commented, Samira 'is comfortable with what she knows'. In contrast, Samira's response to SC's 'invocation' poem and her mesostic 'FLOWERS' poem both reveal moments of a more imaginative engagement, with lines such as 'We all rise on a sepical [special] tree/So the sky has a time to come alive' even operating at a metaphorical level. Observations of Samira during the project showed her to be responding really positively to the process, and being particularly receptive to the garden. Samira took great pride in her PP work, taking me through her notebook page by page, explaining how she had completely redrafted several poems in her own time in order to improve them.

For someone who claimed to strongly dislike writing, Sammy's poetic achievements while on the project were impressive and contrasted significantly with his assessed school piece of writing. The latter – a conventional school story – focuses very much on the world he knows; technically correct, it shows signs of being carefully and consciously composed as an assessment piece. As Lynne commented, 'Writing's not his bag...It doesn't feel as if his heart and soul is in the story at all'. For Sammy, the physical experience of visiting the garden allied with SC's playfulness with words appear to have helped him break away from conventions. In his version of SC's 'invocation' poem, he writes from the perspective of the object he selected from the garden, a softly textured leaf which he refers to as 'Life's leaf blanket'. The poem (see figure 2) takes some of SC's original ideas, such as the patterning of each stanza and the juxtaposition of opposites, reworking them in interesting ways. Both Lynne and I particularly liked the increasingly metaphysical line of thought which can be traced through the final stanza.

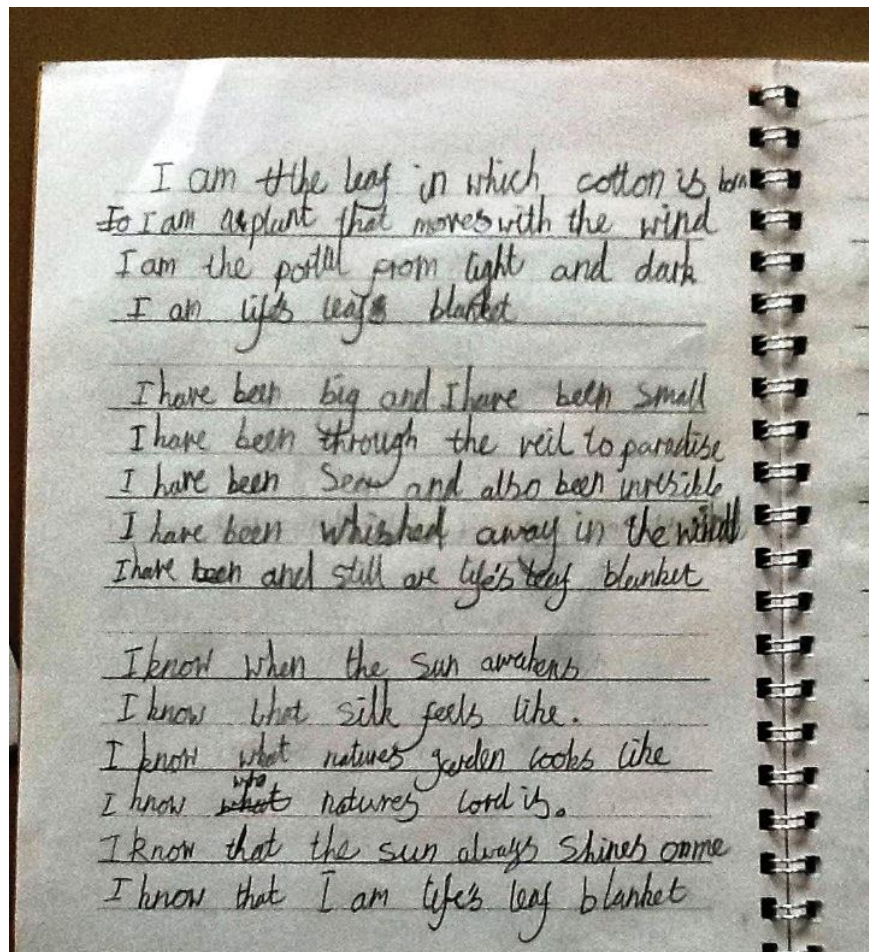


Figure 2

Afterwards in interview, Sammy said that he had found the final stanza of the poem the most difficult to write – yet he felt sufficiently motivated to spend at least 20 minutes writing the final part. Nevertheless, he picked out the mesostic poem he composed for the poetry party as the one he was most proud of. Entitled 'NATURE' (see figure 3), it is also the poem which Lynne felt 'crystallised everything' about the project, synthesising the garden experience, new ways of thinking about science, philosophy and poetic form. Sammy said that his inspiration for the opening line came directly from sitting on a rock in silence in the garden and suddenly being aware of the sound of the breeze. He wanted to be deliberately thought provoking in the way he wrote about nature as a force of mystery. Performing the poem was for him a highpoint of the project.



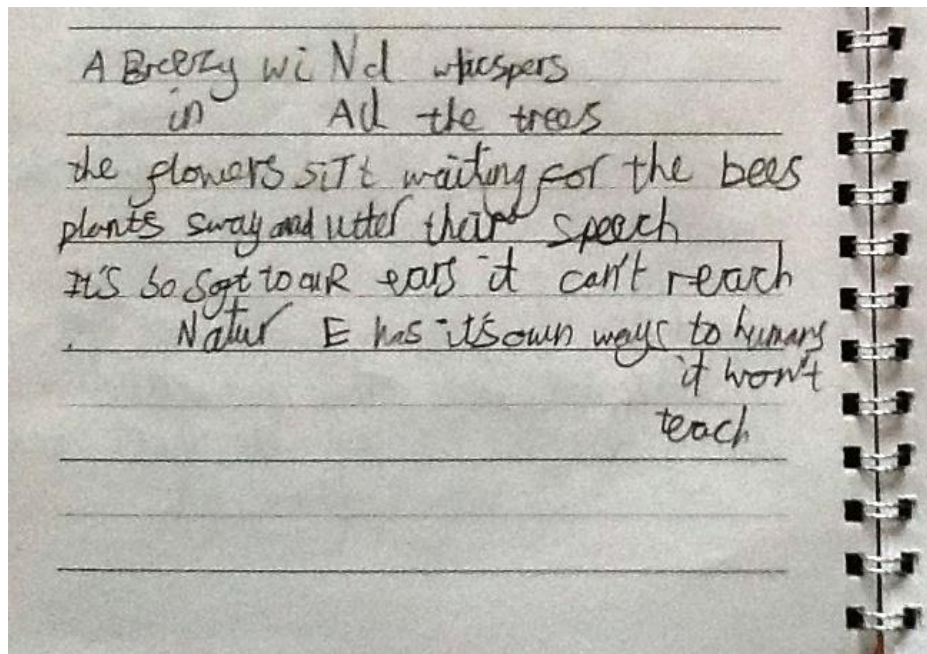


Figure 3

Sammy's post-project interview comments suggest that he has begun to view poetry a little differently:

I thought it would be in class, they were going to tell us stuff and then we got to write a poem about it, but we were more free and had the choice about what to write about...I think I'm better at poetry now, you can focus on anything.

### Inclusivity

Lynne's year 5 class fully reflects the diverse ethnic and social mix of this part of London and spans a very broad range of academic attainment. A significant feature of the PP project was the way in which SC worked inclusively with the pupils, making clear at the first mentor briefing her assumption that everyone could participate and find ways of expressing themselves creatively. This principle of inclusivity was adhered to across all observed sessions. Although not one of the original case study pupils, Kashif, a boy identified by the school as autistic (and formally statemented for his special educational needs), provides an interesting illustration of how this worked.

Kashif's name was raised by Lynne at the pre-project planning meeting with SC and VP. Although Lynne described him as being very weak academically and someone who particularly 'will struggle with using his imagination', SC immediately stated her intention to 'include him as I would everyone else', an agreed approach which she subsequently repeated for the benefit of the volunteer mentors during their briefings. It was apparent throughout the observed sessions that Kashif was able to engage in ways which worked for him, sometimes supported by his dedicated LSA, sometimes working more independently. During the introductory visit to the garden (session 1), Kashif became fascinated by a ladybird he found, which resulted in him independently drawing a colourful picture of it later in the week in his MoS

notebook and then writing a poem about life from the perspective of it with the help of his LSA (see figure 4):

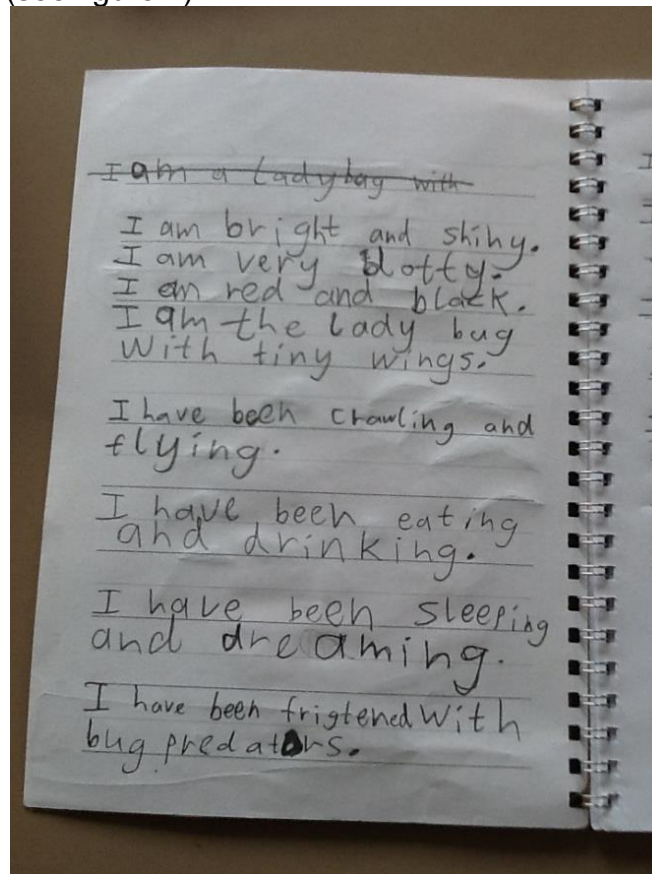


Figure 4

As Lynne said in the post-project interview, there was a 'level of real pride in what he achieved during the project'. His garden-themed mesostic poem 'FLOWERS' was selected by VP to be part of the end of project installation (see figure 5), a matter of enormous surprise and delight to Kashif himself. Lynne described his reaction when he entered the garden at the final event and caught sight of his poem:

Kashif was overwhelmed by the idea of his [flowers] poem on the signs...he was staring at the poem in his book, staring at the sign – doing this completely by himself. In his questionnaire he said that the best thing about the project was having his poem published in the garden...



Figure 5

Lynne commented that the way the project was conducted by SC had given Kashif the space and the freedom to do lots of things independently. For the final performance, for example, he chose to produce a poem about a T-Rex (drawing on his existing interest in dinosaurs), an idiosyncratic interpretation of the garden-themed brief which was happily embraced by SC.

During the end of project interview Lynne was visibly moved when reflecting upon Kashif's PP experiences. When comparing some of the writing Kashif had produced as part of the project with a recent sample of his school writing, Lynne pointed out the way in which Kashif had been able to play around more freely with ideas. The piece of school writing we looked at was, as described by Lynne, 'prosaic' and undeveloped, starting with a formulaic 'once upon a time' and focusing in a perfunctory way on bullies and friendship, a central concern of Kashif's at school. From his year 5 experiences to date Lynne's assessment of Kashif was someone who 'finds writing frustrating and usually needs lots of support'. In contrast, his MoS notebook contains 7 pages of carefully produced poems and drawings ranging in subject-matter from ladybirds to beetroot (grown in the community garden), an indication of the value Kashif gave to his creative activity.

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Planting Poetry project made a valuable contribution to supporting pupils' writing. A number of key features of this project contributed to its success:

- The celebratory nature of the end of project event gave all of the children an exciting (and challenging) platform from which to share their compositions with parents and carers. The garden installation further raised the public visibility of their work, with pupils voicing real pride in their achievements.
- Pre-project planning meetings between staff from the MoS, the creative practitioner (SC) and the class teacher laid the ground for a collaborative way of working, based on recognition of each others' professional expertise. This helped to ensure that PP became embedded within the work of the class beyond the Thursday afternoon sessions and provided pupils with space for independent, extended periods of writing.

- The choice of locales beyond the classroom played a key part in supporting the children's enjoyment in the project. Several pupils talked about the inspiration they derived from quiet time in the garden. Following the final workshop (session 5), mentors expressed pleasure and surprise at the way the children had entered the garden at the beginning of the session and found their own space for quiet contemplation.
- Inclusive ways of working enabled all pupils in this diverse class not only to participate fully in workshop activities but also established the expectation that all children in the class were capable of responding imaginatively to stimuli, developing ideas and producing/performing their own poetry.
- The project focus on 'mesostic' verse form provided a reassuring structure without limiting imaginative possibilities. It lent itself to the creation of sense-related moments of verse, free from the constraints of longer or more complex grammatical units.
- The core mentor team remained relatively consistent throughout the project, so much so that children spontaneously thanked individual mentors by name at the end.

The evaluation of the PP project prompts the following recommendations:

- Given the wholly inclusive nature of the creative process during the project, the selective nature of the tangible end product (the garden installation) appears somewhat contradictory. When reviewing the project the class teacher suggested that the composition of a whole class poem to which each pupil contributes a phrase or a line would have made a more fitting outcome. Despite the opportunity for everyone to perform at the poetry party, some children were clearly disappointed that their poems were not represented on the signage.
- During observed debriefs three mentors more than once voiced anxiety about behaviour management during the more unstructured moments of some workshops and were concerned about the change in dynamics related to different locations, particularly the rooftop area and the garden. Although they were reassured by VP after the event, it might be worth anticipating this in the future and raising it as an issue during briefings.
- Although it would need to be approached sensitively, MoS might want to discuss with schools whether it is appropriate for individual children to be excluded from projects in the future, particularly if exclusion arises as a result of pupil misbehaviour occurring elsewhere in school. Is participation to be regarded as a privilege which can be removed? If so on what grounds?

## **Appendix 4: Computer Games and Narratives Case Study**

**19<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2013**

**A case study for the Ministry of Stories Evaluation Project  
Researchers for IOE evaluation: Theo Bryer and John Potter**

### **1 Introduction**

This case study reports on the “Computer Games and Narratives” summer holiday project which took place over 5 days between 19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 2013 at the Roundhouse in Camden and at the Ministry of Stories (MOS) in Hoxton. It was a jointly organised project, the first in which an outside partner had an equal input into the planning, organisation and running of a workshop alongside MOS staff. It was also the first to feature a new media form as a central part of the activity.

The organisers from the Roundhouse side were Bea Hankey and Graham Russ, with Bea leading. Vicky Price, Creative Learning Manager, organised the MOS side of the project in consultation with Tarnia Mason, Writing Programme Leader. The Roundhouse team commissioned a specialist tutor for the sessions, Emilie Giles from Codasign, a company based in Hackney who run educational technology workshops. For the final day Emilie was joined by a colleague, Lita Wassershtrom. Other adults involved included various Ministry volunteers for the two sessions held in Hoxton and occasional drop-ins by staff from ~~with~~ both organisations. Parents and carers were invited to the final afternoon to view work made during the project (of which more later...).

The title of the project was “Computer Games and Narratives” and signalled an aim on the part of the organisers to connect the usual work of the Ministry on narrative and creative writing with the creation of a computer game directly drawn from this activity. Given the current interest in programming in schools and the changing nature of the curriculum (with programming replacing ICT in schools from Sept 2014) a key aim was to give students an opportunity to be hands-on with coding in the popular educational programming language Scratch<sup>2</sup>, developed at MIT (hence the expert involvement of Emilie from Codasign).

Throughout the report the young people participating are referred to as “students” as per the MOS website. Numbers on the project were kept to 14 to enable students to have significant input and resource in the form of personal laptops. 7 students were recruited by the MOS and 7 by the Roundhouse. The age phase was drawn from the lower end of the Roundhouse’s normal groups of students and from the upper end of the MOS’s work, 11 – 14, with the majority of those involved aged 12-13 and going into Year 8 at secondary school.

#### **1.1 Overview**

---

<sup>2</sup> Further details about Scratch, the interface built at MIT to enable designing and coding activities for education, formal and informal, are available at <http://scratch.mit.edu>



To meet the twin demands of creating engaging narratives and making games, the week was divided up between the venues, with groups moving between the two as follows:

Monday August 19<sup>th</sup>

Based at the Roundhouse (RH) with RH students from 10.00, joined by MOS students at 11.00. MOS leaving at 15.00. RH staying until 16.00

Tuesday August 20<sup>th</sup>

& Wednesday August 21<sup>st</sup>

Based at the MOS with MOS students from 10.00, joined by RH students at 11.00. RH leaving at 15.00. MOS staying until 16.00

Thursday August 22<sup>nd</sup>

& Friday August 23<sup>rd</sup>

Based at the Roundhouse with RH students from 10.00, joined by MOS students at 11.00. MOS leaving at 15.00. RH staying until 16.00

**1.2 Day by day timetable and planned content**

The actual content of the days was planned out in detail by the adults from both RH and MOS and set out as follows:

Day 1 Monday 19<sup>th</sup> August: Roundhouse

10.00 RH students arrive and begin playing with Makey-Makeys<sup>3</sup>

11.00 MOS students arrive – introductions to each other, to staff/initial brainstorming

12.10 Lunch

13.00 Activity with game cards

14.10 intro to both Makey Makeys and Scratch site (for MOS students)

14.45 Re-cap on day and look ahead to the rest of the week. MOS students go home.

15.00 More play with MaKey MaKeys by the RH students

Days 2 and 3 - 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> August: Ministry of Stories

10.00 MOS students arrive...getting to know the Makey Makeys and each other.

11.00 – 15.00 Sessions on character creation/setting more generally, moving on into games issues during the day...volunteers assisting with planning as pictures and as prose...completion of early interviews with us

15.00 RH Students leave

Day 4 22<sup>nd</sup> August: Roundhouse

10.00 RH students work with Makey Makeys and Scratch

11.00 Students from MOS arrive, begin making a maze game in Scratch

12.10 Create a controller for the game with the Makey Makeys

12.30 Lunch

13.00 Begin work on the game from the designs

14.45 Re-group and feedback on progress

15.00 MOS group leaves

Day 5 23<sup>rd</sup> August

10.00 RH students work with Makey Makeys and Scratch

11.00 Students from MOS arrive, recap on activities, continue to work on games

---

<sup>3</sup> Makey Makey is a kit built on the Arduino platform for making a control interface from a range of objects to play games made in the programming language, Scratch. Like Scratch it was invented by a team at MIT. Further details are available from [www.makeymakey.com](http://www.makeymakey.com)

12.30 Lunch

13.00 Continue to work on the games

14.00 Present the games to visitors (parents, carers, MOS, RH staff) in a makers fair style whilst continuing to work on them

15.00 Roundup and goodbyes from MOS students. Final interviews with us

16.00 End of workshop

Some adjustments were made to timing to accommodate travelling difficulties and the length of time that some tasks took to complete, but the overall shape of the week took the form described above.

There seemed to be a genuine attempt on the part of the MOS to break new ground in connecting literacy activities with computer game design in which the students had a degree of agency, albeit constrained by the nature of Scratch as an authoring tool. There was recognition of the potential of programming in stimulating a different engagement with games as a medium which they had so far experienced as active end-users but not yet as authors. For the days at the Ministry of Stories the day was open to their usual roster of volunteers to work alongside all the students and advertised on the website as follows:

*“Be a part of one of our two summer projects and help 11 to 14 year olds devise a plot and characters for their very own computer game. This project is in collaboration with the Roundhouse; students will spend the first day at the Roundhouse before coming to the Ministry of Stories for two full days (Tuesday and Wednesday) to develop ideas for the content of their own computer game. This will include working closely with illustrators and writing mentors to design a compelling key character and setting. After this, students will return to the Roundhouse to work with a games designer.*

*You do not need to have particular experience of games design and development to volunteer on this project, but if you do please get in touch (email [volunteers@ministryofstories.org](mailto:volunteers@ministryofstories.org)) as you may be able to contribute to the sessions in terms of planning as well as mentoring or illustrating.*

*Volunteers will need to arrive at the Ministry of Stories for 09:30 and the day will finish at 16:30.”*

## **2 Evaluation: timings of visits, methods employed**

John Potter and Theo Bryer, from the IOE team evaluating the work of the MOS, were present on odd days throughout the project with John attending parts of each day during the week and Theo joining for substantial amounts of days 4 and 5. Audio interviews were recorded near the beginning of the project and at the end. Photos and short video clips were taken and samples of works in progress were documented throughout. Short evaluative interviews with the students were held alongside two longer reflective interviews with tutors. After the project, Vicky Price shared some evaluations collected in the form of graphs drawn by the students. Researcher attendance was as follows:

Monday 19<sup>th</sup> August JP attending in the morning. Travelling with MOS students to the Roundhouse and attending introductory activities.

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August JP attending in the afternoon at MOS, observing and conducting early-stage interviews with the MOS students.

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> August JP attending at MOS in the morning, observing session.

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> August JP and TB attending at the Roundhouse in the morning. TB staying the rest of the day, observing.

Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> August TB attending at the Roundhouse in the morning. JP joining TB in the afternoon, attending the celebration event at the end of the project and interviewing students and tutors, Emilie and Tarnia.

### **3 Observation notes and data collection**

#### **3.1 Opening sessions – games intro**

The opening sessions were characterised by a range of activities designed to introduce the students to each other, to the Roundhouse as a space and to the concepts behind the work, initially more about game than narrative. There were 7 MOS students, though we focused on the 6 who attended the whole week – 3 female and 3 male (See section 3.2). Aisha, Ayameko, Oladele and Adetoun were going in to Year 8. Zeeshan and Adrian were going into Year 7. They were from a range of schools, including Haggerston, Highbury Fields, St. Aloysius and Stoke Newington. There were eight RH students, seven male and one female.

There was a lively initial discussion about games when the groups were brought together on the Monday at the Roundhouse. Initial shyness was quickly overcome with many cultural touchstones in common: Halo, Grand Theft, Fifa Football and others. Some of the students, particularly the MOS contingent had high hopes for being able to make console games during the week. Amongst the RH group, one boy, Cathal, emerged as an expert in both playing and programming, including with Scratch. Emilie recruited him to give an introductory presentation to the group later in the week at the MOS.

Debates touched not only on gameplay and likes and dislikes but also wider societal debates, including those on game safety and violence with Adetoun, an MOS student, emerging as an articulate defender of violent game content (“Some people think it’s wrong to shoot people in games – I don’t. I love it and it doesn’t make me want to shoot people in real life.”). She was also concerned about the lack of serious representation of women in game narratives and as game characters. She told a researcher (me or us?) in an initial interview that this was something she wanted to change (21/8/13).

The workshop moved into a session on game design in small, mixed groups (mixing up RH and MOS students) designing games on sheets of paper from randomly chosen cards. In one group a debate about strategy ensued with an MOS boy suggesting riddles as potential portals for creating gameplay to capture a prize (in this case a torch). Another group devised a Zombie game which was fairly chaotically evaluated with everyone talking at once initially but they were reminded of the need to work together. Some suggestions on rules and signs were taken seriously and mapped on to particular sets of gameplay.

The initial aim of locating the project in the world of gameplay, strategy and rules was met over the course of the day with the style of presentation consisting of a series of attempts at getting together, forming groups, reporting back and so on. There was some frustration with the pace and the



level of rule setting about feeding back with one or two (Adrian an MOS student) expressing the feeling that this was not what he thought it was going to be like and when would he ever get to actually make a game...

### **3.2 Narrative/character intro**

The focus of the following two days at the MOS was initially on narrative as a balance to the computer game emphasis on day one. Students had created their initial designs for narrative (of which more later) and they had been encouraged to go into some depth over character creation in ways which resembled the more usual working pattern of an MOS session. There had clearly been a lot of work and enjoyment up to this point but there were concerns emerging from the students about whether, when they got to Scratch, they would be able to realise their visions. Some were asking about the content of the graphics ('Can you make your own images?' – Alistair, an RH Student). Zeeshan from MOS said he would have to 'lower my expectations of the game' (due to limitations of Scratch). It is important to note that there was a sophisticated understanding of these limitations, encouraged by very frank and open discussion from Em and that the parameters were seen much more, at this stage, as a challenge to the students which was worth taking on, not as something which would hamper enjoyment or their ability to make something which they would be proud of. Cathal – from RH – offered to work on a game at home and make a demo. Others adjusted their ideas to a more comic strip style of presentation with simpler paths and graphics. Oladele wanted to see if he could improve his design so it could be simplified to fit in with the mechanics of Scratch. Gradually gameplay once again began to dominate discussion with some very sophisticated questions about gamemaking from the young people involved. Nevertheless, several students spoke about 'endings' for the gameplay (Adetoun and Naseem in particular).

### **3.3 Experience and expectations of Scratch / game making**

In reflecting on what students said in the interviews on Day 3 (21/8/13) and Day 5 (23/8/13) and on our observations of them on Days 4 and 5 at the Roundhouse, we have paired the 6 students according to a parity of experience and attainment on the project. Aisha and Ayameko (both female), Oladele and Zeeshan (both male), Adrian and Adetoun (male and female respectively). We have reflected on how they set about developing their games in more detail here, recognising that their motivation and attainment was related to the previous experience that they had of working with Scratch. Their prior involvement in previous MOS projects also emerged as significant and provides some contextual evidence for the way they set about the ambitious tasks they were set.

(Dated references to audio interviews are provided in the text. Naseem has not been included because she did not complete the workshop due, it was reported, to not feeling well).

#### ***Aisha and Ayameko***

Aisha had been coming to MOS for about a year to 'most of their projects', presumably with her brother, Zeeshan. Ayameko had been to MOS only once before with her school in Year 5. Both Aisha and Ayameko had the same experience of building a game using Scratch in what seems to have been a relatively prescribed way, at school – Aisha in Year 7 ICT lessons, with 'all the constructions done on it' already (21/8/13). This meant that both were aware

of how much time they would need. Aisha said since it had taken 'over a whole term' to make a simple Scratch game at school that she anticipated being able to make one level 'maybe if I push myself very hard I can get two levels' (21/8/13) in the two days allocated to working on the computers. Ayameko said that 'I did it for a whole term and everyone's games still didn't come out right so it will take you a really long time for your game to come out perfect as you want it'. She was initially a bit cynical about what she might manage on this project saying 'Scratch ain't really good' (21/8/13). However this awareness appeared to serve her well.

### ***Oladele and Zeeshan***

Oladele and Zeeshan had considerable experience of MOS projects but less experience of using Scratch than Aisha and Ayameko. Both clearly enjoy coming to MOS - they have been coming since the start of the project and regularly attend on Thursday and Saturdays. Oladele said he knew everyone attending from the MOS and Zeeshan said he knew some. Oladele's vagueness in the first interview about what he hoped to get out of the project, 'go away with a smile on my face and able to play my game on Scratch and be impressed with what I've done' (21/8/13) suggested less awareness of the possible pitfalls he might encounter. Zeeshan also had quite high expectations of learning how to make games with a view to showing it 'to the people' (21/8/13) and 'then I could develop from that' (23/8/13) as if he were envisioning a career in game making.

### ***Adrian and Adetoun***

Adrian had been attending the Saturday club at MOS for over a year but Adetoun had only been once in Year 4 with her school, like Ayameko. Neither Adrian nor Adetoun had any experience of working with Scratch and neither made a game that could be played by someone else by the end of the course. Adrian was animated by the idea of making games. His expectation was that he would 'be able to understand how games are made a little bit better' and after discussing how he thought he might adapt the story that he had been working on he commented that he would probably 'reach the first stage' by Friday (21/8/13). Adetoun said 'I like playing video games and thought it would be cool if I could make one' (21/8/13). She was enthusiastic about the links between games and stories reflecting on how 'games sometimes rest on their storyline'. She wanted to make 'a little platform Mario type game' and on Day 3 she was optimistic about finishing her game 'because I've done my story, most of it... I just need to figure out an ending... and I've designed most of my characters, I just need to do two more' (21/8/13).

## **3.4 Adapting plans**

In this section we reflect on the plans that the students made on the first 3 days of the course and how they set about adapting them as they worked with Scratch.

### ***Aisha and Ayameko***

Aisha and Ayameko had both developed clear narratives and characters by the end of Day 3. Aisha spoke about her plans for a lost scientist, multi player game with a lot of enthusiasm (21/8/13). This narrative was not translated in to her final maze game and she did not refer back to it in the final interview. Although Ayameko was not that enthusiastic about the time spent planning at MOS she did find a way of inserting her compelling 'Werewolf Apocolypes' (sic) narrative into the game by writing it out in her initial cut scenes. She was

not happy with her scanned image from her initial design but found images for her characters via google instead. Although she lost her game so that she had to start again at the beginning of Day 5, she did not express regret about this suggesting that it had given her an opportunity to design the game differently with more reliance on pictures and action than written text (23/8/13). Initially, for example, she had written about how the werewolves had set about to kill the '100 thousand million' strong population of China – though the main character's siblings were saved, hidden in a cupboard from which they 'fell out like a can of beans' (from Ayameko's original paper plan and her first cut scene). When Ayameko remade the game she included an animation of a werewolf chasing someone including a contraction of her original text, with instructions for the gamer 'There is one girl left in the city get her before she become a survivor' (photo 5Playing Ayameko's game).



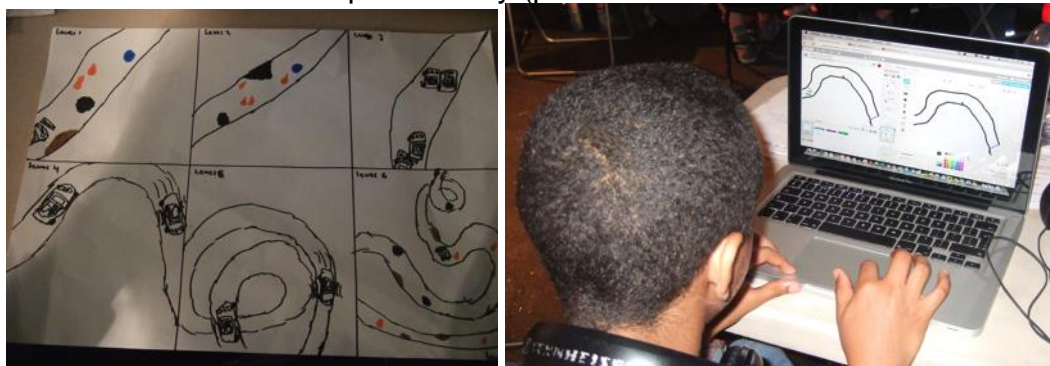
We discussed how the story had become embedded in the action in her second reworking, so that it involved more game play (23/8/13). No one else from the MOS cohort seemed to have such a clear grasp on the process as she did. Her insights about the differences between writing a story and writing a game might inform a reworking of the project in the future.

### ***Oladele and Zeeshan***

Oladele was very clear about what stimulated him in the planning process. He liked 'drawing my characters' and he explained that 'as soon as I see a picture, straight away I've got a plan and it starts to build on all the days' (23/8/13). There was a direct correspondence between his drawings for the story and his final game (video 4). He found a Superdog via google images that matched his drawing and his graphically pleasing game involved three backgrounds, taken from the Scratch palette that suited the urban context of his story. The cars and moving people all contributed to a super hero, graphic novel look to his game. He explained that the character of Lord Zob was inspired by General Zob, from Man of Steel (Snyder, 2013) and he was clearly pleased that he had been able to realise a design that referenced this genre of film.

Zeeshan was similarly appreciative of the planning process that he had been involved in at MOS and said that 'it helped me to think of a game to do' (23/8/13). Although he did not plan the second Pac-Man type game that he made on Day 5 on paper, he said that he would in the future. Like Oladele his

racing game representation was quite graphic on paper – with a plan for 6 Levels that he drew on quite closely (photo



Zeeshan's design, photo5 Zeeshan's game). His simple written outline made brief mention of the challenge the gamer would face at each level – the spiral movement detailed in Level 5, for example. His inspiration was a game called *Need for Speed* (Electronic Arts, 1994 – 2013) that he plays at home often, with his siblings (23/8/13). It was a struggle for him to recognise that he would not be able to make a game that mirrored those aspects of the game that he loved to play. However both his and Oladele's graphic approach to game planning seemed to serve them well.

### **Adrian and Adetoun**

In the first interview Adrian reflected that although 'it can have a lot of cut scenes... for a game to be a game you have to be able to play it'. It was as if this realisation then promoted him to reflect on how he might develop aspects of his plan for *The Amazing Super Hotdog* to develop the gameplay – introducing obstacles when 'hotdog's running away from the salesman' for example, 'jumping over people's feet in the pavement while the salesman's running after him' (21/8/13). Space to reflect and to develop these ideas earlier on – as he explored the capabilities of Scratch, may have been useful to Adrian. He said that the computer that he and Zeeshan had been given at MOS to look at Scratch, on Day 3 was not turned on (21/8/13). Similarly although Adetoun said that she recognised that the games that they were going to be able to make 'were going to be small' (21/8/13) she clearly had faith in the planning process. In the final interview she said, 'on the first day they should show you Scratch... so you know because the people that been on Scratch... knew that but the people that haven't, didn't' (23/8/13). It was very unfortunate that Adetoun did not have her own laptop to work on while Em was explaining how to use Scratch on the morning of Day 4, to remedy this. She was supposedly sharing with Aisha but did not use the keyboard at all during the demonstration. When she finally got a laptop, she had to rely on her paper plans rather than any insights into how to begin making a workable game in Scratch - and in the end, she felt the 3 pages she had written and her drawings of characters did not help her to make a game and had 'no point' (23/8/13).

### **3.5 Development of the game**

In this section we reflect on the students' motivation and progress on Days 4 and 5.

#### **Aisha and Ayameko**

Aisha enjoyed listening to music on the headphones as she worked and on Day 4, she spent time choosing music on YouTube - to listen to and to

accompany her game. On Day 5 she seemed more determined and focused and sat near the wall, next to her brother Zeeshan, (both with their headphones on) and managed to make a maze game with 6 levels. During the final sharing, I played her game and she expressed her frustration that it was not set up to allow me to move beyond Level 2. She then enlisted the help of Liat and Em and added transitions up to Level 6. In the final interview Aisha said that her best moment was when Vicky had played the game (a few minutes before hand) and the transitions between the levels had worked. After our interview she rushed back in, (as everyone was packing up) and Liat helped her to 'change the broadcast so that Level 6 comes on afterwards and says you win' (23/8/13) - completing the game to her satisfaction.

Ayameko worked in a focused and engaged way on both Days 4 and 5. She had to share a laptop with Effie for the demonstration but followed what Effie was doing quite closely, occasionally suggesting ideas. She really seemed to enjoy writing her scripts for the cut scenes on Day 4, drawing on her paper plan and then adding warnings to the gamer, such as 'if u r under da age of 9 u will hve to stop playing this game right now, this game does not contain rainbows and sunshine it contains death and upsetness'. She was the only one of the MOS cohort to address the gamer in this way – as Cathal and others from the RH did; referring to *you*, (i.e. the gamer), in the final discussion on Day 4. She also was able to draw a sunset on the tablet successfully although Aisha struggled. Ayameko was particularly pleased with the way that she managed to 'change perspective' because she had learnt to hide characters. She explained, 'In the third level you're a professor getting a formula in the second level... you're a werewolf running the streets of the city and in the third level you're a civilian running away from werewolves' (23/8/13). This shifting point of view might be one to be explored more deliberately in considering the links between writing and story and writing or building a computer game. It is interesting that her mastery of a technical issue – hiding a character, had opened up more narrative possibilities.

### **Oladele and Zeeshan**

Unlike some of his peers, Oladele's lack of experience in using Scratch did not seem to inhibit him. Because he had such a clear idea about design he was able to articulate it to those that could realise it for him, including, Em, Liat, Adrian, Cathal and Gabriel, (from the RH cohort), whom he sat next to for two days (photos, 4Oladele and Liat2, 4Oladele and Gabriel).



Zeeshan seemed similarly uninhibited by his lack of experience though he was frustrated on Day 4, by the difficulties he encountered in trying to make a game that met his expectations. He spent a long time looking for a rear view of a car in google images (photo 4Tarnia and Zeeshan).





He was not impressed with the flat representations of cars on offer in Scratch and in his reference to the 'flat 2d car' not representing the 'angle' that he wanted (End of Day 4 discussion) he was presumably referring to the effect of a camera moving all round the car as in Need for Speed. He also had to abandon an attempt to make a spiral track that the cars had to move around because he could not find a way to represent it - 'it's kind of impossible to do it – it's not like there's a bridge or something' (23/8/13). I observed how hard Zeeshan tried to make his game fit his vision for most of Day 4 and the morning of Day 5. What was most impressive was that in a burst of creative energy he found time in the afternoon of Day 5 to make a Pac-Man style game that was more suited to the Scratch 'toolkit'.

### ***Adrian and Adetoun***

On Days 4 and 5 Adrian and Adetoun were reluctant to abandon their carefully drawn characters in the way that Ayameko did or to search out analogous images via google, as Oladele did. There were problems with the scanner on both days and both he and Adetoun spent a long time waiting to get their images scanned and then had trouble importing them. Adrian got frustrated by this until Liat worked out they needed to be converted to pdfs. Eventually he was able to import three characters and write their names and he was satisfied with the way that he managed to record his voice so that when Amic appeared, the gamer heard his name (photo 4Amic on screen).



Adetoun was frustrated that once she had finally managed to scan and to import her image of a zombie, (by the end of Day 4) the zombie image proved too pale. It had been drawn with coloured pencils and the detail of the hand

did not come out clearly - she complained she 'couldn't even see it' (video 33). She tried to colour it in, as Ayameko did but only succeeded in masking the edges. Tarnia recognised that she needed to do what Oladele had done much earlier on, to search for characters via google images - and helped her to do this at the end of Day 4. In the discussion at the end of Day 4 Adetoun said 'I didn't really do a lot' attributing that to the time spent trying to scan her images. On Day 5 Em spent time helping her to make her zombies glide so that at least her cut scene worked.

### **3.6 Outcomes and learning**

In this section we present some key learning outcomes or attainment identified by the six MOS students.

#### ***Aisha and Ayameko***

Aisha seemed to have learnt a lot despite this being the first time she had worked on Scratch so independently - 'without anyone helping me' (23/8/13) as she put it. She felt she had got better at it as she said she hoped to (21/8/13). She expressed frustration that the Roundhouse cohort had four hours more working on the computer than the MOS cohort quoting Cathal's warning that to make a game with a lot of levels was likely to take 'a month or two' (23/8/13). She said she had enjoyed the creative planning process at MOS and said that the best bit had been 'meeting new different people' (21/8/13) but she was clear that in the future she would go straight to Scratch and start working on it if she were to make a game again. She recognised that time invested in working on the computer was what was likely to ensure more levels. She said that she would continue to work on Scratch at home (23/8/13).

Ayameko was very clear about what she had learnt. She had worked out why her character had walked through walls in the game she made at school and how to make transitions between levels, for example (23/8/13). She was most enthusiastic about the Makey Makeys and it was pleasing to see that Em was able to set her up to make play dough controls as everyone arrived for the sharing. The controls worked when I tried them and Ayameko seemed satisfied with what she had achieved (photo 5Makey Makeys).



She said that she would not plan in the same way as she had done at MOS since she thought it was more productive to 'just use your imagination as you go along' (23/8/13). From my observation of Ayameko I think that this is a fitting description of the creative way that she worked – with an obvious

enjoyment in combining word, image, character and action. It is likely she will continue to enjoy working in Scratch, at school if not at home.

### ***Oladele and Zeeshan***

In the final interview Oladele was able to explain precisely what he had achieved and what not, 'shooting lasers out of his eyes... flying... cars to be moving and backgrounds'. He had not managed to make 'an earthquake', to make his dog 'shoot bullets out of his tails' and to introduce the character of 'Lord Zob, the evil guy that turned the ordinary dog into Superdog'. He was particularly pleased that he had managed to make the dog's laser eyes because he said he had worked that out for himself, although Cathal had helped him to make a target for the lasers. He said that he had enjoyed drawing, writing his story and designing his game – perhaps because this was the part of the process that he could do independently. He also enjoyed working with the Makey Makeys. He was unsure that he would be able to develop the game for himself although he acknowledged that he might look back at scripts written for or by him, to remind himself of the process (23/8/13).

Zeeshan had learnt 'to lower my expectations of the games' (23/8/13) through his experience of trying to make a game like Need for Speed. Oladele was able to develop a design inspired by film more successfully than Zeeshan – who was trying to realise a very particular experience of gaming. An introduction to Scratch at the start of the course may have helped Zeeshan earlier on – as eventually he learnt through making the game what he could do. He said he was inspired to make the Pac-Man game on the final afternoon, by a simple game made by Felix from the RH cohort (23/8/13). He may continue working on Scratch – and might well encounter it at his new school, in ICT.

We wondered if Oladele and Zeeshan's quiet confidence and determination stemmed in part from their comfortable relationship with the project.

### ***Adrian and Adetoun***

Adrian seemed a bit blocked about developing his own game to his satisfaction. In the discussion at the end of Day 4 he said that he wanted to develop different 'attacks' for his characters, so that they each had their own animation. He did not manage to do this. He did not express frustration as Adetoun did in his final interview and he did seem to have developed some understanding of aspects of Scratch and often helped others. At one point Em was working on his computer while he was helping Zeeshan to script his car and when helping Zeeshan later, Em commented 'Wow Adrian, you're really good at this' (video 13). On Day 5 he continued to help Zeeshan alongside Tarnia – asking Oladele 'what do you want to happen' and directing him to Events in a knowledgeable way (video 40). Later he helped Oladele work on his transitions with Liat. A clearer understanding of what he might be able to do in Scratch may have helped Adrian from the outset. He said that he would have liked 'less story time and more of the making time' (23/8/13). He did not mention that he would continue to use Scratch but he might encounter it in ICT at school.

In the final interview Adetoun conceded that she 'figured out how to do things in the end' and had made one level (23/8/13). Unfortunately Em had had to call on Cathal to sort it out a glitch that occurred in Adetoun's game just as she was finally beginning to script her zombies. When he failed to do it, Em



had to spend time in the lunch hour of Day 5 making it work. This technical hitch seemed to compound Adetoun's sense of the technology being a bit beyond her. As she said 'it was really hard for me to do it and I needed like help to do the stuff because I didn't know which ones to press' (23/8/13). What seemed to frustrate Adetoun the most was a sense that she had worked hard at planning and story making (as she had been directed to do) and that this had not served her well. She said 'Scratch isn't detailed enough and you don't end up doing the cut scenes so I don't really think there was any point... I had to cut most of the storyline anyway... I think... if they'd just told us we could have written like notes or something or storyboard and they shouldn't have like said that we should write a story'. Her experience contrasts with Ayameko's – who was able to realise some interesting narrative moves through her technical skill. There was a sense of humiliation in Adetoun's comparisons with others 'I've only did one level, it's not that great like other people's' (23/8/13). She seemed more sensitive that Zeeshan and Adrian about the outcomes - perhaps it did not help that she was not as comfortable with MOS as them and that her friend Ayameko was so successful. Adetoun said that she was using Scratch next year at school, so at this stage she may find she can do more with it.

### **3.7 Interactions with tutors**

In this section we present some key observed interactions between tutors and students, and some of the students' reflections on the support they provided.

#### ***Aisha and Ayameko***

Ayameko was probably the most independent of the tutors, of the MOS cohort – although she maintained a productive dialogue with Effie, the only girl in the RH cohort. When Em helped her, Ayameko kept her fingers on the keyboard. When Em asked questions, Ayameko had answers, asserting that she wanted her characters to just appear rather than glide, for example. Em expressed enthusiasm at what Ayameko had achieved as she worked with her 'this is great' and offered her choices, 'what do you want to call it?' (video 49). Liat helped Aisha in the same, *hands off* way, very patiently and effectively – making a promise that she would help Aisha to finish the game that she was able to fulfil. The number of tutors and their expertise was a significant help to these two girls (3 tutors to 13 students, at this stage).



Photo 5Em and Aisha2

### ***Oladele and Zeeshan***

Oladele was quite strategic about drawing on the expertise of the tutors and other young people and in the short time that he had, this process worked for him. At the end of Day 4 Em spent approximately ten minutes working on Oladele's keyboard, helping him code Superdog. Liat also spent some time helping him on Day 5, sometimes with her hands on the keyboard, at other times, pointing at the screen but responding to his quite specific instructions about the ways that he wanted to manage the transitions between levels. It was almost as if Oladele assumed the role of designer in these interactions and the tutors, the role of game makers. Again, this worked because of the number of tutors – but it was a significant demand on their time.

Similarly Zeeshan's clear idea for his car game meant that he was able to articulate what he wanted in his interactions with different tutors. Although I observed Zeeshan seeking help for the spiral track from Adrian, Tarnia and Cathal, he said in the final interview that no one had helped him make 'really sharp turns instead', (23/8/13), – suggestive of the control that he maintained over his game design as he talked through the process. Cathal was very helpful in demonstrating varieties of script and the possibilities of what could and could not be done but Tarnia's drawing of a zig-zag seemed most useful to Zeeshan in helping him to find a compromise. Em had to work very hard to help make Zeeshan's game workable, in terms of the transitions between levels because Zeeshan was so interested in the way the cars moved. She did this with clarity and focus. She gave space for Zeeshan to express his ideas and he kept his fingers on the keyboard, yet she also ensured that his multi-player game worked in a satisfactory way – as it did in the final sharing. It is a tribute to the patient attentions of all three tutors and other young people that Zeeshan did not get discouraged and was able to see possibilities.

### ***Adrian and Adetoun***

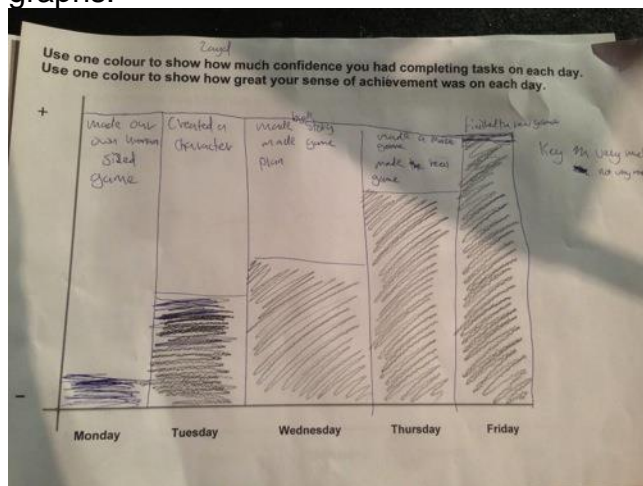
Both Liat and Em worked hard with Adrian to help him to realise his ideas. Em spent time on Day 4 to help Adrian to make a cut scene- showing him a simple Scratch animation as a model and then later encouraging him to think about scripting his characters and sprites and initiating some game play. Later on Day 4, Em noted that he had no scripts on his characters and then helped him to make them appear in a particular way. Liat helped him to record Amic's name. Adrian may have learnt some technicalities by listening to tutors as they helped others – he repeated what Em was saying about coding sprites to Zeeshan, for example (video 13).

Em helped Adetoun, at the end of Day 5 – realising that she did not have much to share. Tarnia's suggestion that Adetoun find a zombie via google images was very helpful although at this stage there was little time left to script. Tarnia was also very sensitive in helping to cheer Adetoun up after she said 'I don't even want to do this anymore' (video 33).

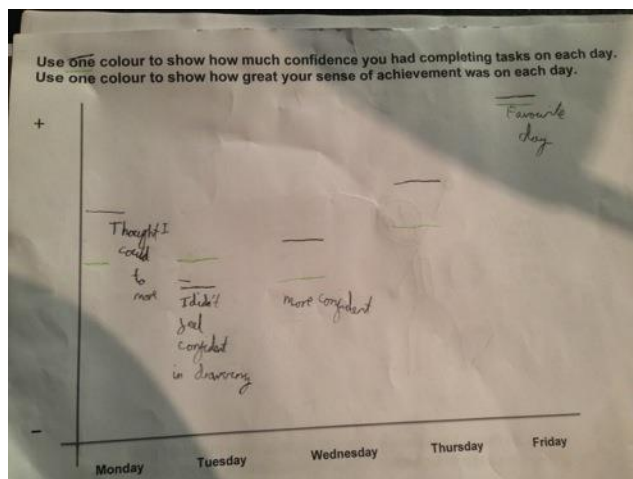
### ***3.8 Observation notes on the end of project evaluation/celebration***

The Roundhouse provided voice recorders for focus groups and a graphical representation idea by way of collecting evaluative feedback on the project. The students in the latter case were encouraged to represent their feelings about the project and their learning in it over time. In the former case, the voice recorders were used in most of the focus groups in a careless and perfunctory way with not much attention given to answers. Although the idea

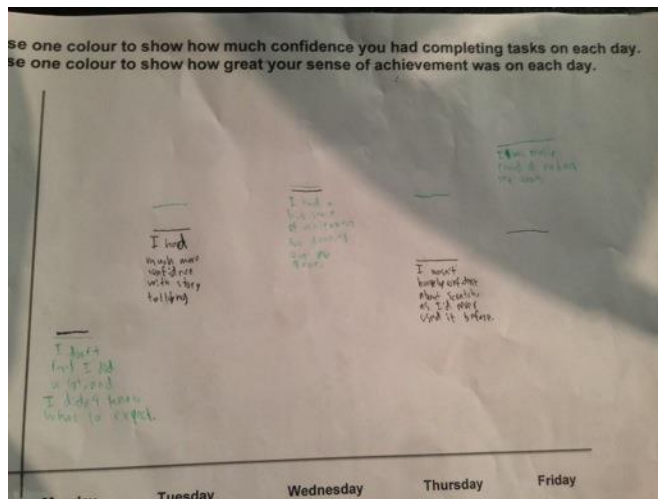
was good, there was simply too much still to be done for the participants to be focused on making sense of the whole experience. On the other hand, the graphical representations yielded some interesting responses from the students with some very frank observations on how the week had gone included as diagrammatic evidence or in the form of text. For most it had ended on a high with some troubles indicated along the way. For some it had been a continual improvement through the week. For one dissenting voice it hadn't quite lived up to expectation. Here are some example evaluation graphs:



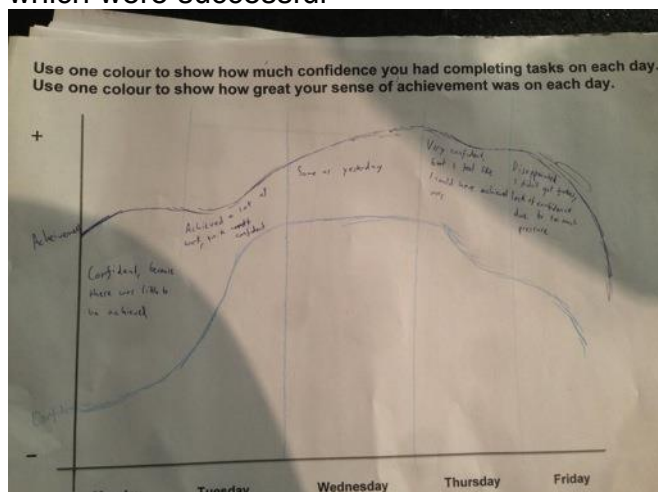
Above: Clear improvement of experience through the week from Zeeshan



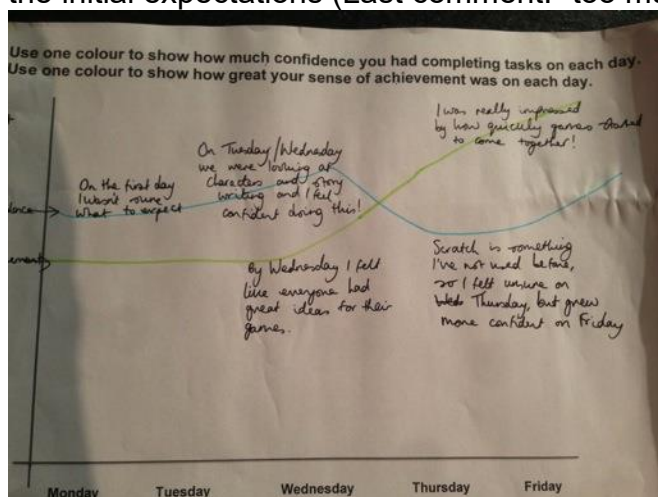
Above: Tuesday identified as a problematic day due to being made to draw...



Above, nuanced account of progress through the week, including differentiating aspects of the experience which were problematic and others which were successful



Above: some highs and lows and some disappointment with the outcome from the initial expectations (Last comment: "too much pressure")



Above: Changes in expectations in the other direction towards pride in achievement by the end of the week

By the time allocated to the celebratory show and tell, both MOS and RH students were still working on their projects, in particular connecting the

games to the Makey Makey interfaces. The presentations to parents, carers and other adults therefore took the form of a “work-in-progress” makers’ fair with students explaining the games to the adult visitors even as they tried to complete them. Aisha and Ayameko, in particular, were quite distracted. Nevertheless, the atmosphere in the room was good and there was substantial interest in the work which had gone on during the week with many of the students very proud of their games, even if they hadn’t created console-style gameplay or realised some of their earlier narrative designs fully.



Above: Showing work including playing the game with the Makey Makeys at the end of project celebration

### ***3.9 End of project interviews with the tutors***

As the project finished and with the MOS students about to leave we conducted interviews with Em from Codasign and with Tarnia from MOS. We asked Tarnia about her overall view of the week and she focused firstly on how the students had interacted with each other through the week as being a major positive outcome. She felt very positive about the levels of support which those who were experienced in Scratch had provided for those who were new to it.

When we discussed the nature of the project as being outside the usual MOS sphere Tarnia acknowledged that it was out of her comfort zone and significantly downplayed the amount of encouragement and high quality input which we both observed her providing. Certainly in terms of moral support, if not essential knowledge of the software, Tarnia kept many of the students going when they faced difficulties, perhaps due to her feelings of empathy over the whole difficulty of programming in this way. She reported a key benefit as being able to understand how the parts of a process contribute to a whole and how a significant focus in the work was on the step-by-step iterative nature of the work. Partly this was enabled for her by not being in overall charge but in collaboration with others in the planning and delivery of the workshop. She had more space to learn and to observe.

Commenting on the pedagogy during the week Tarnia recognised the frustration that some of the students had with the timings and running order. She suggested that a future iteration would reveal Scratch earlier in the process so as to manage expectations. Part of the occasional frustration with the workshop lay in not being able to begin making the games earlier.

For the more obvious connections to wider culture, Tarnia admitted to having learned from the students about the ways in which they can articulate different responses to debates about game content. Whilst not necessarily changing her opinion about gaming in general, the workshop had given her the opportunity to reflect on the nature of debates and the passionate and sophisticated articulation of them by the young people in the project on many levels.

When we spoke to Em from Codasign about the project she emphasised many of the same points which Tarnia had made but from her own perspective. She also elaborated on the collaborative side of the project as a major success ('they've been socialising with each other and helping each other and that's been such a nice thing to see'). It seems to have been helpful for Codasign in considering new ways of working and to reflect on their usual method of working with pre-created, adaptations of game starting points in shorter workshops. It seems that the partner organisations extended themselves beyond their usual reach in different ways.

Throughout the interview Em was very keen to push the idea of agency and activity and explaining to students about why and how decisions get made on coding and creative production. She emphasised that a key aspect for her had been to communicate to the students how important the process was and how game design was a journey in which the journey was as important as the outcome. This is a difficult point to put across in the atmosphere of a workshop and even a makers fair but it was an ambitious aim and characteristic of the project as a whole. Em was certainly keen to work further with the Ministry and is clearly motivated to work more on coding and creativity projects.

#### **4 Discussion of the data: concluding thoughts**

Firstly, the project was a highly ambitious one, combining the following:

- to bring together the fields of literacy (specifically narrative) and gaming in one week of a summer school;
- to consider the wider cultural significance of games in discussion with the students;
- to make a game in a programming language
- to make a game controller which connected to the game
- to work across two sites in different parts of London
- to work across two institutions in the first partnership of the Ministry of Stories with another organisation
- to have a parental and carer show and tell

The level of commitment from both the Ministry of Stories and Roundhouse was very high and, in Em from Codasign, the Roundhouse found a programming expert with a high degree of sensitivity to the skills of teaching which were partnered with Tarnia's experienced and sensitive ways of working in Ministry projects. The two tutors worked very well together in (sometimes) challenging circumstances (equipment difficulty, changes of venue, travel, students unfamiliar with each other and with the work etc).

Overall the structure of the week, with only two days devoted to learning how to use the software and building games, put significant demands on Em, Tarnia and Liat, that they coped with well.



In terms of MOS's four key outcomes, this project was very successful.

1. To increase their motivation to write and love of writing

From the student side the project was highly engaging and connected the two worlds which are usually separate in both school and home life, namely, gaming culture and literacy. They all felt a measure of achievement by the end even if they did not end where they thought they would. Students' levels of motivation have been commented on throughout this case study – with the exception of Adetoun, they were consistently high. It is worth noting that there was a mismatch in expectations, commented on by both students and adults, of what could be achieved both in the format provided for working (Scratch) and the timescale (one week, two venues). Some of the order of events would need to be changed to allow for greater familiarity with Scratch nearer to the beginning of the week but also longer periods of time with no interruption were commented on as being a desirable future outcome for the design of the next version of this workshop. All the students seemed to enjoy working with the Makey Makeys but there was not time for everyone to incorporate them into their final gameplay. Familiarity with the medium in which students were expected to make games and some recognition of the kinds of game design that Scratch lends itself to, proved key to students' attainment and to some extent, their motivation.

2. To improve their creativity in writing

This was a very creative project and students learnt much - making artistic choices at the different stages of planning and development of their games. We do not judge it appropriate to attempt to measure the creative aspects of the games they made but it is notable that despite the limitations of Scratch, the games the students produced were all quite different. The game making enabled students to experiment and to adapt their ideas in ways that challenged and excited them - offering them opportunities to draw on their particular skills through the creative process. Ayameko enjoyed developing the narrative elements through words and then image and action, Aisha found some inspiration in music, Oladele focused on the graphics, Zeeshan sought to develop the game play, Adrian was interested in the look of his characters and Adetoun had ideas that inspired others. Because of MOS's area of expertise the planning process was more prescribed than the game making process, despite Em's clear introduction at the start of Day 4. The openness of the latter half of the project meant that students were able to find their own way into the process. Overall, a sustained period of making and experimenting clearly proved very engaging for students - and they wanted more of it (something that they rarely get time for in school). There are benefits in tutors not necessarily having a sense of a tried and tested way of making a finished product that have emerged from this innovative project.

3. To improve their attainment in writing

Adetoun commented on how much writing this project involved and that she had actually felt inspired to make a book (23/8/13). Others were inspired by the visual design elements of game making - perhaps these might have been foregrounded more in the planning process (am I wrong about this? Did they do quite a bit of drawing?). Searching google images or using templates from the Scratch palette proved more successful than importing drawings for everyone but Adrian – and although Adrian liked the drawings he imported he

did not have time to develop his gameplay. It might be worth considering how to adapt the approach in future incarnations of the project, to facilitate those who are less experienced so that they might then experience the benefits of a sustained period of making.

There were not enough laptops for everyone on both of the final days and it was unfortunate that the least experienced student did not get her hands on a keyboard. A change over of tutors, pressure of time and issues that had arisen between Ayameko and Adetoun may explain why levels of experience were not taken in to account in allocating equipment.

#### 4. To improve their broader expressive and communication skills

There were opportunities for students to listen and to learn from each other throughout the course of the project. The debates about gaming culture – violence and representation of women – had a positive impact on levels of motivation and engagement across the group and Adetoun's comments seem to have prompted one RH student to make an amazing Moustache Girl character. There were also informal opportunities to share and to discuss work in progress that proved particularly beneficial to Oladele, for example. The MOS students were motivated to explain their ideas and to reassess them throughout this project, partly because they needed so much help to realise them. This seemed to be a very positive outcome to the process. We were impressed, for example, by how hard Zeeshan had to work, to explain what he meant by a flat image, when talking about his car game to tutors and in the discussion at the end of Day 4. The concepts that some students were grappling with were novel and challenging and they had to find language to describe processes of gaming that they may have engaged in often but not talked about in this way.

There was a discussion at the end of Day 4 that focused on technical issues as students were thoroughly embedded in making at that stage. An opportunity was missed to reflect on the links between writing stories and writing games at the end. All 6 students had much to say about this, when we interviewed them on Day 5, particularly Ayameko - and it would have been productive to share these with experienced game makers like Cathal. It is always difficult to build time for reflection into creative projects. In this project the emphasis seemed to be on planning in more abstract ways, with less time allocated to reflection on the creative process. Privileging making at the outset and talk and discussion afterwards can be more productive in terms of learning, than the other way around.

The connections to story and narrative were weaker given the way in which Scratch operates and that only very reductive versions of the students' own stories were possible. Other software titles might be more appropriate for working on this aspect. However, Scratch brings with it a hands- on aspect and direct access to command lines which do change the perspective of the end user on both game production and what constitutes literacy. Certainly this aspect, which lies beyond the purely evaluative remit of this report, is a useful finding for thinking of the ways in which coding can be productively situated alongside other forms of literacy activity in the new curriculum for schools in September 2014 and, just as importantly, in wider culture.

#### **Recommendations regarding future media and literacy collaborations**

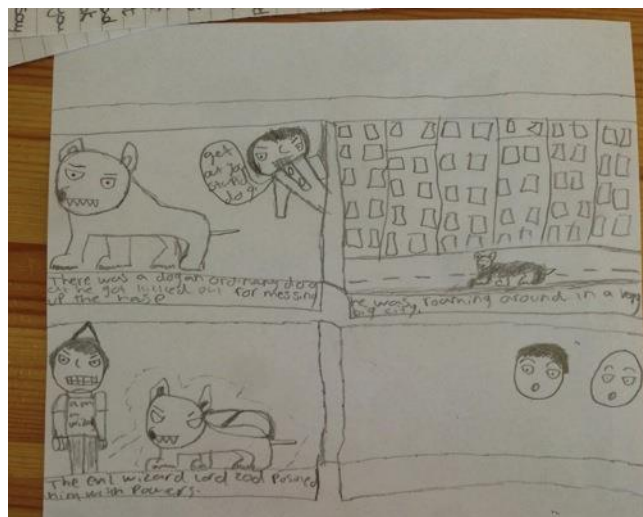


On the basis of our findings from this project we would recommend that the Ministry of Stories seriously considers running the project again in some form. In its second iteration, perhaps some further thought can be given to the timings of the activities to allow for longer sessions of actual making. In noting this, we are working from our own observation notes and from the comments of students and tutors. It might be that some of the work on character would be more appropriate for different kinds of gamemaking software, given the limitations in that domain of Scratch, though there was rich dialogue around this aspect and it contributed to the awareness of the ludic aspects of their designs. A recommendation would be to reduce some of the time on this but not to lose it completely.

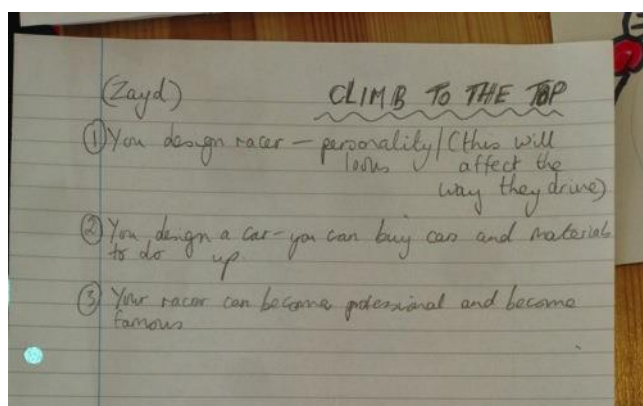
The students clearly gained from working in the digital domain alongside the more usual literacy activities and this integration of new media into the programme is a very positive development. It allows for a dialogue between the wider literate worlds of students and young people and provides contexts for formal literacy activities leading to authored outputs of digital work, visual design and rich narrative. In another project it might be interesting to see what they make of more directly narrative game making software which will take them away from the coding interface but keep them located in issues of character and new media. It might also be interesting to work with other media production forms such as animation which require structured approaches to writing, creativity and similar levels of teamwork and focus but which are also connected to media culture.

## APPENDICES

### APP 1 Example plans and stories



Above – unfinished planning/storyboard



Above – initial ideas for Zeeshan's racing game "Climb to the Top", sophisticated description of game attributes in evidence. Note – this was when he thought they would be making console games.

THE WEREWOLF APOCALYPSE

It didn't start like this, it should have eventually died out but China contains 100 thousand million people, HOW CAN IT NOT DIE OUT!!!

I went to military 2 years ago to return to an empty home, no father, I heard a bang on the cupboard door, it sounded like it was coming from the inside, I edged forward ~~cautiously~~ forward with my gun in my hand, the door flung open my mum and siblings fell out like a can of beans, they were in pain where is father...

I wanted to leave a note for her she just got back from foreign city, I'm really going to miss her, I'm going to die because Raul McDandez says if I don't give him the werewolf enhance growth formula, I'm gonna die. I eventually gave in and shamefully gave it to him, instead of letting me go, he put me in solitary confinement, I know my daughter will come get me soon enough.

\* \* \*

Raul McDandez here I have finally got my werewolf formula, finally I can rule the world and nobody can stop me except for Dan-Lynn's little brat of a girl. I REALLY HATE HER.

TESTING TIME

Aiko

Kate is my worker and I am going to test the werewolf enhancer on my worker she already has drunked it I think it's working, what do you think Kate.

\* \*

What what is it- BRAAAAINNNNS... BRAAINS... BRAA... HOOOWWWWWW!

\* \*

PERFECT well done dan-Lynn, well done.

Above – Ayameko's Werewolf story written to explore setting and character



Above and below: character created in response debate about lack of female characters in gameworlds by RH boy, inspired by arguments of Ministry student, Adetoun



Below: How Moustache Girl was realised in Scratch by the end of



the project:

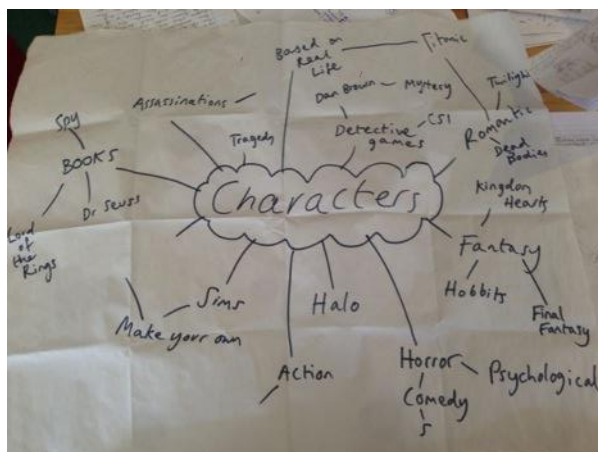
## APP 2 Blogpost by Codasign

The immediate response of Codasign's Emilie Giles is available at <http://codasign.com/2013/08/storytelling-and-game-design-workshop-with-the-roundhouse-and-the-ministry-of-stories/>

## APP 3 Further selection of photos



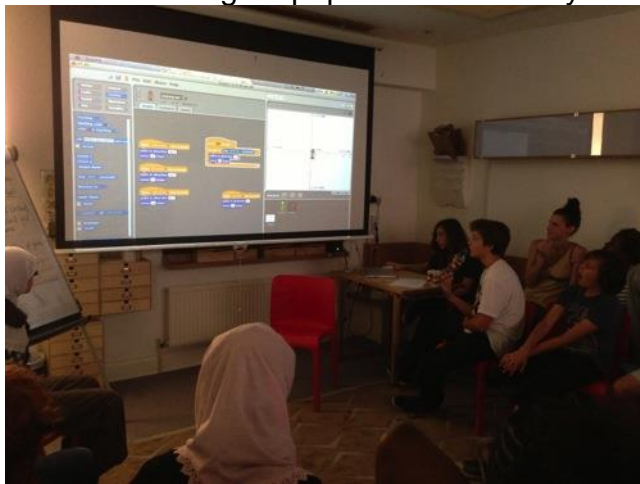
Early game design task on day 1 at Roundhouse and, below, more planning on character back at the Ministry of Stories



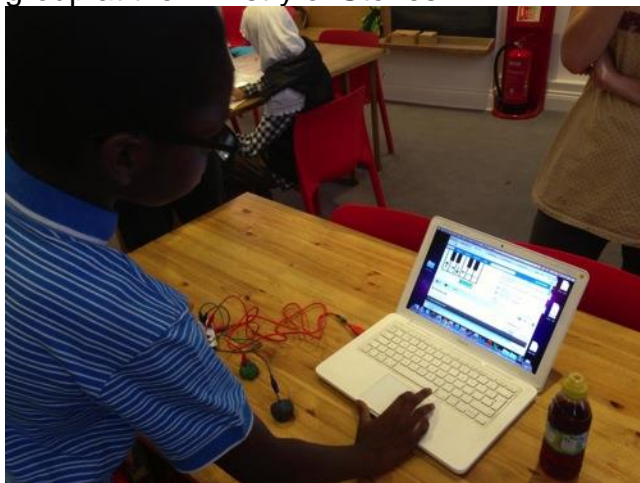




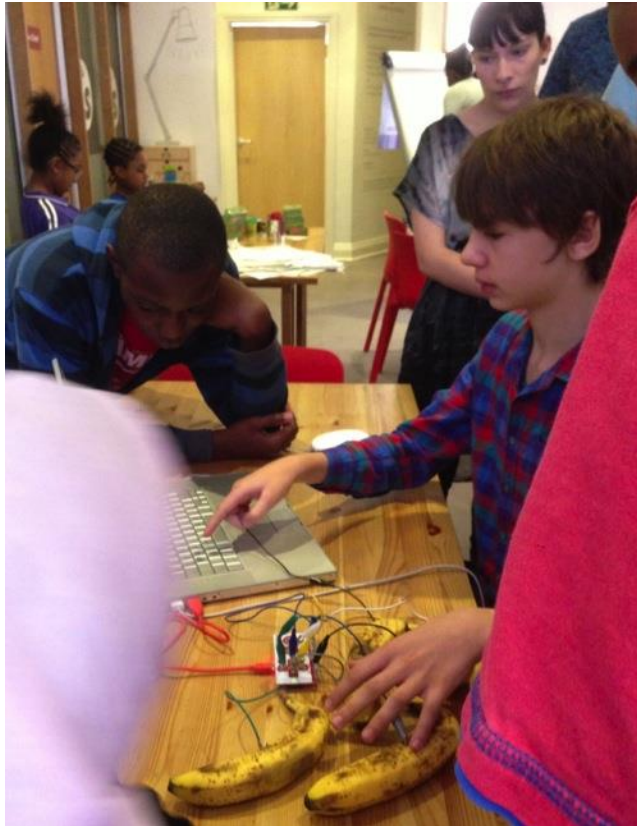
Above: Planning on paper at the Ministry of Stories



Above: one of the Roundhouse boys, Connall, demonstrates Scratch to the group at the Ministry of Stories



Adrian makes a musical instrument with the Makey Makey and plasticine and Scratch at the Ministry of Stories



Oladele and boy from the Roundhouse design a game with bananas as controllers with the Makey Makey and Scratch at the Ministry of Stories



Above: Hard at work on closing stages of the game design at the Roundhouse

## **Appendix 5: Letter Writing Project Case Study**

**Professor Dominic Wyse**  
**Institute of Education, University of London**

The MoS Letter Writing Project (LWP) was carried out in October and November 2013 with a class from Whitmore Primary School who visited the MoS site for six sessions, and had one session at the school. The sessions covered the following main activities:

1. Introduction to MoS. Task: Young People's (YP) profiles to be sent to pen pals in Australia on MoS t-shirts
2. Carousel of four tasks: 1. Invisible parcels; 2. Using code wheels (and worksheets) to create coded messages; 3. Message in a bottle (and disguising it); 4. 'Invisible' ink letters revealed through UV lamps.
3. A walk around Hoxton as stimulus for a map of Hoxton, with stories written alongside map, to be sent to pen pals
4. Decoding messages from pen pals. Writing "extended letters"
5. Mission to design a children's global postal service
6. Continuation of week five and presentation of outcomes to whole class
7. Session at the school. Letters from pen pals, reflections on LWP, and research interviews with selected YP

The following report is based on the evaluation of the LWP carried out by Dominic Wyse.

### **Research Methodology**

The methodology of this case study is related to the research design for the three-year longitudinal research evaluation of the work of the MoS. The case study research design reflects the key questions of the longitudinal study and is intended to provide further cumulative data to support and further illuminate the analysis of the longitudinal study.

In addition to observing the whole class of children during four LWP sessions a selection of six children was made in order to explore issues such as the YP's creativity and motivation for writing in more depth.

The data sets included recorded interviews with the six YP towards the beginning of the project and at the end. The interviews adopted the interview schedule used for the longitudinal study. Observations of the work of MoS staff, mentors, and YP in sessions were carried out in weeks two, four, five and seven of the project: field notes and a small number of photographs were taken. Approximately two pieces of writing written by each YP, one written prior to the LWP and another written towards the end of the LWP, were selected by the MoS. These were discussed by the researcher and the class teacher (with support from a MoS staff member) in order to complete a consensual judgement about the writing using the research team's consensual assessment of creativity tool.



The analysis of interviews included quantifying responses that required the young people to give a score out of ten for elements such as their motivation for writing. Other interview answers, and all qualitative data, were subject to standard qualitative data analysis thematic coding supported by HyperRESEARCH software. Cross-case themes, and themes that cut across data sets, were stimulated partly by the research questions and by other findings that emerged during the qualitative data analysis. These themes are: 1. Developing writing; 2. Motivation for LWP; 3. Enhancing creativity; and 4. Adults and expertise. Recommendations were established on the basis of the data, its analysis, and further reflections on the wider issues raised.

All ethical procedures were addressed in the ethics review of the overall research evaluation by the IOE ethics committee prior to data collection. YP's informed consent for this case study was acquired by MoS in collaboration with schools. Pseudonyms are used in this report.

## **Findings**

### **Developing Writing**

The first LWP session that I observed (week two) involved a carousel of tasks that the young people (YP) were expected to experience by the end of the session: 1. Invisible object, certificate of posting; 2. Secret message; 3. Message in a bottle; 4. Writing in code (using a wheel that offsets letters of the Anniebet). The session also encouraged the YP to locate and read the letter from their pen pal in Australia. The tasks were thoughtfully planned and imaginative and the children appeared to be motivated. There is substantial intrinsic value for the core idea of the project which was writing to pen pals in Australia. This core idea was supplemented by the use of structured tasks in LWP sessions. The use of a carousel of structured tasks, that addressed to varying degrees the topic of letter writing, raised a question about the point when the YP would independently write their own full-length authentic letters (it transpired that the writing of the letter was to be done in week four).

At the second observation (week four) the session was divided into two main tasks: 1. Decoding some coded messages created by the YP in Australia; 2. Writing a letter. There was an assumption that the YP would be more interested in the decoding than writing the letters but contrary to this assumption most of the YP were keen to get through the code breaking so that they could start the letter writing. Consequently the chance to actually write real letters perhaps came a little late in the session.

Prior to writing the letter the YP were sitting on the carpet for some input on how to write what was called a 'long form' letter (not a description that I was aware of, and perhaps the more straight forward 'letter', or "extended letter" as in the session plan, might have described the form more accurately).

The input was preceded by the reading of a letter that the workshop leaders had written to each other. This interested the YP, and prompted one child to mention a letter from his father in Nigeria. However in the interests of authenticity and linguistic precision another possibility would have been to analyse real letters, perhaps familiar to the group, perhaps brought from home, and/or examples available in the public domain through the Internet.

Another precursor to the YP writing their own letters was the reading of a composite whole class letter from the pen pals. This letter contained interesting messages that needed time to be discussed in a little more detail. For example the pen pals had posed some questions that could have been discussed, and answered orally, in the session. In addition, a suggestion that the YP could pose questions to pen pals in their letters might have been backed up having discussed real answers to the pen pals' real questions.

As further introduction to the YP writing their own letters the session leader was helpfully scribing on the flip chart a brainstorm of words and phrases such as, "To; Dear; For...; I am writing to you to answer all the questions ... ; How has your day been ... ;" Another strategy would have been to model the written form as faithfully as possible on a display visible to the whole class group, and to use the 'think aloud' technique to voice the kinds of thoughts one has when composing a letter. This allows for points to be made about both compositional and transcription elements of writing and would also have helped when the composite class letter from Australia was shared with the class.

### **The views of the YP**

The most common observations that the six YP made in interviews in relation to whether their writing had changed as a result of the LWP were about the transcription elements of writing such as handwriting, and paragraphs and indents mentioned by one YP. Hania, one of the six YP, made an observation about the compositional side of writing. She provided some very interesting thoughts about her writing being "more real and more wild", and she also revealed the ways that different out of school and in school experience were part of a complex pattern of social influences on writing that are difficult to separate from the influence of the MoS. However Hania identified clear benefits, in her view, of the MoS approach to writing compared to the approach at school:

DW    OK, that's interesting. Do you think your writing's changed because of the letter-writing project?

N       I think my writing's changed, it's changed because I've been writing adventurous things to them, so now my writing's more real and more wild.

DW    Any other changes, or is that the main change?

N       There's another change, when I go to [unclear on recording] them, like I am getting more like better at finding out about more

people, I've been to this project called Brownie, I've been there and we used to do letter writing, so there's quite a lot of people like...

DW Brownies did you say?

N Yeah, I found out more about different people.

DW Ah yeah, so like meeting other people even if you don't actually meet them.

N I haven't seen their faces yet...

DW Getting to know them.

N ...but I can tell them by the features of their writing.

DW Is there a difference between the letter writing project and writing you do at school?

N It's different, because at school we have to do like maths, literacy, like newspaper writing, and yeah, stuff like that, but here, at the Ministry of Stories, we could do whatever we want, we could just write outrageous things, normal but outrageous things that you could just tell them.

DW And you couldn't write those at school, some of those things.

N No.

DW Give me an example, if you can think of one? One of the things that you've written at Ministry of Stories that you couldn't have written at school.

...

N Oh, because well about the seaside at Lyme Regis, we would have talked, at the Ministry of Stories we spoke about putting like messages in bottles, at school we couldn't do that, because we are going to a trip to Lyme Regis and we are not going to do that, even though it would be really cool to find out how long it would last, and who would read it, but we know at the Ministry of Stories who read it

Hania's final comment provided evidence in support of the imaginative activities that MoS had planned for the YP.

### **Motivation for Letter Writing Project**

At the start of the project the young people's (YP) interview responses, to the question asking them to score out of 10 their motivation, revealed high levels of motivation for writing at school (see table 1). Four out of six YP's motivation scores had increased by the end of the LWP, two YP's scores decreased. In an interesting addition to this finding it can be seen, later in this report, that although Mirza was one of the YP who scored motivation for writing lower at the end of the project, he was judged to demonstrate some of the highest levels of creativity in writing.

When interviewed at the end of the project the most common observation about why the LWP motivated the YP was the use of the pen pals, i.e. a real audience and purpose for writing had been created by the MoS. For example Marcia commented as follows:

DW What's your opinion of the letter-writing project?

E The letter writing project, my opinion is that it's fun writing to other people that you don't know, but also it's mysterious, because you don't know much about them, you only know their name, how old they are, you don't know like other mysterious kind of things that they like doing, and we haven't really got to know them properly, because only eight weeks, there's one week we write and the next week they write back, so there's not much we've been doing with them.

DW Would you like to get to know them a bit more?

E Yeah.

The point that Marcia made about wanting to get to know the pen pals better was an important one that links with the findings about the balance of task setting vs. continuous writing opportunities in the sessions, and the importance of engagement with the real audience.

### **Enhancing Creativity**

During my third observation at the MoS (week five) of the LWP sessions there was an example of what appeared to be creative freethinking of a kind rarely seen, particularly in schools. The young people had been encouraged to imagine a global postal service of a very different kind to anything that exists now. A member of MoS staff was sitting with a group of YP (because she said that they were a mentor down on that day so she was helping one of the mentors who was described as being with a 'difficult group'). The suggestions from the YP included: magic paper that walks; invisible writing; walking pencils; sky storage. An example of a question from the member of staff that provoked further thinking was, 'if the paper is stored in the sky what happens if the paper runs out?'

One of the children's explanations of their writing and drawing about their postal service, captured in a field note during the third observation, gives a glimpse of the kind of thinking that had been taking place:

This is the Phoenix Rocket Bird. Here, you go to rocket airlines. Then Minions [inspired by the *Despicable Me* film] take the parcel and letters to Rocket Airlines. Then the letters go through a second pipe. Someone has to press the 'go' button. Letters go to Australia or anywhere. Minions go to gambling shop to get talking stamps, then stick them onto the letter or parcel.

It appeared that the transitions from the creativity that was evident as part of the speculative thinking about the postal service into independent writing of conventional letters was not straightforward. This was evident in the ways that YP often used drawings as a means to convey ideas. One YP even suggested that they could build a model of the postal service but it was suggested that this could be done at home, presumably because of resourcing issues. The freedom to use drawing appeared to support the aim for creative responses but perhaps at the expense of practising the formal features of letters. This is not however to argue that one approach is better

than the other, it depends on what the aims for a session are, and the balance between drawing and writing that MoS want to achieve.

In addition to comments made already in this report about creativity, the consensual judgements of the YP's writing showed that the extent of creativity in the pieces of writing, and the processes that led to them, were quite evenly spread across the six children selected for analysis as part of the case study (see table 2). Creativity was judged to range from very limited to very strong depending on the individual YP concerned. Mirza's piece (Figure 1) was an example judged to be very strong in the newness of its ideas, particularly in the way that the presentational features were played with, drawing on visual forms, but also the creative use of language including humour (see Table 3).

### **Adults and expertise**

It is always possible that there will be new mentors at any session, a reality that affects the nature of the pre-session and after-session briefings. The briefings often seemed to focus on social aspects, including understanding the nature of the tasks for the session, more than aspects to do with the development of writing. There is of course much to learn by a new mentor in relation to topics such as behaviour management and any special needs that individual children may have. But this raises the issue of the balance of input between social aspects and writing development aspects.

A key social issue concerned a YP who had recently been placed in local authority care, and consequently was missing her parents. The briefings were really helpful both to alert mentors to this issue, and to discuss the balance between appropriate encouragement to share a painful issue but also not to let it dominate the time at MoS. This significant social event also played out movingly in the writing during the session. The YP's idea to send a bottle of 'invisible tears' to Australia as part of the message in a bottle task was quite profound, possibly cathartic, and probably wouldn't have arisen without the MoS emphasis on communication and expression.

Another notable example of social issues occurred because a YP had confided about being bullied to his pen pal. When asked to read his writing aloud he did so enthusiastically but self censored the bit about the bullies, who had been to some extent described in the letter to the pen pal, because his class were the audience for his reading.

The teacher of the class who attended the LWP appeared to play a relatively passive role (although positive about the MoS approach) in the sessions apart from supporting MoS staff with behaviour management. A conversation with the teacher revealed her view that the sessions were so different from school lessons, particularly because she saw them as more creative.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

The LWP was a very valuable contribution to supporting YP's writing, and to the MoS portfolio of projects. The identification of a real audience and purpose to contextualise the writing was one of the excellent features, as were the opportunities for the YP to think creatively.

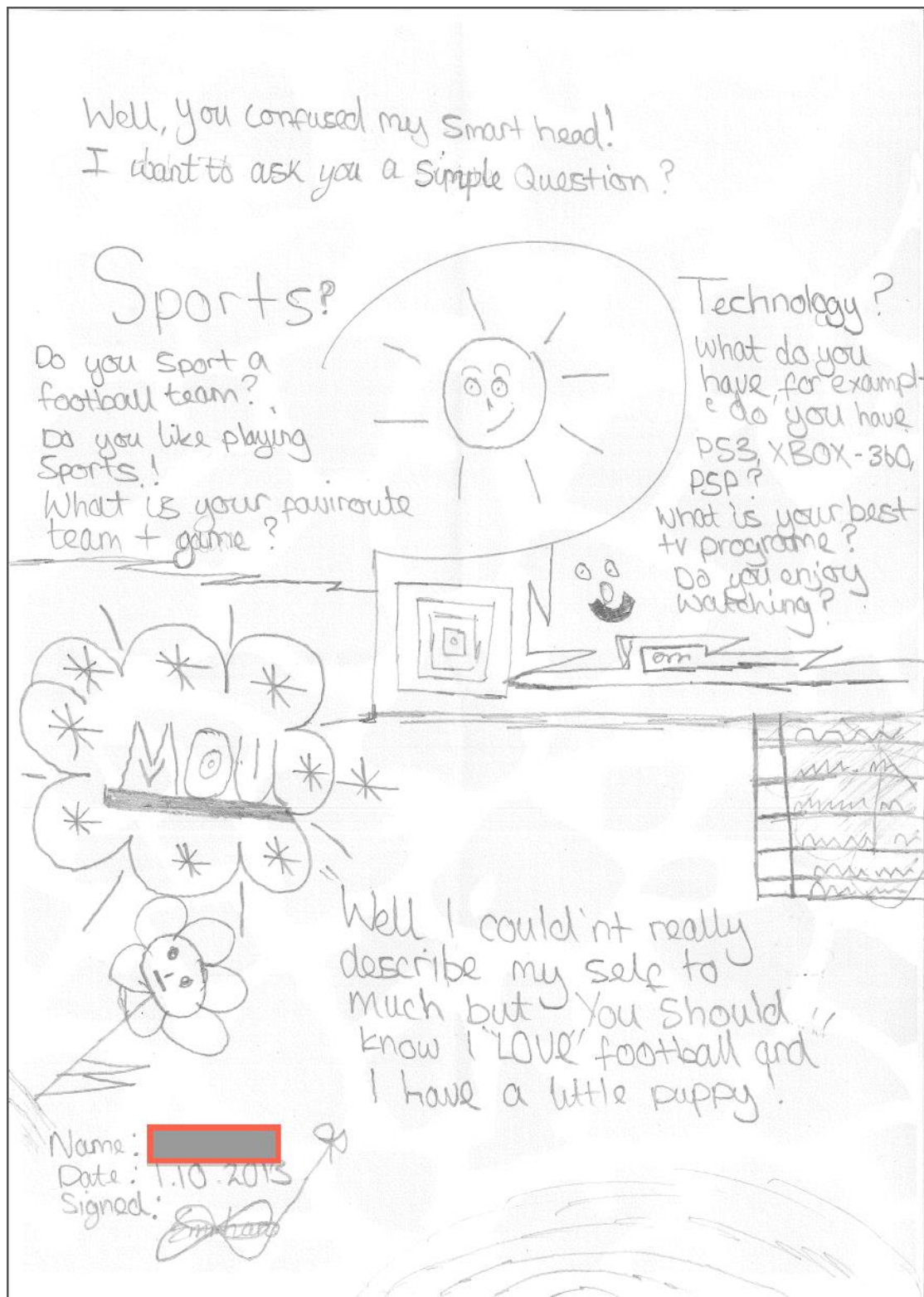
The evaluation of the LWP project prompts the following recommendations, some of which may have implications for the wider work of the MoS:

- It is important that YP have extended opportunities to experience the writing process from initial ideas, to drafts of writing, through to 'published' final outcome. This will require, on occasion, the opportunity for writing started at one session to continue into one or more other sessions.
- Although the act of receiving, writing and sending letters/messages to pen pals from week to week might appear repetitious, such a repetitive process can allow for the development of deeper understanding of the pen pal and their interests and lives. This developmental process facilitates greater attention to the development of the YP's writing including the opportunity to carry out writing as a series of drafts. The novelty to this approach lies in the different meanings expressed rather than in a change of task. This deeper understanding may not be achieved if there is not sufficient opportunity to write and receive a sufficient number of letters over an appropriate period of time. It would be possible to organise time for on-going writing from week to week in addition to periods of shorter tasks in each session. A final consideration is the extent to which YP might be encouraged to choose either set tasks, continuous opportunities for writing, or both in a given week.
- Planned tasks and activities to stimulate writing should be balanced carefully against the overall aim to give opportunities for extended writing. Tasks should continue to be used as one means to increase motivation for the work of the MoS, but tasks could also be planned on the basis of observation, analysis, and recording of the interests and needs of the young people assessed as they experience the processes of writing.
- Opportunities to make choices about writing are an essential feature of the writing process. MoS should continue to think about how YP are offered choices. Choices can be offered in relation to the subjects for writing, but also in relation to the YP's selection of tasks and or extended opportunities for writing.
- It is essential that at times writing can be shared, discussed, and edited in a way that the whole class can see and discuss the same piece of writing. These kinds of strategies, that draw YP's attention to all aspects of writing, can be greatly enhanced by using a visualizer (rather than OHP or flip chart) so that examples of real writing can be shared and edited in situ (Amazon now do a HUE HD Camera for

£39.99 which appears to be a very cost effective way of visualising via computer and data projector).

- Teaching about different forms of writing, and other conventions of writing, should be build on analysis of the ways that writing is currently used in real life. The extent to which emails have replaced letters or not, and different levels of formality that are used depending on the audience, is also a legitimate area for discussion when the focus is letter writing. Discussion about real letters can include analysis of their structural features, which then needs to form the basis for advice about the format of letters to be written in the sessions. This advice should also point out that depending on the context and formality of the letter/email some conventions are stricter than others, where personal preference is a determining factor.
- MoS should consider ways to differentiate the information given at pre-session briefings to mentors. Basic information perhaps could be included in a guide for mentors as an aide memoir to enhance information given prior to sessions. Consideration should be given to how information about learning to write could be given to mentors in addition to information on the social and behavioural aspects of working with YP.
- MoS should consider how the knowledge and experience of class teachers might be built on (and clarified) through pre project meetings and on-going collaboration. This could include more direct involvement of teachers in MoS sessions in order to create powerful synergies between the knowledge of creative writing specialists and the knowledge of educators.

Figure 1: Mirza's writing showing newness of ideas





**Table 1: Scores out of 10 for perceptions of writing at the MoS and at school (10 = positive; 1= negative)**

Name of Young Person	Favourite Activity in Life	Favourite Activity Score	Writing at School	Letter Writing Project		Notes
	Start of Project				End of Project	
Chidiebere	Football	10	8	9	10	
Hania	Reading, or writing a story	9	8	10	10	
Ammar	Football	10	9	9	8	Wanted greater use of computers
Mirza	Football	10	9	9	8	
Susan	Singing	7	1	7	9	
Addy	Annoying my brother	10	3	10	n/a	Only interviewed at beginning of project
Marcia	n/a	n/a	n/a		7	Only interviewed at end of project

**Table 2: Consensual Judgement of creativity in YP's writing**

Creativity Assessment Criteria	Agreed Scores			
	1 None	2 Some	3 strong	4 Very Strong
The sample of writing demonstrates imaginative adaption of existing ideas	Am <sup>4</sup> S	C	HMiMa	
The process of writing demonstrated imaginative adaption of existing ideas	AmS	C	HMiEMa	
The sample of writing demonstrates newness	AmH	SC		MiMa
The process of writing demonstrated newness	AmH	SC		MiMa
The sample of writing demonstrates value		AmH	MiCMa	S
The process of writing demonstrated value		AmH	MiCMa	S

---

<sup>4</sup> YP's initials (pseudonyms)

**Table 3: Consensual judgement of Mirza's writing**

Creativity Assessment Tool	Agreed Scores				Consensual judgement notes
	1 None	2 Some	3 strong	4 Very Strong	
The sample of writing demonstrates imaginative adaption of existing ideas			x		Content of writing is fairly similar to but the presentation is radical.
The process of writing demonstrated imaginative adaption of existing ideas			x		
The sample of writing demonstrates newness				x	First sentence at top of page grabs Composition of 'letter' uses visual in the middle. Standard name, date perhaps borrowing from the structure
The process of writing demonstrated newness				x	
The sample of writing demonstrates value			x		Shows continuity of messages from attached to communication with an
The process of writing demonstrates value			x		

## **Appendix 6: Poetry to Go Case Study**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This project was run during the Easter holidays 2015, over 5 days: Tuesday 7th April to Saturday 11th April. The workshops were run by Emma and Laura, and focused on:

**Tuesday: Introductory poetry games**

**Wednesday: Visit to the Saison Poetry Library and writing about the South Bank**

**Thursday: writing poems for local businesses on Hoxton Street**

**Friday: completing the poems and presenting them to the businesses**

**Saturday: the Poetry Takeaway on Hoxton Street Market.**

The programme was attended by 14 children, aged between 9 and 12, all (?) attendees of the clubs.

The UCL-IOE researchers visited on the Tuesday (Theo Bryer), Thursday (Andrew Burn) and Saturday (Steve Connolly).

This research broadly follows the methodology of earlier case studies, consisting of interview, observation and analysis of writing. Because of the nature of the event, however, it was not possible to explore the wider context by conducting pre-interviews and by comparing writing with other samples from the children's previous work. Nevertheless, the data contributes to the detailed picture built up over the three-year study of the processes typical of the MOS approach, reported on here under three of the core headings of the overall study: Motivation to write, Creativity, and Communication. These will be summarised at the end, after specific observations from the three days. As with several other case studies, it is not possible to report reliably on achievement or learning progression.

### **DAY 1 (TUESDAY)**

#### **Time and Toys**

Emily was appreciative of the time that they were given at MoS and the more relaxed approach compared to school, where, 'they put the timer up and then we're all worked up so here we just take our time and then just write'. Ruth appreciated the 'time to play and be free' that was integral to the MoS day and Emily liked the 'toys', by which she meant the notebooks and Easter eggs, possibly exemplifying a more playful and less prescriptive approach. She also mentioned that the content of what they wrote about was different, 'the things we write about, they're fun'.

#### **Games and play**

The workshop leaders were versatile and skilled in their deployment of game techniques as warm-ups, and were able to move beyond this function into more specific uses of games to introduce poetic forms relevant to the day's work ahead. Games used on the Thursday, for example, drew attention to inventive words and

phrases, to voice and disguised voice (the blindfold game), to embodied expression, to the senses, to rhythmic patterns, and to rhyme.

It was clear that the children found the games very enjoyable and motivating, one of them exclaiming spontaneously, "This is exciting!". They also stayed focused and attentive. The games, then, set the tone for the workshops, emphasising an approach to poetry which avoided abstract language and a confinement to written language, and promoting instead a multimodal approach, a collective, embodied experience, and an easy move from composition to performance.

### **Audience and Sharing**

One significant aspect of writing at MoS that Ruth and Solmaz mentioned was the opportunity to share their work with others. Ruth associated this with being creative 'use our imagination, share it out'. Solmaz picked up on the ways that sharing built confidence and developed a collaborative ethos, 'you know if you share your ideas your confidence grows inside you and you can like spread your ideas out and magpie get ideas from your friends'. Gareth enjoyed reading his poetry out to me as we talked. Throughout the day children were encouraged to share their work with each other or with adults, not for the purposes of 'peer assessment' or to correct grammar but to entertain their friends. The volunteers would often act as sounding boards for ideas, listening without being prescriptive about outcomes, as children wrote. Richard's laughter as two boys shared their haikus provided the encouragement they needed to keep going. Laura encouraged a pair of girls to perform their poems and Emma rapped Emily's poem with her. Writing poems all over a big piece of lining paper together encouraged this sharing and everyone was keen to know who had written what as they moved around it. Children were increasingly eager to read or have others read their work and there was an appreciation of what their peers had done. Barrs and Cork point out how this approach supports students in developing their writing, 'In 'learning to listen to their own texts' (Barrs, 1992) children are also learning to become their own 'first reader' and to develop the kind of 'ear' for written language which will be an important resource in their reading and their writing' (2001: 41). It helps to motivate and focus young writers to have a specific audience in mind for their work (Anderson, 2014: 98).

Laura pointed out that that the 'brilliant thing about random poems is that when different people listen they will hear different stories', suggestive of a concern for the 'active role of the reader in the interpretive process' (O'Neill and Rogers, 1994: 47) that may be less prevalent in school contexts.

### **Experience and content**

Steven pointed out how important it was going out on to the street, because 'if you didn't walk around Hoxton, our poems would be just things you imagine'. The children seemed really inspired by their short time outside in the sunshine looking at the world through a different lens, with a view to writing a poem. Most seemed to find this more accessible than the more abstract approach suggested by the 'I come from' poem, for example. Doing things together - going on outings, doing drama, reading poems, talking about memories, with a view to developing some immediate content for children to draw on is a departure from the focus on form that often prevails in school contexts. The importance of having something to write about is easily over-looked. Some children were confused about having to find two

adjectives for each noun, or four adjectives, (two for each noun) and one simile or metaphor, for the last activity of the first day. However being outside then writing and drawing together was a stimulus to some quirky and interesting similes - 'The flat is as boring as a egg', 'The gate was as rusty as a car wreck'. I was impressed by the way Erdogan persevered to find an adjective to describe the sun. Richard's encouraging suggestion that 'sometimes poets see what other people don't see' inspired him.

### **The Role of the Volunteers**

The number of adults and their encouraging approach was recognised as by the children as a very positive aspect of writing at MoS. Mark liked the attention, compared to being in a class of thirty with one teacher and Steven thought they made sure that 'we have a good time'. Ruth felt 'protected' by the adults. She was encouraged by a volunteer to read out her poem when she had been feeling uncertain and suggested that it made her more feel confident. I noticed children being encouraged by the way that Richard spoke to them as writers learning a craft, 'it doesn't have to be perfect the first time you write it... just writing something down can give you another idea'. He explained that he really tried to avoid being patronising. Children clearly responded to his serious engagement with their concerns and their efforts to express themselves.

### **Creativity In Writing**

Much of the first day involved children learning about different types of poems including limericks, haikus, acrostics and odes. The ode to food suggestion was enough to inspire some engaging writing about jelly and other delicacies. I observed Emma having to cope with some girls finding the limerick form difficult; she spent some time explaining it, so that the focus on food that the children were writing about was in danger of being lost. The recall of different forms throughout the day reinforced the sense of poetry being something that children needed to learn more about to access. Reading and sharing poetry that they were likely to appreciate may have helped them to tune in to different approaches (Barrs, 1992) and complemented the favourite words and defining poetry activities. It may also have encouraged Gareth to recognise that poetry is not necessarily all about rhyme.

### **Expressive And Communication Skills**

#### **Talk and writing**

It was pleasing to see how much opportunity there was for discussion around writing. Sometimes children sat in silence and wrote in a concentrated way, as Steven did when creating his Hoxton poem on day one. But mostly they talked and wrote, either between themselves or with the adults. Talk not only provided an impetus to write but it was also inspired by the act of writing. Douglas told Richard about sushi and Erdogan and Mark discussed whether they had ever been on an aeroplane and whether 'dangerous' was an apt adjective to describe aeroplanes, following the recent Alpine air crash (24/3/15).

### **Bilingualism and cultural heritage**

We have recommended that MoS consider the variety of languages that children speak as a resource and stimulus for writing. It was impressive that Douglas wrote

a haiku in Japanese but he did not share it and the tutors didn't realise he had done it until the end of the day. Emma modelled the 'I come from' poem in a creative way and it worked well, writing lines together but this did not allay the confusion that the title set up and that some took quite literally. Solmaz said, 'Miss, how can you come from an object?... Miss what country *are* you from?' She struggled with writing this poem as did Emel who said 'I come from Turkey' and then, recognising that this was not what she had been asked, started to make jokes about turkeys being edible. Erdogan, Eren and Solmaz's (and Emel's?) families are Turkish Kurds, they speak Turkish and Kurdish and can write in Kurdish. Emily's poem about coming from a big, nineteenth century house in France and 'a happy, family that always play with me', may have been a satirical response. However Mark's pride at his poem about his Mother's Ghanaian food and the focus that he showed when writing it suggests he found the form less problematic. Identity and cultural heritage are complicated issues and it is worth talking to children about whether and how they might like to express this through poetry. Again questions of identity are often overlooked in school and yet MoS have time, small groups and plenty of adults, to find out more about their participants. Perhaps MoS could ask children to bring in poems in any language at the start of a course as a way of signalling to them that the languages children speak at home and their cultural heritages are valued.

### **DAY 3 (Thursday)**

The focus for this day was on writing poems for local businesses on Hoxton Street. The day began with group warm-ups, followed by assignments to specific shops and other businesses and visits to those locations, and finally an intensive writing session inspired by the businesses. The poems were to be delivered and performed for the businesses on the following day. 12 children were present for this day.

The allocation of groups to businesses was:

Erdogan and SHANE (with Mandy and Thea) - **El Tel Falafel**

Melody and Emily (with Kate and Emily) - **Barrel Boulangerie**

Ruth and Charlotte (with Emma and Ben) - **Cooke's Pie and Mash**

Mark and Gareth (with Key and Dominic) - **Percy Ingle**

Emel and Solmaz (with Ilana and Andrew) - **Hoxton Fruit and Veg**

### **Pedagogy**

The warm-up games led by Emma and Laura worked well, certainly in terms of pleasure and motivation. The focus on the senses may have focused the attention of some children as they moved on to the writing, depending on mentors' encouragement. The sessions focused on a range of experiences. One of these was an attention to short-form poetic genres: ode, acrostic, haiku, limerick. Another was the elements of poetic language: the senses, rhythm, rhyme, emotion, grammar (parts of speech). The group games drew attention to inventive words and



phrases, to voice and disguised voice (blindfold), and to embodied expression. The children loved the games, spontaneously commenting on them – “This is exciting!” – and responding fully and attentively.

As in the MoS approach generally, there was a strong emphasis on enjoyment, on children's choices of topic, style and genre, and on the expressive functions of writing.

The MoS environment was clearly an important factor - the children were mostly well-used to it as regular attenders, and so found it comfortable, reassuring, and stimulating. The value of the relationship some had with some of the mentors was also apparent. The mentors joined the activities, and their breadth of experience and expertise was striking, including, for example, the therapeutic value of the arts for children, and experience of children's wellbeing programmes with Kids' Company.

### **Motivation to Write**

The writing activity for the day - writing poems in and for shops and businesses on Hoxton Street - had many clear benefits. It provided immediate stimuli for writing, so one pair of girls visiting the Hoxton Fruit and Vegetable store enjoyed identifying familiar and unfamiliar produce. As Turkish speakers, they also enjoyed thinking of the Turkish words for this produce, writing down, for example, *nar* for pomegranate (a word they were unfamiliar with). They also noticed Turkish words on many of the food labels in the shop, and used some in their poem later.

The worksheet was well-designed, and helped the children to move from visual images to sounds, feelings and other observations.

The other intended benefit of this activity - as with some others in the week - was writing for an audience, as the poems were to be written out and presented to the shop-keepers on the following day. It was hard to gauge how aware they were of this audience. Solmaz and Emel were not obviously constructing their poem with the shop-keeper in mind. Mark and Gareth also could not say when asked how they had considered their shopkeeper; although they seemed interested in the idea of writing a poem for someone, and said they had never done this before.

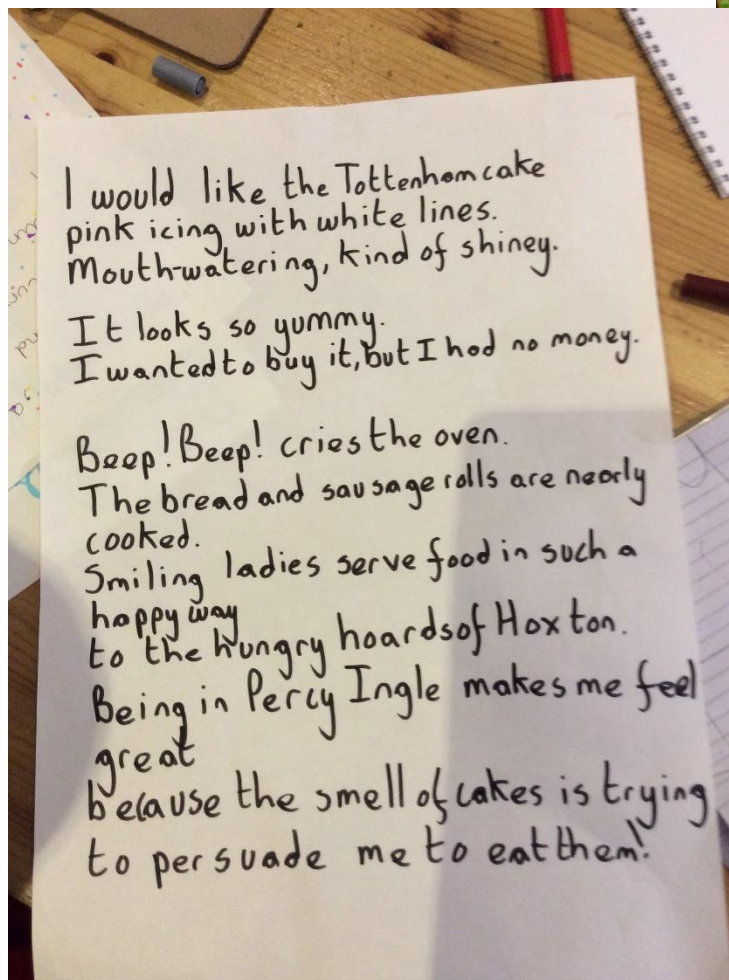
The context the MoS was perceived as important by the children:

*You write stories and have fun”; “We learn words we never knew before: today I learned ‘gobsmacked’!*

### **Creativity**

The poems displayed considerable variety of form. Mark (Year 3) and Gareth's (Year 5) mixes vernacular tones ("kind of shiney"; "looks so yummy") with more formal poetic devices such as the alliteration in "the hungry hordes of Hoxton". In interview they reported that the aspects they struggled with were “how to show the sellers' feelings”, and “how to upgrade the words” – presumably how to find more

innovative uses of vocabulary – success here is represented in phrases like “the hungry hordes of Hoxton”. They were particularly pleased with the way the ‘Beep! Beep!’ represented the sound of the oven; and it is notable that they have taken this further in personifying the oven in the verb, ‘cries’.



Emel and Solmaz visited the Hoxton Fruit and Veg shop, a Turkish-owned business close to the MoS. Both Turkish speakers, their interest in culture and language was evident even as they approached the shop, where they began identifying fruits and vegetables by Turkish names. Inside the shop, they chatted in Turkish with the owner, and continued to explore items and names: food, drinks, spices.



The tangible experience of the shop clearly helped the creative process, working, as the pedagogy of the programme intended, on a multisensory level, supported by the worksheet which encouraged them to note sights, sounds and smells. The question of language was ever-present: we asked the shop-owner if he would prefer their poem for him to be in English or Turkish, and he opted for Turkish. Though eventually their poem

was in English, it included Turkish words and references.

Their poem is free verse, though Solmaz began by wanting more reassuring rhythm and rhyme, trying to find formulae such as 'it's made by my mummy, it's yummy for my tummy'. These were soon abandoned because they didn't represent the shop they had visited - and their notes on the clipboard reminded them of the interesting foods and words they had found, which then became the skeleton of their poems.

They began with the pomegranate, which they elaborated descriptively together, each supplying words, into "a spiky lid on top of a plump, round body", adding "In Turkish we call it NAR". A puzzling, though perhaps revealing, moment in the creative process was Emel's production of the clause "waiting for adoption", which followed on immediately after the description of the pomegranate. It was impossible to tell where this personification of the fruit as a street orphan had come from, except to say that the process of pondering at leisure over a tangible object, embedded in a cultural setting, in collaboration with others, characterised the conditions out of which the creative impulse was born.

Emel was particularly inventive, producing an extended description of milkshake in the shop freezer which elaborates imaginatively on the actual object by representing it as a 'chocolate fountain'. They ended the poem with the 'spicy smell of bharata', recalling the spice stall in the shop and the Turkish names they had explored.

*Pomegranate, a little spiky lid on a plump round body  
(In Turkish we call it 'nar')*

*Waiting for adoption.*

*The blazing hot sun on the open shop*

*Constructed with greens, reds and yellows.*

*Inside the freezers buzzing, oozing,*

*Milkshakes spilling like a chocolate fountain.*

*Customers picking at the black plastic wrappers*

*Coming to the till to pay, counting coins.*

*The till's going 'ping!' in the air.*

*He spices of bhararat, the scent that I love.*

Elements in the poems generally that suggest creativity as we have discussed and defined it in the project might be:

- experimentation with adventurous words and combinations of words
- concrete representations of sights, sounds and smells around them
- experimentation with formal structures - less dependence on regular metre and on (obvious) rhyme
- easy juxtaposition of vernacular expressions and more unfamiliar diction
- some subtle incorporation of poetic devices such as alliteration and simile
- a strong sense of 'voice', sometimes first person.
- Play between naturalistic representations of places, people, events and fantasy constructs.
- Inter-cultural, bilingual play with language.

Interviews with Mark and Gareth suggested how at home they felt with the idea of poetry, and how comfortable with their own experience of it as writers, both in school and at MoS. This should be regarded as evidence of success, given the difficulty schools often have in approaching poetry; and the dislike boys in particular sometimes express towards it.

The mentors on this occasion seemed to have a productive, easy relationship with the children, in some cases built up over time. They were often skilled in managing motivation, mood, productive work.

## **Day 5 – The Poetry Takeaway Van**

The focus for the final day of the project was the opportunity to take poetry to the streets through the use of the Poetry Takeaway Van, a mobile writing room, serving up poems to passers-by on Hoxton Market. This activity was preceded by a workshop led by performance poet and radio presenter Laurie Bolger, in order to have the children generate some ideas for poems that they would write in the van.

### ***Pedagogy – Outside the Van***

The initial workshop was very interactive, involving all the children and mentors in a number of games designed to develop their poetry writing skills. After beginning with an alliterative name game that asked children to link their name to an object in the room that began with the same name, Laurie introduced the idea of writing poems for the “customers” who would come to the van. This idea was extended through a role-play involving both Laurie and Emma from the Ministry of Stories. In the role-play, Emma took the part of “Janet”, a customer who had come to the van to ask for a poem to be written for her nephew, “Eric”. Laurie, who was taking on the role of “Poetry Chef” here, enlisted the help of the children in the workshop in asking “Janet” some questions about “Eric” so that they could plan and write a



poem for him. These questions focused on his interests, what he looked like, what his relationship was like with his Aunt and other areas of his personality. Laurie explained that these things would become the ingredients for the poem being written for “Janet” and noted them down on a flip chart.

With the ingredients on the flip chart, the children (along with mentors and other adults in the room) were invited to write their own poems for “Janet” to see what they could come up with. This was followed by a paired activity in which children role-played with each other as “Poetry Chef” and “Take Away Customer”, interviewing each other about their interests and personalities in order to come up with a new set of ingredients and then writing a poem based on these. (Examples from these can be found in the Creativity section, below)

After the completion of this activity, the children split into two groups; one group would base themselves in the van, taking the role of poetry chefs, while the others would be on the street talking to passers-by and “drumming up trade” for the van. Each group would swap roles every 20-30 minutes.

### ***Pedagogy - Inside the Van***



As noted on the day 3 workshops, tangible, multisensory experience made the creative process more productive. The Poetry Takeaway is an effective combination of adult reality (resembling a commercial business outlet) and childhood play experience (fitted out like a kitchen, with bulldog clips for “orders”, utensils and

other paraphernalia such as typewriters and quill pens). This combination appeared important for the pedagogical success of the project in two ways. Firstly, and most obviously, it was a fun and enjoyable imaginative experience for the children, who were clearly stimulated by the environment. In addition, the location of the culmination of the workshop in the van - an adult environment that genuinely resembles a business location – suggests to the participants that poetry is a serious craft and one to be taken seriously; in effect, it is productive and business-like. These connections between imaginative play and serious craft, or what Heidegger (Heidegger, 1978) calls “techne” - craft aimed at the revelation of knowledge exemplify a particular notion of creativity (Connolly, 2014), and suggest that the Poetry Takeaway is making a valuable contribution to the pedagogy of teaching poetry writing, and the creative process involved.

In the van, children would be presented with “orders” either by the other children who were drumming up trade or by passers-by directly. Laurie’s role here was quite distinctly different to the one she played as workshop leader, only suggesting things to the “chefs” if they asked directly for help. This meant that the children felt and acted as if they were in charge, being the creative power behind the takeaway and working the “ingredients” they were given into their own end products rather than a format they were compelled to work with.

### **Creativity – in the Workshop**

The initial workshop, which introduced the idea of “ingredients” contributing to a poetry recipe resulted in some entertaining and engaging poems which showed the participants becoming more confident in using a range of poetic forms. Melody’s haiku about the volunteer she was working with (Emily) showed how the “recipe” format could pack quite a lot of ingredients into a short poetic form.

#### **Emily**

*Emily Moped,  
Emily Melody her  
Tiger bread dress*

For other participants, such as Douglas, their confidence was shown in their decision to dispense with a particular form and embark upon work in a more “free verse” style. Douglas’s “order” was given to him by Richard, one of the other volunteers and resulted in something quite different.

#### **Rich Richard**

*He likes pasta  
So I guess he likes Italy  
No he doesn’t  
He likes whales  
He likes tea  
Like English Breakfast and  
Lemon and Ginger  
Eats midget gems  
Likes to go to the theatre  
He isn’t a meat eater*

*He cycles everywhere  
Apart from on a bear*

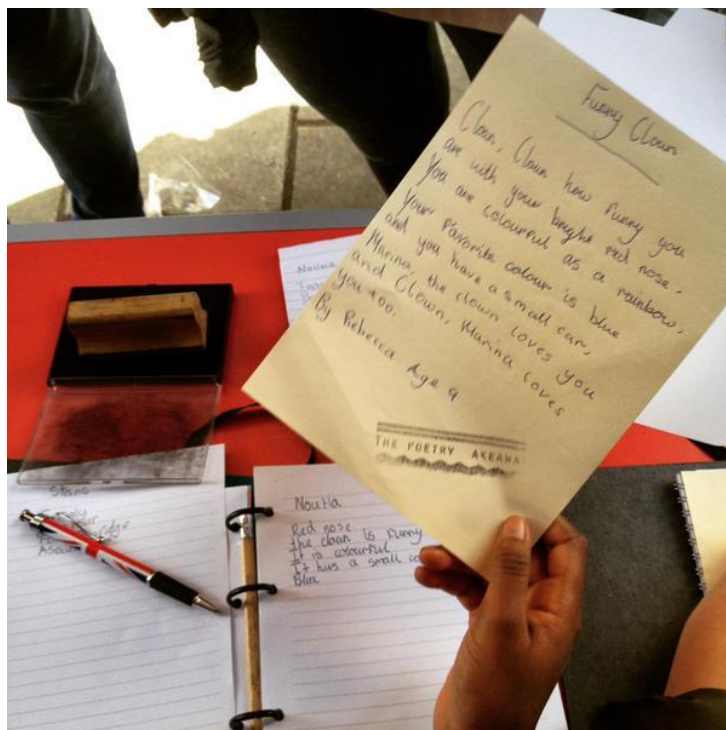
Some of the poetic features of Douglas's work show a deliberate consciousness of the kind of things that his audience will appreciate, building on the kinds of enthusiasm for reading work out that were identified on day 1 ; for example the use of the homophone "whales" to contrast the country of Wales with another country, Italy. Similarly the use of pararhyme in "theatre" and "meat-eater" reflects an ability to both know and break the perceived "rules" of poetry. These conscious experimentations – noted also on day3 – were perhaps becoming more evident because the participants knew that they were about to deliver their poetry as product and felt the need to make sure that it impressed their "customers" on the street outside. It seems reasonable to speculate also that they were growing in confidence as the week went on, and this more ready to experiment.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the model of poetry as recipe produced a lot of references to food in the children's work. One of the suggestions in the original role-play was that "Eric", the imaginary nephew of "Janet" liked home-made puddings and sleeping and this resulted in a line about his "apple crumble bed". This connection though, between the concept of the poem as recipe and the physical environment of the Takeaway Van demonstrates the creative link between conceptual understanding, imaginative play and the craft skill of writing poetry. The concrete concepts of food, recipe and ingredients are imaginatively explored in the play space of the van allowing for something to be "cooked up" under the supervision of a professional poet who can hone the craft skills of the young people without forcing them to write in a particular way or damaging their creative instinct.

### **Creativity – In the Van**

Once in the van, the Poetry Chefs began to interact with members of the public, asking them questions about what sort of ingredients should go into their order. They took the order and asked the customer to return in a short while, when they would be presented with the finished poem. The finished product here emphasised the multisensory and multimodal nature of the work that is going on in the van. The Poetry Chefs draft the poem in their note books but the final poem is written on special writing paper, by hand and stamped with the official Poetry Takeaway stamp. It is then inserted into a cardboard envelope and presented to the customer.





These design and production choices add to the idea that the processes that contribute to the writing of the poem are artisanal in their nature. This is something personal for the customer, crafted and presented in such a way that they will want to keep it, complementing the writing that is going on. It is also characteristic of the MoS approach generally, with its emphasis on high quality production of children's writing in a variety of material forms, with a richly multimodal incorporation of objects, colours and artefacts. Rebecca's poem here illustrates this, written as it is for a female customer who said that she liked clowns.

### ***Funny Clown***

*Clown, clown how funny you  
Are with your bright red nose  
You are colourful as a rainbow  
Your favourite colour is blue  
And you have a small car  
Marina, the clown loves you  
And clown, Marina loves you too.*

This sequence of events – workshop, practice, production, presentation of product – clearly has benefits both for the children involved, but also for the notion that poetry is part of the creative industries. While it is important not to see it solely in commercial terms, there is a consolidation of the idea that poetry is valid, productive creative work which has an audience, in the same way that art, or dance or music is and does. This is emphasised by Solmaz, who in interview declares that

*"I love having customers...I like meeting new people and finding out about their personality and then writing the poem for them"*

Both the work of the Ministry of Stories, in establishing the Poetry to go workshop, and the Poetry Takeaway, reinforce this, making the writing of poetry something more tangible and real world than perhaps it might be in school.

### **Role of Mentors and other Adults**

Interviews with both the young participants and the adult volunteers also suggest that the creative and productive aspects of the workshop and the Takeaway Van are experienced reciprocally by both groups. One adult volunteer (Daisy) describes how she has observed the children explore a creative freedom in the poetry writing process that has taken place

*You can watch people adapt and change. So you say 'write a poem' and people will go 'What? No!' but then you say 'You could do it this way' and you work them up and just watch their imagination loosen up and then suddenly they're writing hundreds of poems in five minutes.*

Such an observation reflects the way that the creative processes facilitated by both the workshops the Poetry Takeaway offer an alternative to the way that poetry is sometimes tackled in school. The ability to “work things up” in the environment of the Takeaway van provides the adaptation and change that a teacher in the classroom situation (often through no fault of their own) cannot offer. For Daisy, seeing this creative transformation in the young people she is working with also stimulates her own creative instinct;

*I work 9 to 5 in the city normally, and I basically want to do something else that's actually good. I love creativity and I love stories, and that's why I got involved.*

This idea is also reflected on by another volunteer, Dominic, who comments on the way that he, as a poet, has been impressed by the creative efforts of the children

*I think the kids have thrown themselves into something that a lot of people would not necessarily consider easy for children to do, but I think that adults who think that children can't do poetry massively underestimate them.....I'm a poet myself – my first book's just come out – and I'd say that still being relatively young myself it's great to be part of these amazing things that are coming out of this.*

These comments suggest that one of the additional benefits of choosing to work in this way is the creation of a community of poets, both young and adult who are, perhaps in quite subtle and small ways, generating creative and cultural activities which affirm the nature of poetry as a vibrant and valid form. The opportunity that the Poetry Takeaway provides here is to create a focal point for poetry, with not only an established poet like Laurie (who has her own show on the radio, a show reel on YouTube and countless festival performances to her name), but also the children at its centre. Such a focal point expands the discourse of poetry - both alongside and beyond that provided in school – emphasising its status as art form, cultural product and creative industry.

## **CONCLUSION**

The evidence gathered over the week indicates the considerable success of this project: the pedagogy, the integration of volunteers and writers, the imaginative contexts and purposes for writing, and the quality of much of the work all suggest a productive project which represents the best of the MoS approach.

### **Motivation to write**

The motivation to write was maintained at a high level throughout the week. The data collected on the three days indicates a range of factors contributing to this: the lively warm-up activities; the time spent on the writing process; the supportive and friendly atmosphere; the sensitivity of the volunteers; the real audiences involved; the novel twists on poetry production; the location in the local community.

### **Creativity**

The factors supporting the creative process were: the modelling of generic forms; the multisensory approach; the balance of physical activity and reflective writing time; the collaborative nature of much of the work; the frequent, immediate feedback from volunteers; the focus of writing for specified audiences; the artisanal character of crafting and producing writing and carefully attending to the material qualities of its production.

An element in the creative work that is always difficult to assess, here as elsewhere, is the balance between imaginative adaptation of previously experienced material and the innovative creation of original material, not least because these categories are not polar opposites. Adaptation is never simply imitation; innovation always draws on some source. In this case, it seemed that the impulse to experiment, break rules, try out new forms, became greater as the week went on. For staff and volunteers, the skill of knowing when to intervene with a supportive formula or framework, and when to intervene to encourage breaking out of such frameworks, is important and could be considered as a general aspect of creativity in future training events. In this project, the staff seem to have struck the right balance.

### **Communication**

While quiet, reflective writing time was an important part of this project, a wide range of forms of social communication supported the work, and developed the children's confidence. In reading their own and each others' poems aloud, they learned the importance of dramatic expression; in the range of oral activities in the warm-ups they heard new sounds, words, language patterns; in communicating with the variety of adults they met during the week they experienced and learned to engage with communicative repertoires of different kinds, in different social contexts.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. To use examples from past projects to help staff and volunteers identify how and when children move from safe frameworks and formulae in writing to more experimental, adventurous creative uses of language.
2. To continue to develop opportunities to support bilingualism in speech and writing, in order to draw on the cultural and linguistic resources of the local community, to enrich the understanding and experience of language encountered by participants, and to explore the cultural identities of young writers.

## Appendix 7: MoS Storywriting Case Study

### The Ministry of Stories Storywriting Project A Case Study for the MoS Research Evaluation

#### INTRODUCTION

The MoS Story Writing Project ran between April and June 2015 with pupils from two Yr9 English classes from St Daniel's High School<sup>5</sup>. These were the two 'bottom set' classes in the year group and many pupils had been identified as having special educational needs. An important context for this particular project was the fact that it was generated by one of the two class teachers making contact with MoS because of her concern about the self-esteem and motivation of the pupils in her class and the struggles they seemed to be experiencing as they embarked upon a three year GCSE curriculum. A central aim of the project was, therefore, to enable pupils to have an enjoyable experience of writing and to gain confidence in their own ideas as they experimented with and developed their own creative writing over a number of weeks. The project set out to support pupils in the writing of a short story developed from a set of props in story bags, explored collaboratively during the first session. The general aim was for all pupils to publish a story in the anthology at the end.

The initial introductory session was run in the MoS building in Hoxton and was led by TC ('Tom'), a professional writer and performance poet with support from EJ from MoS and around 12 volunteer writing mentors. Workshop sessions, also led by TC, EJ and facilitated by the writing mentors, were then held once a week on Wednesday mornings for an hour, in the school, over the subsequent six weeks. Some class time in between these workshops was also devoted to the writing of the stories. The use of writing mentors to work with small groups of (about five) pupils, for increasingly large parts of the workshop sessions, was a central and significant aspect of the project.

The workshops covered the following main activities:

1. Introductory session: Key messages about MoS and issuing of individual notebooks and USB sticks for use during the project. The groups explored 'story bags' filled with intriguing props and worked together to ask questions and build initial hypotheses about the characters and stories that might lie behind them, before pupils were set the task of writing a first line inspired by one of their character and story ideas, ready for the first workshop in school later in the week. The emphasis here was on generating *multiple* ideas and on asking questions and praising contributions rather than settling on one idea.
2. Exploring first lines from published writing alongside examples from across the class. Individual responses were elicited, what they liked and didn't like, how they responded as readers. A whole group game and work in small groups focussed on generating *different possible* paths for their stories to take. Pupils were encouraged to keep their options open and to explore a range of possibilities in discussion with others. Pupils were set the task of writing 250 words more for next week.

---

<sup>5</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout for names of teachers, pupils and the school

3. Exploring editing processes in relation to their own and to published work. The task for next week was to edit their work.
4. Support with writing in process, mainly in small groups led by writing mentors. Pupils chose their favourite paragraph to read and discuss with their group.
5. Drafting and feedback. The final session was led just by EJ and writing mentors. Pupils were asked to finish their stories and send to their teachers for publication.
6. A celebration and launch of the final anthology was held at the MoS and in a nearby community garden several weeks after the end of the project.

This report is based on the evaluation carried out by Gill Anderson and Jane Coles of the IoE.

## **METHODOLOGY**

We considered the following evidence in the writing of this case study:

- Observation of the introductory session at The Ministry of Stories and observation of four out of five of the workshop sessions held in school as well as observation of some volunteer mentor preparation and debriefing sessions. These were recorded through field notes and photographs.
- Two sets of interviews with the two class teachers (Mark and Rosie) carried out near the beginning and after the end of the project. The first interviews (about 15 minutes each) focused on their aspirations for the project and their reflections on the case study pupils in the context of the current writing curriculum. The six case study pupils, relatively representative of pupils across the two classes, were selected by Mark and Rosie. The second interviews focused on the teachers' perceptions of the achievement and motivation of the six case study pupils throughout the project.
- Interviews with the six case study pupils at the beginning and end of the project (although one of the six, Beyza, was not able to attend either interview for different reasons and was replaced by Hayley in the second interview) In the initial interviews, we asked pupils about their views of writing and their first impressions of the MoS project. At the end of the five weeks, we asked them about their thoughts and feelings about the workshops and the writing they produced. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed and thematically analysed. Themes used included the overall MoS evaluation questions with additional themes emerging.
- Scores for the six case study pupils using the Creativity Assessment Tool would usually be arrived at in dialogue with the class teachers at the end of the project by comparing the writing produced during the project with other writing produced earlier in the school year for each of the pupils in the focus group. In this case, such direct comparison was not possible because of the very few examples of writing of any length or of a comparable type in their exercise books (an interesting finding in itself) and to some extent, by lack of teacher access to those books where pupils had moved set. However, we have derived scores from the interviews with teachers and pupils at the end of the project where there was considerable discussion of questions of value and originality, and from our own subsequent review and analysis of the stories and the interview transcripts.
- Observation of the final celebration event on the publication of the class book of stories in Hoxton (26/06/15).

## FINDINGS

### Motivation for Writing

A major aim of the project as articulated by EJ at the initial mentor briefing meeting was to raise students' sense of self esteem and to tackle their low motivation as writers. This lack of pupil confidence certainly emerges in the first set of interviews, where the case study students exhibit a tendency to focus on their perceived weaknesses and indicate a low level of engagement with English-related activities. The following extract from the first few minutes of this interview provides a flavour of the conversation:

GA: What do you like to do in English? Can you think of anything you've enjoyed in English this year?

Hamdi: Nothing [all agree and laugh]

...

GA: Anyone else? Anything you've written in school you were pleased with?  
[pause...no...laughs...]

GA: No? Nothing you've done recently in English you've been pleased with?...  
[no – they all look at each other, more laughing]

When pressed to talk about bits of writing they have done in school prior to the MoS project, students reveal a nagging concern with notions of correctness and the fear of making a mistake, apparently generated by their awareness of mark schemes imposed by external examining bodies:

Mahdi: Yeah – if I'm doing my homework and I have to write, I just write it on my phone and because it has autocorrect, I can just write it on there...

Hamdi: Yeah that's what I do, that's what I do...

Anne: Yeah if I want to write a word like, I'll just write happy instead of excited because it's easier

GA: OK – does that sound familiar to anyone else? Is that what's in your mind when you're writing - that you might get something wrong?

Hamdi: It's when it's in a test, it's for your grade – then I'm worried I might get the spelling wrong. They deduct marks...

[General agreement – they all chip in with their anxieties about losing marks and talk all at once – some debate about what percentage points will be deducted]

Mahdi: Yeah they deduct 20 percent

[General talking – they are all animated by the 20 percent aspect...]

Liam: Yeah, you have to use simpler words, it's less interesting but then I can get better marks if I can spell them – you might use a harder word but get less marks so it's just easier like that.

However, this early interview also indicates that the highly interactive introductory session at the MoS had successfully served to whet the students' appetite for more and they appeared to be inspired by the presence of a 'real' writer (see comments in 'Developing Writing', below). Overall, the project appears to have had some success in motivating the case study pupils to write. In post-project interviews all of the students expressed enjoyment in the project, picking out different aspects which helped to motivate them. Anne, for instance, enjoyed the freedom to 'use your own ideas and not have the teacher telling you what to write'; Mahdi responded well to the upbeat, positive attitude of the MoS team, including the professional writer and



the mentors. Liam told us that it was the open, workshop approach of the project which worked well for him:

Liam: It was better than having a normal lesson. It was more interesting. I'd much rather have that than sit in a normal classroom and listen to a teacher talk. I'd rather have the smaller groups. When you're bored in a normal lesson you don't really listen, you get distracted, you get in trouble. But when you are engaged in the lesson you want to get on with your work, you want to finish it. So, when you're bored, you just mess about.

Anne: But this, it got you involved

Mahdi: Yeah

Mark highlighted Liam as someone who was normally hard to motivate in class (a 'major behaviour concern'), yet who had responded with a pleasing degree of engagement and confidence within the looser structures of the MoS project, where a sense of 'ownership' was conferred:

Mark: The nice thing about the MoS project was that he worked *independently* on it, whereas, when he's doing work in class, he's a real 'write two lines, put his hand up 'can you read it sir?' so it's 'prodding him' to do 'the next bit'. Because in the MoS project, the criteria were so much looser, he felt much more confident just getting things on paper which conversely (or perversely?), means that he produces the success criteria better....

GA....Well, I thought that was really noticeable about him – his independence – there was one session where he just took himself off to a table on his own and he was writing non-stop.

Mark: Yes and he was also writing between sessions for homework and he's not someone who does homework...

Rosie's reflections on the project emphasised the importance of the end product in raising her students' sense of self belief:

I think there was a lot of pride and surprise, I think, from the kids, suddenly seeing their work formalised in such a way, you know being published... So, having come to the end of the project, looking back, I'm really pleased with the way that our students definitely felt a sense of achievement at the end of it. They felt that they had done something on their own – even though there was a bit of editing that went on here and there. When we read them out in class - I invited the students to read them aloud or I would read theirs out – you know, the listening of all the others and the clap at the end was so great for their confidence and self-esteem.

Rosie specifically picked out Beyza and Mario as students who had benefited strongly from the project in terms of motivation. She felt that they had both responded positively to the prolonged process 'of editing, being reflective, listening to other ideas and advice from the mentors or teachers, keeping the process going basically'. Beyza also was able to enjoy an unaccustomed level of praise from her classmates when she got to read her story out loud in a post-project lesson. Both Mark and Rosie, however, reported that sustaining students' interest and motivation across the five weeks of the project had proved challenging in the face of some students' resistance. For example, Mark mentioned that he sensed Anne's engagement with the project did not extend beyond the MoS sessions themselves: 'she's quite diligent in lessons, but she wasn't really interested in working

independently between lessons...'; Mark also identified Mahdi as someone who had openly expressed a reluctance to continue two or three weeks into the project, yet who subsequently produced a better piece of writing than Mark was expecting. Rosie suggested that a lack of weekly continuity might account for these 'ups and downs in terms of engagement'. The MoS team visited the school for one hour only out of each week's three or four hours of English lessons, therefore it was vital that all parties shared a common vision of what could – or should – be achieved between MoS directed sessions. Teachers told us that this was not always the case. Consequently, they found that student engagement 'dipped' resulting in a need for each teacher to 'gee up' their classes once more in anticipation of each week's MoS workshop.

## **Developing Writing**

### **a) The use of space and the physical resources of the classroom.**

From the introductory session, it was noticeable that pupils were invited to move around the space with independence and autonomy, exploring different story bags and exercising choice about which one to focus on. Most sessions in the classroom began with a circle of chairs and some discussion and games and then broke up into small groups, informally clustered around the room with a writing mentor but also fluid enough for pupils to move and work in pairs on a section of a story, to read to each other or just to find a table and work on their own writing. This atmosphere was more like a workshop than a classroom and this allowed for dialogue and social relationships of the classroom to be used widely as a resource, facilitated reading relationships, discussions of each other's writing, opportunities to review and reflect at a slower pace and in more varied and less prescribed ways that might be the case in the classroom. Many pupils chose to compose on a computer, which at once removed the considerable barriers many of the focus group highlighted in relation to spelling difficulties but also reinforced the idea of writing like professionals and also facilitated editing. The practice of printing out what had been written in between each workshop session and then re-reading, performing, reviewing and editing it, supported pupils in considering their *choices* as writers and in building a sense of pride and ownership of the writing over a period of weeks. It seems likely that this contributed to the lively, independent and idiosyncratic character of much of the writing produced, commented on by pupils and teachers.

### **b) The writer facilitator**

The fact that the sessions were led by a writer facilitator was significant for most of the pupils, at least initially and the idea that he had different expertise from their teachers in relation to writing was interesting to them and undoubtedly inspired a certain amount of energy in relation to their own writing:

Mario: 'He's a storyteller and he's telling us how to write good stories – teachers are good at – well, they're good at ...essays...probably'

Liam: He's like an expert at what he does and it helps us *a lot* (with feeling and emphasis)

The particular persona and style of TC was also a factor that was noted by pupils as something that helped to mark out this writing project as distinct from the writing

they might normally engage in. After the first session Hamdi commented, 'I like Tom. He's more hyper and that gets you involved...he gets our imagination out.' The two teachers also remarked on the high energy persona of TC, also noting it was different from how they present themselves in the classroom, perhaps with more mixed feelings. TC spoke very loudly and quickly, moved around the room a lot and gesticulated and deliberately adopted a zany and unconventional tone, more like a children's entertainer.

However, in spite of some initial excitement about working with TC, overall, we were not convinced that his persona was flexible and nuanced enough to include *all* pupils or whether the MoS theorisation of creativity had taken enough account of the need to find out about and respond appropriately to the range of pupils in the group. As noted above, for a number of pupils, for different reasons, interest and motivation was not sustained, especially through the second half of the project. We were concerned right from the first session that the girls' voices were rarely (if ever) heard in the whole group discussions. It wasn't clear whether this was noticed by TC or by EJ and what options they considered in response. While there were clearly some strengths in TC positioning himself as 'not a teacher', there were a number of classroom skills he lacked which might have made the workshop sessions more effective. These included: the presentation of an overview of the individual sessions as well as how they fitted into a bigger picture of the project; strategies to help pupils remember and focus on key ideas from session to session; even writing clearly on the board and managing the timing of sessions so that they started promptly and ended in an orderly and purposeful way. In many cases, the two teachers began to step in to support these aspects and this suggests further thinking for MoS about collaboration with schools for future work. It may also be worth thinking further about how the resource of a 'real world writer' could be exploited in other ways beyond just creating an initial burst of energy around writing and a general sense of encouragement and praise, important though both of these things are. There were perhaps missed opportunities for TC to read some of his own work, or to discuss decision points or choices he himself made or to talk about why he writes, what he thinks his writing offers his audience and what inspires him. In other words, to take pupils a little more seriously and to engage more fully with writing as an activity in the world, to ask about their own reading and writing interests and to look at what they did actually produce. It was notable that TC was not able to attend the final workshop or the celebration event which again was commented upon by both of the teachers. One suggested that if he wasn't able to attend the celebration, he could perhaps have been filmed reading out some of his favourite bits from the stories and then appear as if on a 'video link' like at a real award ceremony!

### **c) Supporting writing processes over time**

All the case study pupils and the teachers emphasised in their interviews the way they experience writing in school as time pressured.

Liam: Yeah, I think that's really hard for me and I don't have time to finish and you move onto the next bit – so I'm just trying to get the hang of it – say like PETAL<sup>6</sup> –

---

<sup>6</sup> PETAL is an acronym used by English teachers in the school to support a structured approach to writing analytical essays ('Point-Evidence-Technique-Analysis-Link')

and I'm just starting to get the hang of it and before you get the hang of it, we're moving onto speeches...

The teachers were well aware that the pace of lessons and the pressure of 'covering the syllabus' and preparing their pupils for external exams is not always helpful to the pupils themselves. From this point of view, the fact that there were five or six weeks to finish a piece of writing and to adjust the pace so that different phases could be supported and developed was a strength of the project. Both teachers and pupils commented on the advantages of 'breaking the process down, bit by bit'.

These approaches worked best at the 'ideas generation' stage and in the introduction to editing where pupils were well supported in considering the work of published writers alongside samples from their own work and making and listening to a range of suggestions for how they might be changed. The teachers valued the fact that pupils were supported by the mentors and each other in actively and constructively reviewing their work and in generating their *own criteria* for writing based on taste, judgement and reader experience, rather than working with prescribed lists of assessment criteria. Another strength of the project, was the attention paid to discussion of the feelings and difficulties that might be encountered by a writer, potentially building resilience, though again, there was room for more nuanced discussion of this and more *listening* to pupil experiences.

What seemed less well thought out was the support for the later stages of the writing. In part, this was due to some lack of clarity about what was actually to be produced and how. Was it a complete short story or a sample of writing, as if from a longer work, to be used as a pitch for an editor? The original plan suggested 500 words should be written between sessions but TC gave the instruction to write 250 words at one stage and later the process became vague and uneven between the two classes and between individuals within them, as noted in the previous section. It was quite unclear to teachers, mentors and pupils alike, exactly *how* the writing would be done. TC told them in one of the first sessions, 'Don't worry, you won't be asked to write in these sessions (although they later did and enjoyed doing so, in some cases) these are about getting ideas'. But that left the question open about how the writing *would* be achieved and what collaboration had been planned for with the teachers in order to support that. We felt that perhaps MoS might usefully consider ways of sustaining the later stages of writing and ways of negotiating and clarifying the scope and outcomes for the project at an earlier stage so that pupils, teachers and mentors can have more of an overview and more pupils can experience the satisfaction that some pupils achieved here. Another concern about the final outcomes that contributed to a sense of disappointment for some pupils was that at the final celebration event, five or six pupils discovered their writing had not been included in the class anthology (for reasons that were not entirely clear) and they were understandably upset. This seems like a significant problem given the starting points mentioned above in relation to low pupil motivation and self-esteem in relation to writing – and in the light of MoS' commitment to inclusive approaches.

## **Enhancing Creativity**

There was good evidence that for all six case study pupils, the final published writing was not only the longest, most sustained piece they had written all year but also to different degrees something that served their own purposes in terms of value and pleasure. In this section we want to focus particularly on the work of Liam, Anne and Mario, students who we believe best exemplify the success of the MoS project in 'enhancing creativity'. As part of this process we consider 'value', 'originality' and 'imaginative adaptation of existing ideas' both in terms of the writing process and the finished product.

Although initially described by his teacher as having 'poor literacy skills' and being difficult to motivate, Liam produced one of the longer stories in the anthology. Liam exhibited real pride in what he had achieved, taking time to develop his story further at home and even asking his teacher to read his story aloud to everyone gathered at the final celebration. As Mark acknowledged afterwards, 'This was something he saw genuine value in'. Liam's detailed and well developed story opens with a dramatic abduction scene and ends intriguingly at the point where the abductors telephone the captives' mother presumably to make their demands, the nature of which are yet to be revealed. It is a story which is confidently handled and carefully structured. As Mark observed, although in some ways it is 'a kind of corny kidnapping story...[Liam] is actually producing the kind of stuff that *people read*', drawing on his own online gaming interest to make it read 'like a dramatization of a scene from a video game'. What is remarkable is that Liam's creative engagement with his story continued beyond the publication of the anthology. In interview two weeks after the end of the project Liam was still expressing his frustration with having to submit his story before he had finished crafting the ending to his satisfaction:

I feel I could have done some more to make it like as good as it could have been. In my head I thought it could have been like this, but it wasn't quite as good as I thought it would be because we didn't have enough time and I didn't have time to get on the computer and do it.

Anne also felt a bit rushed at the end, and although she did not work on her story at home like Liam had done, her story far exceeded anything she had written all year – the longest piece of writing her teacher could find in her year 9 exercise book consisted of two paragraphs. Anne's story opens with the intriguing question, 'Where did this key come from?', notable as a direct echo of the dialogue prompted by storybags and their contents from the opening MoS session. In fact, Anne's whole narrative is recognisably shaped by a combination of the physical stimuli and the questions prompted by them during that introductory workshop; indeed, the whole story ends on a question and the suggestion that there is more to come. (Interestingly, this way of ending the story evolved out of a later exchange between Anne, her teacher and her writing partners. Not surprisingly, Anne emerged from the project with a strong sense that the collaborative process had been key to her success, as alluded to earlier). The plot of Anne's story is driven by an old man's need to find answers as he discovers long-hidden objects from his own life (including the key to his previous marital home, a jewellery box, a photo and a letter). In their evaluation of Anne's story, Mark and GA (the researcher) appreciated the conventional horror story conceit of a mysterious note leading the protagonist to an old house, the scene of a historic murder. What is unusual is that

the plot is driven by nouns, a creative approach which flies in the face of current assessment practice, leading us to suggest that Anne was creatively liberated by the absence of narrow success criteria and constrictive frameworks.

In contrast, Mario's story opens with a piece of atmospheric descriptive writing and comes to a happy conclusion with the discovery of buried treasure (prompted by a key and a map found along the way). The central event, where the two young male protagonists battle with giant spiders in a night-time forest, is reminiscent of a scene from a Harry Potter book/film. Narrated in the first person, Mario chose to provide the reader with lots of action, the excitement heightened by frequent sound effects ('GRRRRRRRRR') and an eye for sensual detail (for example: 'I stopped. I turned around, and it blew its revolting breath at me'). Rosie was particularly impressed with some of the adventurous vocabulary that Mario experiments with, words such as 'sodden' and 'distorted'. Rosie felt that Mario had responded well to the structure of the project: 'I liked watching him writing away, really thinking hard, saying, "Miss, what's another word for this?" and so on'.

Mario was obviously proud of his achievement, claiming in interview that 'It's the best thing we've written so far'.

Table 1 represents our attempt to plot the six case study pupils' project writing against aspects of creativity consistent with those adopted by the wider IoE evaluation (originality, imaginative adaptation of existing ideas and value). These judgements have been made retrospectively on the basis of interviews with pupils and conversations with Rosie and Mark after the publication of the stories. (It excludes Mahdi because his story was inadvertently omitted from the anthology.)

Table 1: Consensual judgement of creativity in the sample students' writing

Creativity Assessment Tool	Agreed scores			
	1 None	2 Some	3 Strong	4 Very Strong
The sample of writing demonstrates <b>imaginative adaptation</b> of existing ideas		Beyza Anne?	Mario Hamdi Liam	
The process of writing demonstrated <b>imaginative adaptation</b> of existing ideas		Anne	Beyza Mario Hamdi? Liam	
The sample of writing demonstrates <b>newness</b>		Beyza Hamdi Liam	Mario	
The process of writing demonstrated <b>newness</b>		Hamdi? Anne? Liam	Beyza Mario	
The sample of writing demonstrates <b>value</b>			Beyza Hamdi Anne Liam	Mario
The process of writing demonstrated <b>value</b>		Anne?	Hamdi	Beyza Mario Liam

## Collaborative practices

### a) Workshop approaches:

Despite producing individual stories, one of the values of the project highlighted by case study students was the opportunity to work collaboratively along the way. A recurring – and explicitly stated – theme in the students' interviews was the pleasure derived from working co-operatively in small groups, supported by a team of mentors. The following extract from a post-project interview is typical of the students' comments:

Hayley: And we liked the people.  
JC: Which people?  
Hayley: The people that worked with us –  
Mario: [Interrupting] and Jim!  
Hamdi: Jim? Tom!  
JC: Yes, Tom the professional writer.  
Hayley: And I liked the two girls who were working with us.  
JC: Mentors?  
Hayley: Yeah.  
Hamdi: I liked it when we were in a group, that helped –  
Mario: [interrupting] Yeah that helped...  
Hamdi: Having lots of ideas in your head for the stories [Mario: Synapses!] and the group share, like, they support you.  
JC: Yeah?  
[Mario slips into a spontaneous role play enacting the writing process...]  
Hamdi:...and you can change it –  
Hayley: And they help you where to improve your stuff, you know, to improve.  
Hamdi: Yeah.  
JC: So, that was a combination of working in a group and also having mentors working with you?  
Hayley: Yeah, coz we couldn't do it by ourself...so we had to have someone there. And they read our stories, and even if they were bad they made you feel like they were good. They were -?  
JC: Oh, they were very positive -  
Hayley: Yeah!  
Mario: Not negative.

Rosie, too, spotted the benefits of what she termed this 'unique' way of working: '...the children loved it. They thrive on that level of personal attention.' She praised the fact that 'some of the adults really tried to build a relationship and had questions about those children'. High levels of mentor continuity across the period of the project meant that it was possible for personal and trusting relationships to be built up between students and adults. Along with reorganisation of the physical layout, our observations indicated that the informal, facilitating role adopted by mentors' also helped to shift the classroom into a more interactive, social space where much of the writing developed through productive dialogue. It seemed to us that the success of working this way particularly benefited girls who were heavily outnumbered in the two English classes. As already indicated, in our observations girls rarely, if ever, volunteered to contribute vocally to whole class



activities. Anne was a good case in point. She tended to stick to her known friendship group and kept her head down almost to the point of invisibility. Consequently, girls were very rarely invited by workshop leaders to read out their ideas or participate in other ways during plenary activities. Yet during each session Anne looked comfortable working in a small group of girls who were able to build up a rapport with their (young female) mentor over the weeks. Despite her habitual reticence to speak out, Anne needed no prompting in the post-project interview to reveal that sharing ideas in this way had been a key to her enjoyment and success:

JC: Anything else that you enjoyed?

Anne: That we could get to share out our ideas and get ideas from other people.

JC: Who did you share those ideas with?

Hamdi: Our group

Liam: It was also good to have our small groups so that you could get more individual help and you can get more help from other people.

## **b) Professional collaboration:**

MoS has succeeded in attracting teams of enthusiastic volunteer writing mentors to support their various projects. A significant strength of the current project was not only in the relationships developed over time both between some mentors and specific students but also between the mentors themselves as a team. Each writing workshop was preceded and followed by a team meeting led by a member of MoS staff. These meetings, often held in a nearby cafe, established an appropriately informal and supportive atmosphere where MoS staff ran through the planned workshop content and where individual mentors felt able to pose questions, share challenges and celebrate successes. It is to the MoS leader's credit that she invited feedback, both positive and negative and, in dealing with problems, drew on the views of the more experienced and more confident mentors, thus engendering a strong sense of team spirit through open dialogue.

It is, perhaps, a shame that the same degree of professional collaboration was not extended to the teacher participants. In retrospect both teachers regretted that their views had not been sought more actively by MoS staff both at the planning stage and as the project developed. Although a broad outline of project sessions had been emailed to Rosie and Mark before the project got underway, both felt that an informal meeting at that stage to discuss the details would have helped them become more involved and better able to integrate MoS sessions with their own English lessons as the project progressed. As Rosie said: 'I mean, everything was emailed, but to have the opportunity to sit down together with the plan and discuss the real content of each session and how that might link up with things we can do in class to support it, I think that would make the whole thing come together a bit more.'

To the same end, Mark would have welcomed a greater degree of on-going professional dialogue as the project progressed:

Mark: I think some more sense of where it's all going would have been very useful for just keeping more of the kids on board.

GA: And maybe for you as well because it emerged that there was quite a big job for you and Rosie to do between sessions?

Mark: That was another thing, and in a way that was fine but if they'd spent 10 minutes at the end of the first session saying right, we've got four more weeks, here's what's going to happen in each week – I'm not asking for a breakdown of every activity or a scheme of work – no teacher has time to read that anyway – just an overview and the main steps.

Mark's own experience and interests (later in his interview he talked about previously having visited '826 Valencia', the equivalent of MoS in San Francisco) suggest that a rich professional exchange could have emerged out of shared planning and weekly updates to the benefit of both parties. During their interviews, both Rosie and Mark made several suggestions as to how the organisation of specific sessions and the concluding 'celebration' event might have been improved (see recommendations below) and it was surprising to both researchers that the teachers' own valuable pedagogic expertise appeared to have been so lightly recognised.

## **CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusions**

The project contributed to young people's creative production in a number of ways:

- Importantly, MoS created a break from school routines and ways of working and 'reframed' writing for many of the pupils in a number of productive ways, at least to some extent. The initial session was held at the MoS in Hoxton, creating a sense of adventure and expectation, connecting pupils to a wider family of MoS writing projects. This sent the message that writing is a public and social practice, not just a set of skills to be demonstrated and assessed in school. Classroom space was reconfigured so that it became more like a workshop. Emphasis was placed on games, experimentation and imagination and the production of the writing developed through a series of open-ended tasks over a much longer time than pupils were accustomed to and many of the pupils produced a longer, more sustained piece of writing than they had so far in that academic year. Without the strict time constraints and heavy scaffolding of the writing process they were used to, pupils were largely free to set their own pace. Pupils were encouraged to develop and discuss their own ideas without writing frames or prescribed assessment criteria and for many pupils, this resulted in more motivation for and enjoyment of the writing process.
- The use of collaborative approaches and dialogue between pupils and peers, writing mentors and teachers also enabled the social resources of the classroom to become a resource for writing. The story-bags worked well as initial stimuli and students were encouraged to pose questions and play around with ideas to build out from this. Pupils were encouraged to consider their own choices as writers and to hear the responses of other readers. The wide range of written outcomes by the end of the project was indicative of some of the pupils enjoying a sense of their own agency as cultural producers to a greater extent than was usual for them within a tightly prescribed GCSE curriculum.
- The use of a professional writer facilitator also helped to reframe writing, particularly at the beginning of the project and added some energy and initial interest.
- The supportive collaboration with writing mentors was generally a strength of the project but we feel that collaboration with the teachers and the school is an area

that needs a lot more careful thought both in terms of aims and working strategy (see below).

## Recommendations

The evaluation of the Story Writing project prompts the following recommendations:

- Recognition that teachers in school are experienced practitioners themselves and have valuable skills which the MoS team can draw on at the planning stage and during the project. We would recommend that there are face-to-face planning and review meetings before the start and regularly throughout the project. The aims, scope and approaches should be *negotiated*, not merely presented to the teachers on paper. They should also be clearly and regularly discussed with pupils and their experiences listened to. The roles within the delivery of the sessions could also be negotiated and shared between teachers and the MoS team to provide greater continuity for pupils and to allow for a creative and dynamic exchange of skills and perspectives.
- Better awareness of particular group dynamics according to specific contexts and making sure that a range of voices is heard. For instance, in this case, ensuring that girls were not effectively silenced during whole class plenary sessions or that attention was paid to the experiences of pupils who were becoming disaffected as the project went along.
- More attention is needed to draw explicitly on students' sets of cultural resources, experiences and interests as part of the writing process; for instance, explicitly encouraging mentors to talk with students about their reading/viewing/gaming habits.
- Greater clarity about purpose, scope and intended outcomes to be shared by all participants, including pupils. These will inevitably evolve week by week, part of an on-going professional dialogue and time needs to be set aside for the presentation and discussion of this overview every session so that understandings are shared about what might be done before next week and how this will happen. Connected with this is the need for further consideration of how to support the writing process in its later stages beyond just the initial burst of ideas and enthusiasm.
- More thought is needed about how a writer facilitator might be used and also supported as part of a school project. This goes back to how creativity and writing are theorised as well as to questions of delivery. The MoS needs to be more prepared to support a range of writers with different skills and experiences. What exactly do they have to add and what is expected of them in terms of engagement with the pupils individually and in groups and in terms of their commitment to seeing the project through to the end and responding to work produced? How might they be encouraged to draw on their own work and experiences, through readings, talking about themselves and how they came to write and difficulties they encounter? Importantly, how can they be supported in finding out more about the pupils and what they have to offer to the creative process of cultural production?
- Special events such as the end of project 'book launch' need to be properly planned so that they don't promise more than they ultimately deliver. More attention to detail (e.g. when, where and how students receive their copies of the anthology) would ensure that due respect is afforded to what young people have produced. The unstructured nature of the time in the garden was found to

be quite challenging for Mark and Rosie in terms of pupil management and the whole event was variously described by the teachers as 'a missed opportunity', 'really pretty regrettable' or an 'anti-climax'.

### **Final thoughts:**

The MoS story writing project served to encourage pupils to write creative pieces in which they and their teachers saw some value. In many ways, however, the actual short stories produced are in themselves unremarkable as a result of 5 weeks' work by a group of fourteen year olds. In the context of a high-stakes assessment system where in some schools creativity has been squeezed into the margins of the English curriculum, MoS are indeed 'enhancing creativity' and helping to motivate most (but not all) students to develop their own ideas and produce sustained pieces of writing. But, our strong impression is that the project at St Daniel's could have been better thought out with the consequence that there were a number of missed opportunities.

More importantly, we think this project begs a number of questions about the way the MoS positions itself in relation to schools. We would encourage MoS to consider their orientation towards schools and teachers as well as to pupils. We remain unclear as to whether the purpose of projects such as that at St Daniel's is limited to providing a temporary antidote to the overly structured, drily micro-managed secondary curriculum as it is played out in many contemporary English departments; or if the aim is to engage school partners more interactively in considerations of pedagogic possibilities, to support experimental practice and open up more sustained dialogue about the role of creativity in education. If the latter, MoS might consider engaging seriously with the recent history of writing within the school curriculum and the contexts within which English teachers are working, as well as finding out about the individual teachers involved, their interests, enthusiasms and skills. We observed a lot of potential for a project such as this to really support teachers in reflecting on their own pupils and practice in a way that they rarely have time for and also in thinking about how to sustain their commitment to creative practice after the end of the project.

## **Appendix 8: The Picture Book Project Case Study**

### **Ministry of Stories: Case study report**

#### **The *Picture Book* project – Summer term 2015**

UCL IoE researcher: John Potter

#### **Background to the project**

The *Picture Book* project was a Ministry of Stories after-school workshop series which ran in the summer term 2015. It took place in the crypt of St John the Baptist Church, just off Hoxton High Street. It began on 14<sup>th</sup> April and ran for 8 sessions from the end of school until 5.30. It was very focused on the church and most of the children were recruited by both the ministry and the church itself.

The aim of the project was to enable the children involved to create a story for a younger audience which was then to be professionally illustrated, published and launched at an event in Shoreditch Library at the end of June.

#### **Staffing**

The project was co-ordinated by Emma Joliffe from the Ministry but led by a facilitator with a theatre background from Hull called Laura - and three trained Ministry volunteers who were present throughout the sessions. There was also a volunteer from the church who assisted with the sessions, preparing refreshments and taking the register, making any necessary phone calls to parents. She knew many of the children already. She did not join in with the activities.

#### **The children**

The children in the project were drawn from two nearby schools, with the majority coming in from St John's. There were 14 in total and they were not regular Ministry attendees. They ranged in age from Year 3 up to Year 5, with the majority in the latter age group. The mix of the children was 5 boys and 9 girls. The core attendees were present for all sessions and numbered about 11, the remaining 3 children joined in but did not take part in all the sessions, nor did they have a book made for them.

#### **Working methods and overall aims**

The sessions followed the usual Ministry of Stories pattern with some engaging and enjoyable games in a circle once everyone had arrived. These were mainly memory games though they had a strong literacy focus, mainly based on the Anniebet.



### *Workshop session in the crypt at St John the Baptist church*

After these games the children worked on their stories in notebooks. They were encouraged to think about potential audiences for their stories but also to imagine the visual impact of the characters they were creating. The children were invited to consider that the audience for their work was younger than they were. They were also invited to consider the picture book as a form of literature in itself with a strong design element. A very large collection such books was brought to the crypt in the early sessions and children were asked to browse them and look for such features as layout of the text, the ratio of illustration to print, any typographical features and so on. They were encouraged to be critical of the ways in which these texts worked and to justify their choices.

After this session and whilst the stories were being drafted, a group of illustrators attended the session and were partnered with the children. The children were positioned as commissioners, discussing their requirements based on their preferences but also on their own enjoyment of picture books. Preliminary sketches were made after these conferences between the illustrators and the children and the books were prepared in outside the sessions for publication. The print run was to comprise a copy for the Ministry, the library and for the children to take home. It would be small but it would be “real”, faithful to the process of publication of picture books in the outside world. It would generate an ISBN and a record in the British Library with the author name and the illustrator name on the cover. The actual presentation of the books would be at a special event at Shoreditch Library. The children would not have seen the books up to this point and were not to know that it would be a big launch event with speakers, the illustrators, press coverage etc. They would be able to take away their own copies of the finished book after the event. Parents and carers would be able to attend.

The pedagogical aims were therefore:

- To consider writing for a specific target audience
- To introduce the process of publication, including drafting, re-drafting
- To consider design elements, including text layout, font size and style

- To consider the genre of the picture book and the creation of character traits and personality in text and illustration
- To motivate the children to see themselves as authors of actual artefacts
- To encourage the children to use professional language around authoring and publication, talking about the “process” and so on
- To generate self esteem in the public nature of the book launch and encourage parents and carers to see the children as authors

### **Visits to the project**

Two visits were made to the project. The first of these was in the middle of the term in May, after the illustrators had visited and the consultations had taken place on how the stories were to be represented. The second visit was to the publication launch event at Shoreditch Library.

### **Mid project interviews**

The whole session on May 5<sup>th</sup> was observed, and an interview conducted with Emma, the volunteers and three pairs of children in the project. The interviews captured the main emergent themes and the fact that the children were clearly motivated and enjoying the work.

Two girls from Year 5 and Year 3 – Katerina and Cora said that they felt things were going well, with one of them noting “For me, the process is going really well, (illustrations, everything)...” In particular they enjoyed the week where they were able to evaluate picture books that had been brought on for them “there were loads they filled up the whole of that place...”. They described in some detail how their favourite book worked with its illustrations, a set of incongruous objects all stuck in a tree.

They were enjoying working with the illustrator who was shared between two projects. They did not know when or how the book was going to be delivered but they were excited by it. Two other girls, Jolene and Sarima (Y5) were keen to demonstrate their knowledge of how the size of the text worked in relation to both the picture and the story. Jolene said that her illustrator could basically “draw anything - she was really, really good” and could bring the story to life. Jolene was interested in grading the age of reading carefully on her cover, saying “I think my book is 8 plus actually because when I was doing the sharing of my story all the adults were laughing and laughing...”. She had a developed sense of how the audience would react.

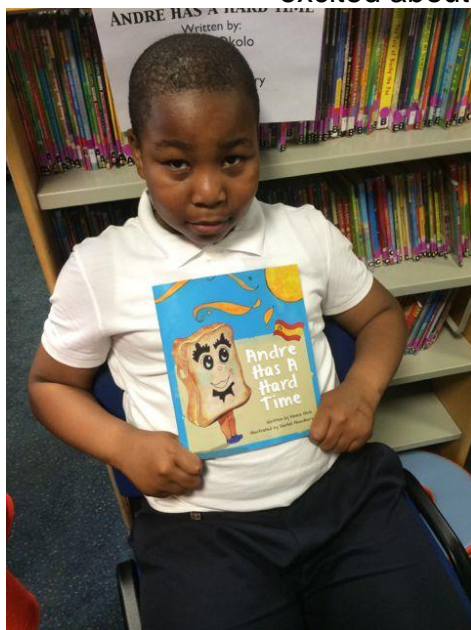


*Jolene, her mother and her book*

We discussed how the book could work as a series and how it could also perhaps be made into another form, maybe even a film. Jolene told me she had already done that herself at home in iMovie, using her own ideas for the illustration.

Two boys in the project, Benjamin (Y3) and Ngozi (Y5), were interviewed together and were hugely motivated. Ngozi in particular found his own story of a piece of French Toast who has adventures in Spain to be hilarious. He wrote it and also part illustrated it, giving his illustrator key ideas on how the work should be done.

Benjamin was a highly visual thinker and similarly motivated by the project and excited about its realisation as a real artefact.



*Ngozi and his book about a piece of French toast called Andre*



Two of the mentors were both hugely impressed by the project and had followed it from the outset, enjoying seeing how the ideas were being realised by the illustrators. They described the working methods outlined above and were fulsome in their praise of Laura the facilitator. Laura herself was unavailable for interview in this session due to illness.

### **Project showcase**



### ***Launch event at Shoreditch Library***

The project showcase and book launch at Shoreditch library was attended by the mentors, facilitator, director of the MOS, parents, carers and various siblings. Early on in the data collection at the event the researcher made the decision to engage one of the children, Jolene, as an assistant interviewer. She was briefly trained in the operation of the voice recorder and she roamed around the event, discussing it with the other children and illustrators.



*Jolene interviews other authors at the book launch*

With refreshments laid on and speeches, the event had all of the features of a book launch. As each of the children was presented with their book there was a collective and palpable sense of pride in the finished product from all concerned. On seeing their book for the first time one of the children said that it had not turned out the way they expected to after their talk in the workshop but that “now that I see it it’s turned out even better...”

Jolene’s interviews were all concerned with pride in the story and she asked the same broad sets of questions:

*Jolene: So, what’s your story called?*

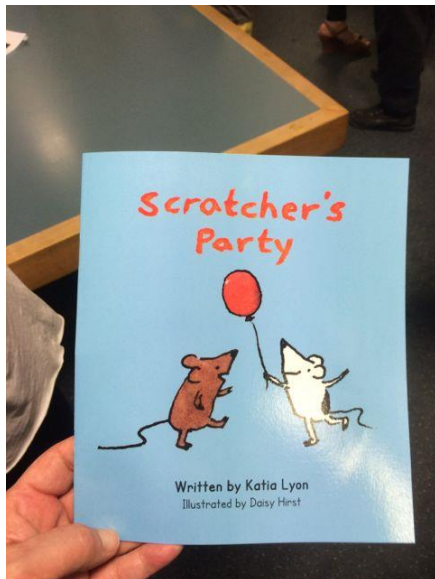
*Katerina: Scratcher’s Party*

*Jolene: What’s it about?*

*Kata: It’s about a mouse who is bored of his little brother and who has a party...*

*Jolene: And are you proud of you story...how its turned out?*

*Katerina: Yes, very..*



*Katerina’s book: Scratcher’s Party*

All the children whose work was followed experienced some kind of disconnect between how the book turned out, compared with how they had originally planned and envisaged it. But for the vast majority, this was not a problem but a source of genuine pleasure. The surprise, carefully stage managed by the MOS, handed out in plain brown bags, really worked to create a sense of esteem in the work.

Parents, carers and siblings who were interviewed were all highly impressed and worked their way round the room, listening to the stories as they were being told. Some small groups formed around Benjamin, the boy interviewed on day 1 and the researcher was able to speak briefly with his illustrator who confessed that he had very little to do, with the ideas for the book emerging from Benjamin almost fully formed.

There was one counter to the general atmosphere of positivity at the launch. One of the children's names had been incorrectly spelled on the cover, indeed it was not at all correct. This was a clerical/admin error which had occurred during the typesetting process and greatly upset the mother of the child. The MoS facilitator made a note of the email address and gave assurances that she would do what she could to sort it out. The level of upset reflected the high stakes involved in the project and its value as a vehicle for pride in the work and the sense of the child as author. It was a genuine mistake and hopefully was later resolved in the summer.

### **Concluding comments**

The project was a really well-conceived and organised set of workshops. It took the children through all of the stages of publication, from initial idea through key decisions about the illustrations to the final production. The flow of activities through the weeks was well thought out and the involvement of committed and talented professional illustrators lifted the project out of the ordinary.

The children were encouraged throughout to value themselves as real authors and to have faith in their creative ability. They were encouraged to be genuine conSuleimant-partners with the illustrators, the vast majority of whom worked straight from the initial ideas into print.

Possible extensions into media productions would be a good next step with audio books or animation as a distinct possibility. In fact, one of the children, as noted above, had already filmed her story at home.

From the main aims of the project which were noted above, by far the most successful outcome was in the motivation and encouragement of the children to view themselves as authors, not in the future (although that was a possibility many of them thought would come true) but in the present, raising their self esteem. This made the incident with one of the children being incorrectly named on the cover all the more unfortunate. It was, however, a genuine mistake which should be simple to correct and which should not overshadow a well conceived piece of work.

Of the key objectives noted above the following were met for the majority:

- To introduce the process of publication, including drafting, re-drafting
- To consider design elements, including text layout, font size and style
- To motivate the children to see themselves as authors of actual artefacts
- To generate self esteem in the public nature of the book launch and encourage parents and carers to see the children as authors

And these were met for many of the children:

- To consider writing for a specific target audience
- To encourage the children to use professional language around authoring and publication, talking about the "process" and so on
- To consider the genre of the picture book and the creation of character traits and personality in text and illustration

