

Playful Writing



Building stories together to inspire young writers: a teacher handbook

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Introduction

Let's think about what writing a story demands. The young writer needs to plan the process, perhaps develop an outline of the text beforehand, and continuously monitor his or her progress by revising the text while writing. When we look at writing this way, it is easier to understand how this is a difficult skill for children to master. Indeed, children who struggle with turning ideas into sentences can feel alienated from the learning process and develop negative attitudes towards their own abilities to write. In such cases, fostering motivation is crucial and approaching writing playfully could be the answer to keeping children engaged.

Research finds that providing a playful context where children can freely re-enact and develop a known story results in significantly better-structured and more creative stories using the same characters, than a context where children follow adult-led activities (Whitebread & Jameson, 2010).

This handbook is a product of the Play Learning and Narrative Skills (PLaNS) project, which aimed to develop a playful learning approach to improve 5-10 year olds' narrative and writing skills, as well as to investigate the potential impact of this playful approach on children's learning. This is known as a 'proof-of-concept' study, in which a new methodology is designed, implemented, and tested on a small-scale. The PLaNS project came together as a collaborative effort between the Faculty of Education and three Primary Schools in Cambridge, UK, from March 2013 to June 2015. The project was supported by the LEGO Foundation.

The approach used in the PLaNS project gives children control over their learning process in a manner that is fun, hands-on and engaging, while giving the necessary instructional support through the design of activities and explicit learning objectives. Based on research on children's writing and development, the teachers designed and implemented pretence and construction play activities that supported the writing, storytelling, creativity and collaboration skills of primary students in Year 1, 3 and 5. Over the course of a full academic year, the teachers tried out new activities in their classrooms and met regularly with the research team.

The purpose of this handbook is to share the playful pedagogy that emerged from the PLaNS project: an approach based on previous scientific evidence as well as tried out in real classrooms.

In this handbook, you will find key elements of the PLaNS ethos, underpinning research and resources that you can use to try this approach in practice. We hope that these ideas may serve as inspiration for unleashing teachers' creativity and develop further playful learning activities to support children's writing.

You can see the teachers and children in action, and meet the researchers, in the PLaNS project video by copying this weblink into your browser:

<https://vimeo.com/142506730>



When looking back on the introduction of playful writing activities in their classrooms, the participating teachers saw a number of changes among children:

Children have more ideas to write

"I think, because they had a short task at the beginning which was playful – building with LEGO®, they then were a lot more on track with the writing because they had a time to give their brain a break... So when it actually came to the writing after, they were a lot more engaged, a lot more motivated."

(Year 1 teacher)

"Actually (those children that you know are weaker in the writing skills) had the most brilliant ideas and seeing the self-esteem and the kudos that they get from other people around them, is worth so much..."

(Year 3 teacher)

Children have better social skills

"I think it supported their collaborative skills. I mean the ones whose personalities might not lend themselves to collaborative work, they have worked brilliantly, including some of the SEN children. It has helped them with their social skills, and their turn taking and their risk taking".

(Year 3 teacher)

Children are more focused and engaged

"When they're working or writing and they haven't got the model, they tend to talk about completely random things that aren't really related. But when they were doing the LEGO modelling, talk was much more relevant because it was all about the story, rather than what they did at the weekend."

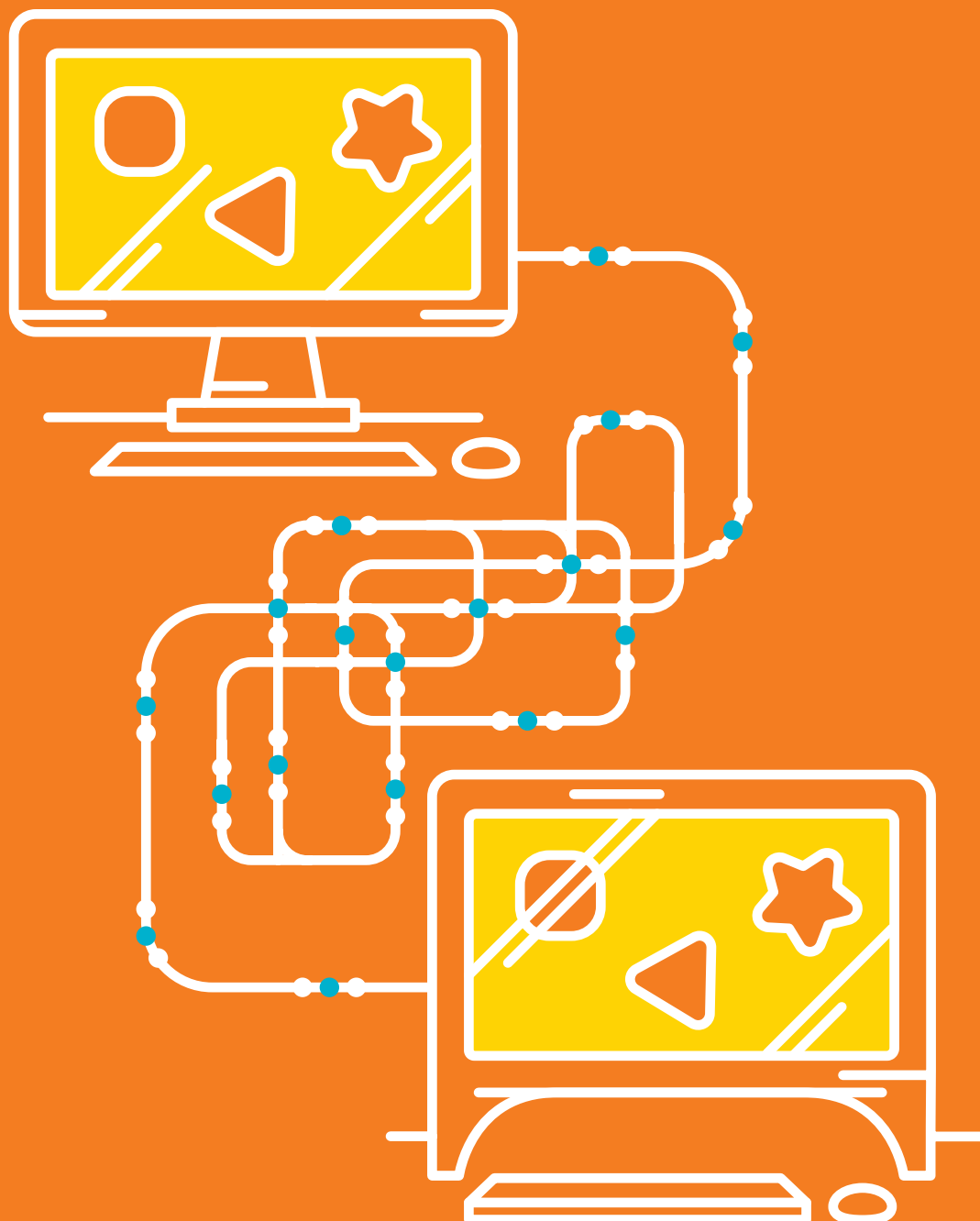
(Year 1 Teacher)

"(The playful approach) took away some of the stuffiness or the fear factor of having to write a longer piece of writing, that they have to do every week...I think it showed them that actually it can be quite enjoyable."

(Year 3 teacher)

"The enthusiasm they have to write, was massive when anything to do with the LEGO. (...) That frequent high level of motivation towards writing just created a more positive feeling around the idea of writing. So that children were then happier to write."

(Year 5 teacher)



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Supporting writing skills through guided play

Research on children's development as writers has helped us to understand what cognitive skills are involved in the process of writing texts and stories. Although different models and angles exist, all researchers agree at least in one aspect: writing is much more than putting letters on a page – it is a complex process where we orchestrate multiple skills and draw on previous knowledge.

Let us unpack what children do when writing

The young writer needs to master the conventions for writing a particular type of text (e.g. a letter is different from a story), and needs to keep information in mind such as the target audience, and an appropriate tone. He or she needs to plan the process, perhaps develop an outline of the text beforehand, and continuously monitor his or her progress by revising the text. Of course, the young writer needs to remember and retrieve the content of the writing piece and continuously think up new ideas. Then comes the process of converting those ideas into words and then transcribe the words onto paper or a screen, drawing on his or her knowledge about how to form letters and how to spell. Finally, the writer must evaluate the written work against expectations and edit it, making appropriate changes and corrections.

Retrieving and keeping information in mind, planning, evaluating and revising a text draws on children's metacognitive skills, or the ability to control and develop knowledge about one's own thinking. If we think of producing a written text as a problem-solving task, rather than simply putting words on a page, then children need to apply and hone their metacognitive abilities in order to master writing (Hacker, Keener, & Kircher, 2009).

Next are transcription or handwriting skills. These are particularly important for young writers. If these skills are not fully automatized, a lot of the child's attention is absorbed in physically writing a text. This leaves little mental room for other key processes noted above, such as planning and revising (Graham & Harris, 2000).

What support can help children to become proficient writers?

In the PLaNS project, children engaged in pretence and construction play through collaborative activities using creative materials. These literacy activities often had two phases: a planning or idea phase where children represented their ideas in a 3D format, and then moved on to a related writing task. During the collaborative building phase, children came up with ideas, structured their stories, and rehearsed expressing ideas in language. During the writing task, the physical model helped children remember what happened in their story or what they planned to write about.

Another important issue is motivation to practice writing. Struggling writers might have difficulties with one or more specific skills involved in writing, and become convinced that they are 'not good writers'. As they move through primary school, the writing demands increase. If these children have not practiced enough to overcome their difficulties, writing becomes an overwhelming task and they feel alienated from the process. This might explain why struggling writers fail to catch up with their peers. In the PLaNS project, having the opportunity to practice writing in a playful non-threatening context seemed to improve children's attitudes towards writing and their motivation to practice.

What the children said about using creative, hands-on materials and playful activities to help them write:

"It helps us do more writing." (child one). "And it makes me more crazy." (child two). "And it makes me have more ideas." (child three).

"...[children] can put down their ideas and then, if they forget, if they think, oh no I forgot my idea, they can just look then at the LEGO and maybe remember it"

"I enjoy LEGO because it is almost like playing in class, but we're using it for a learning reason. So it's fun to do it, when you know that it's gonna help you with something as well."

"Because if, if they don't have any imagination, with LEGO you can use the imagination, so they learn to use their imagination. And also they can learn to build and work together."

The PLaNS approach: using research in practice

In the PLaNS project, we talk about 'guided play' rather than 'free play', because all the activities intend to improve children's learning and their ability to write, as well as their collaborative skills. Although the activities are proposed by adults, they remain child-led and playful.

The activities can be characterised as follows:

- Hands-on experiences with creative elements (any materials that are easy to construct and be creative with, for example LEGO® bricks).
- Children have a high degree of choice within the activities (deciding what to build, the content of the writing, how to manage the task within the group and where to work, including the floor or carpet area etc.).
- Activities require children to be imaginative and creative, not just in building a model, but also when writing and their creative ideas are valued and shared.
- Children express their ideas through different mediums (talking, building, writing, pictures, videos, drawing etc.) and translate their ideas from one medium to another.
- Children have opportunities to show and share their creations, giving purpose to the creative process.

Connecting building and writing

A key point of successful activities is to connect the two aspects – the building and the writing – to the children. For example, introducing the writing activity before they start building, model the writing in front of the class using their creative model as a prompt, or remind children to think about the content of their writing while they build. You can find more ideas for linking building and writing in the resource section.

Enhancing dialogue and collaboration

In the PLaNS project, children participated in groups of three and worked in these same groups throughout the academic year to plan, represent and inspire their writing. Discussing their ideas with classmates, and having to agree on their collaborative creations, means children engage in exploratory talk (a constructive and reasoned form of dialogue) which in turn is reflected in the organisation and overall quality of their writing.



Negotiating in groups

Teachers in the project introduced, reminded, and supported the use of 'Rules for Talk', a form of contract agreed by the children on how to interact with each other in group work activities, in order to promote the development of dialogic skills for learning together. Successful activities had elements that children needed to discuss and decide as a group, time and support to do this well, and reflection about the process. The resource section has specific ideas and materials to help prepare for playful writing activities.

Promoting reflection and problem-solving

Given that children had the freedom to decide what to do and how to do it, they practiced reflection and problem-solving (metacognitive monitoring and control) as they discussed, planned and negotiated in groups. Successful activities include questions that prompt and support children to reflect, and gain skills and knowledge about their learning processes. For example, requiring them to explain the model to others or ask questions about other's models. The lesson planning section gives step-by-step examples.

Integration with the curriculum

All the activities were fully integrated with the curriculum, both in and beyond literacy. Each activity built on children's previous knowledge and served as a scaffold for further learning opportunities. Teachers supported children's awareness by making connections between subjects explicit and helping them see how learning objectives built on previous work.

**"...when we get, just get
to choose our own thing,
then we can just use our
imagination and do it."
(Year 1 student).**

PLaNS lesson planning

In guided play lessons, as in any other lesson, the teacher provides clear learning objectives, differentiated by ability, and these are shared with students. However, the overarching ethos of the approach is to promote children's ability to learn autonomously and, therefore, create a learning environment in which children enjoy and reflect upon the process. This is the most important goal to keep in mind. Every aspect of planning should have this goal as a priority.

Here are a list of questions to inspire your planning of guided play activities.

- **What aspect of writing are children learning about?**
Establish a genre and writing goals (e.g. persuasive writing, newspaper article, graphic novels, etc; opening and connecting clauses, punctuation).
- **What are children writing about?**
Establish a topic, book, book section, or shared experience, such as a school trip.
- **How do the learning objectives and topic connect with previous learning and future goals?**
Identify previous knowledge and experiences and the ways in which the current activity helps to build the basis for future learning.
- **What is the building task?**
Define a clear building task for children according to the objectives (for example, if children are learning about the narrative structure of fairy tales, a building activity that includes representing different scenes would be suitable; whereas if the objective is to produce a newspaper article, a single scene representing the main event to be reported might be better).
- **What is the writing task?**
Define a writing task according to the learning objectives and which allows for differentiation.
- **What is the purpose and format of the task?**
If children see a meaningful purpose in the task, this can have an impact on their motivation to write. Identify a specific presentation format (storyboard, writing own illustrated book, a comic strip, a printed newspaper, etc.) and the audience and purpose of the writing activity. Examples could be display in school, write a letter to your favourite author, give tips to younger students, create an animated film for a contest or edit a newspaper to share with families.
- **How will the activity be structured?**
Decide if you will need more than one lesson to conduct the activity, or if you will split the activity in several sections. Remember that one building activity can serve to inspire several pieces of writing!

The teacher's role in guided play

The teacher's role in guided play is to propose a learning framework (in preparation and introduction stages), observe and ask questions, and be supportive of children's efforts (in building, sharing and connecting building to writing stages), while being open to their decisions and ideas about how to undertake the tasks. The teacher also plays an important role as an observer in the classroom, identifying interesting or challenging situations, highlighting good practices, and learning opportunities to share with the class as a whole.

Finally, while children undertake the writing task/s (playful writing stage) the teacher's role is similar to practice as usual, providing specific writing instruction, and giving feedback for children's individual work. Crucially, their role at this stage is also to support a relaxed and focused writing environment. They encourage children to help each other (while respecting other's work), to speak aloud but quietly among themselves in order to generate ideas or revise their work, and to go back to change the model to help them with editing ideas, changing perspectives or being inspired to continue writing.

Every lesson using a guided play approach is different, as there are many ways to use creative, 3D materials in collaborative groups to support writing. Even if teachers use the same lesson plan, children respond creatively and contribute to enhance the learning experience in their own ways.

The steps listed below offer inspiration for how to introduce a new activity to the whole class, get children started building in groups and sharing their ideas, how to transition to writing and how to support them as they write.

1. Whole class introduction

- Present or remind children of the topic, book or shared experience. Encourage children to share their ideas with the class.
- Remind children of the Rules for Talk and LEGO® rules. You can ask children to anticipate potential problems when working together and discuss good strategies to solve them. Children might have the rules printed and available on their tables or displayed in the classroom.
- Explain the building and the writing task to the children. Encourage them to give examples of ideas they might include in their models and writing.
- Describe additional activities that children might carry out while building that will help them with their writing. For example, to make a note of good character names or adjectives.

2. Building time in mixed ability groups

- Prompt children to have a discussion about ideas to represent before they commit to building.
- Allow children to organise their own time. Be available for questions or for children to 'show off' their creations to you.
- Remind children of the time halfway through the building and towards the end.
- Walk around the classroom to see different ways in which children are building ideas. Ask some children to share with the class ideas to highlight their creativity.
- Remind children of the need to discuss and agree on a single group model.
- For documenting models, take pictures or ask children to take them by themselves.

3. Sharing ideas (whole class and groups)

- Give children the opportunity to share ideas with other groups, and to individually explain the ideas represented in their models.
- Ask questions about how children collaborated. Prompt children to discuss examples of when they used the Rules for Talk.

4. Transition from building to writing (whole class)

- Prompt children to practice how to generate ideas from their models and construct sentences. Some teachers used video recordings of the children building at this stage, so that children could listen to their recordings before writing.
- Explain and model how to increase the complexity of sentences.

5. Playful writing (individual work in mixed ability groups)

- Remind children of the writing task and the specific learning goals.
- Encourage children to help each other, and remind them to be respectful of each other's work.
- Encourage children to go back to the model if they 'get stuck' when generating ideas for their writing.
- Remind children of specific strategies (e.g. to circle words if unsure of spelling, or to look around at the classroom displays to find good adjectives to use, and ideas for opening clauses, etc.)
- Encourage children to revise their work and evaluate if they have fulfilled the learning objectives.
- Provide children with the opportunity to reflect on their progress as writers, their strengths and weaknesses.



Teachers in the PLaNS project agreed that these were a good summary of typical steps in their lessons but as they were also very creative in their practice, not every lesson followed this pattern. For example, when children in Year 5 created comic strips, they had a brainstorm and drawing-planning activity before they built models to photograph for their illustrations. Then they edited their ideas using the models and proceeded to writing up speech balloons and captions. In another example, children in Year 3 constructed models to re-enact scenes in order to spot transition errors in their scripts and fix them by re-writing, learning the importance of revising and editing through pretence play.

In short, this is what a playful writing activity is about, according to a five-year-old student and writer:

**“We look at the model
sometimes and then we think of
stuff and then we write it down
on a piece of paper.”
(Year 1 student).**

Background on the PLaNS project

In previous research at the Faculty of Education, we showed that playful experiences can be more effective than directive teaching in supporting Year 1 children's writing skills (Whitebread & Jameson, 2010). Providing a playful context where children could freely re-enact and develop a known story resulted in significantly better structured and more creative oral and written stories using the same characters than a context in which children followed adult-led activities. However, there is currently not enough evidence to support the implementation of playful pedagogies in primary education practice across the board, and there is increasing pressure on schools to demonstrate their effectiveness in standardised assessments, fostering result-oriented practices. These pressures constrain the use of playful approaches, which are process-oriented in nature and place the emphasis on children's engagement and enjoyment of the learning process rather than on short-term learning outcomes.

In the PLaNS project, we wanted to extend the idea that a playful context can support children's narratives in the classroom. So, we set out to use instructional principles, established in previous research, to incorporate playful activities into practice. Children in nine classes (three Year 1, three Year 3, and three Year 5) worked together in small groups during literacy lessons to create and represent stories and ideas by building LEGO® models that then inspired writing in various ways, such as comic strips, movie scripts, 3D storyboards, and much more.

Throughout a whole academic year, collaborative LEGO building was the main form of planning their writing tasks. All groups consisted of three children of mixed ability in their writing, and throughout the year, teachers encouraged not only their motivation to write, but also their metacognitive strategies, and collaboration skills through dialogic learning. Children dedicated a good amount of time (at least four lessons each term) engaged in collaborative tasks in which they had to plan and manage the creation of 3D models that represented the ideas they wanted to put into writing. They also received the specific instruction they normally would learn about formal aspects of writing (such as, conventions of different genres, structure, punctuation, spelling, etc.). However, when they received this information, the children had already generated ideas for their writing in a playful way; they had embarked on the process of translating ideas represented in their models into a written text.

Through practical activities developed by teachers and regular meetings with them throughout the academic year, we documented the experience and gathered invaluable information about what works in the classroom. But we also wanted to find out if this approach would, in principle, have a beneficial impact for participating children.



The PLaNS research team evaluated 108 of the children that participated in the project at the beginning and end of the school year to measure the impact of this teaching approach in children's writing, as well as a range of skills necessary to become a proficient writer: oral narrative skills, vocabulary, metacognition, and creativity. Children and teachers were observed in the classroom throughout the academic year as they implemented this playful pedagogy, and were also interviewed by the research team in order to understand their perspectives on teaching and learning writing skills in a collaborative and playful way.

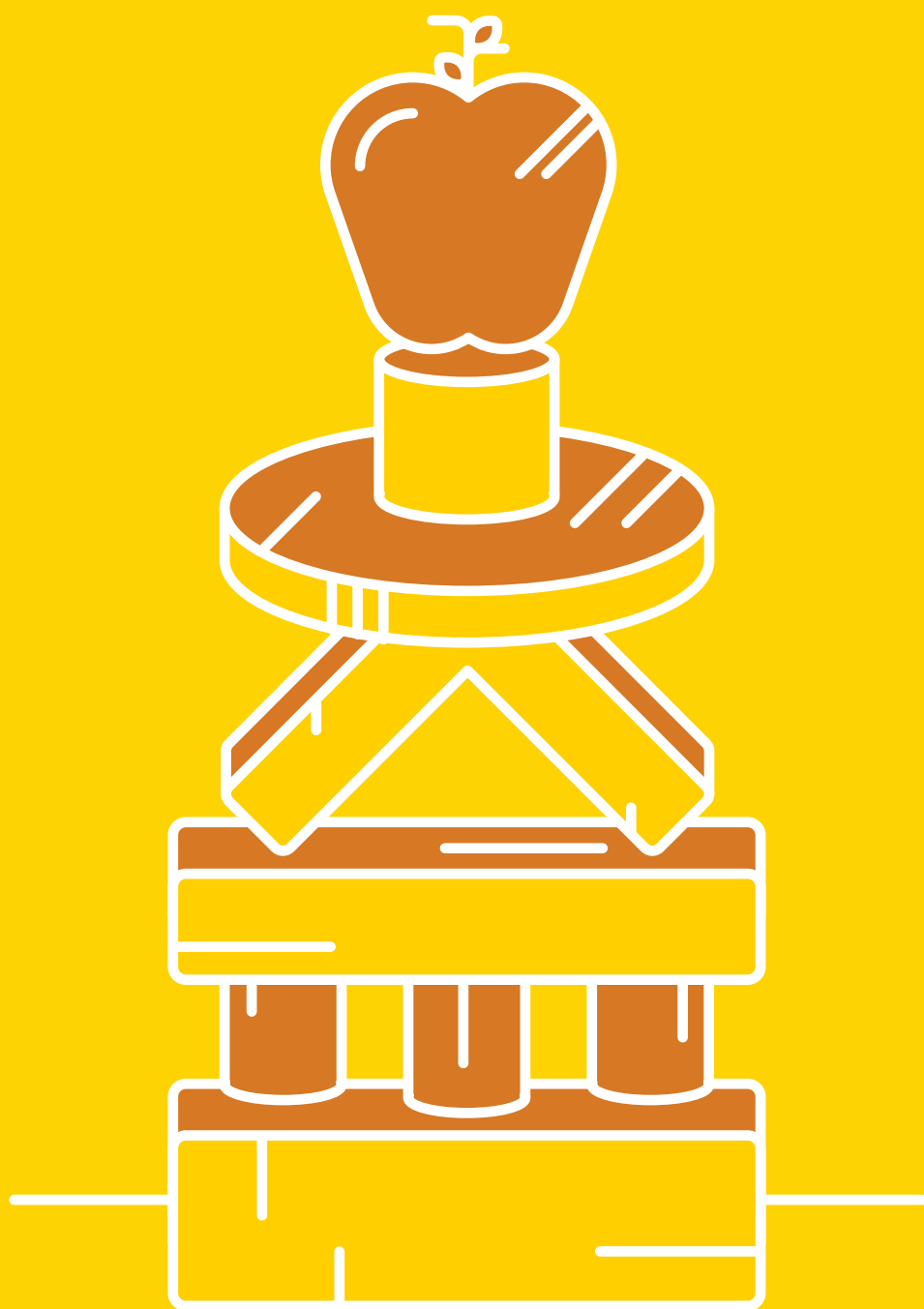
Our initial findings are very promising for a small-scale intervention. First, we were able to assess the progress of children's writing skills and compare them with children who were taught the previous academic year by the same teachers but who did not receive the intervention. We found that children in the PLaNS project improved in the formal aspects of writing skills (measured by schools according to National Curriculum Levels) just as much as their peers in the previous year. We also compared children's progress at the beginning and the end of the year, and found significant improvement in children's quality of writing, as well as key skills related to ability to write, such as creativity and metacognition. We also observed that children were highly engaged in the activities throughout the year and learnt to collaborate better with others. Moreover, children who were more playful and creative (engaging in pretence play, social play, and contributing with original ideas) were also those that worked better in their mixed ability groups.

In the PLaNS project, children improved significantly in the quality of their writing, as well as key skills related to their ability to write, such as creativity and metacognition. Moreover, children who were more playful and creative also worked better in groups.

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Before starting playful writing activities

Before starting the various playful writing activities, children need to agree and get familiar with a set of ground rules for talk and using LEGO® in collaborative activities. Here are some tips and ideas for establishing LEGO rules and rules for talk. The ideas in this section were provided by teachers and children from the PLaNS project, with resources in turn drawing on a previous research project called 'ChAT' - see the Credits on pages 46-47 in this handbook.

Tips for establishing LEGO rules and rules for talk

- Encourage children to think about possible LEGO rules and rules for talk in small groups
- Encourage each group to come up with their priority of rules
- Encourage the whole class to identify the most important LEGO rules and rules for talk (4 or 5 rules to start with)
- Display LEGO rules and rules for talk on the wall
- Display sheets or cards with LEGO rules and rules for talk in front of children on their table to remind them about good group work
- Use pictures to support children to read the rules
- Give children ownership so that they can use the rules when they have conflicts

Ideas for LEGO rules

- When working with LEGO, keep all LEGO pieces in the working area (e.g. an A3 sheet of paper of large hoop)
- When any LEGO piece falls on the floor, pick it up
- Dis-assemble LEGO pieces before packing them up
- Be responsible and look after your LEGO set
- Do not put LEGO pieces into your pocket
- Do not lick LEGO pieces

Setting the rules for talk

Before agreeing with your class on a set of ground rules for talk, children will need time to become familiar with key vocabulary, experience talk, and reflect upon the quality of their dialogue.

Activities that facilitate the incorporation of key/new vocabulary

1. Encourage children to report on what other children have said.
2. Encourage children to provide reasons, such as discuss why someone in the class might be a good friend.
3. Encourage children to agree when making group decisions. For example, decide what materials to use in a joint arts project.
4. Introduce a TALK BOX (see page 25) as part of the classroom materials and select a different key word each week.
5. Model the use of key/new talk vocabulary in different lessons.

Activities that encourage children to reflect on the quality of their talk

1. Encourage children to evaluate the quality of their talk:
 - Did you find it easy or difficult to talk in your groups? Why?
 - Who was a good talker/listener? Why?
 - Did everybody in the group have the chance to talk?
2. Ask 'how' questions:
 - How can you tell if someone is listening to you?
 - How did you come to an agreement?
 - How did you solve your disagreement?
 - How did the talk help in your group?
3. Encourage them to think about possible rules for talk:
 - What rule would be helpful if...?

An example of a progression of activities leading to the development of rules for talk

Week 1: Focus on talk

- Activity: What did you do at play? (a) Talk to the person next to you (b) Find another person to tell.
- Illustrate successful/unsuccessful talk using stories. Introduce key vocabulary: compromise, agree, interrupt, ignore.
- Reflect on the quality of talk.

Week 2: Focus on listening

- Illustrate not listening using a puppet: "What is going wrong?" "Why?" Draw on vocabulary.
- Pair Activity: Sit children back to back. Ask one of the children to describe an object and the second child to guess it. Discuss how well it worked and what was important.

Week 3: Focus on reaching agreement

- Use debates or other group activities that encourage children to seek agreement (E.g. sort, rank).



Resources to support these activities



Talk Cards

Talk cards can be helpful when encouraging the use of new vocabulary during group activities. Children can be encouraged to use one (I think...) or more cards (I agree because...) during group activities.

For younger children:

Use a puppet and pretence play to model good use of talk as well as potential problems. Encourage children to describe what happened and how the dialogue could be improved.

For older children:

Use action figures (such as LEGO minifigures, or figures made by children), to enact how good and bad group work looks. Children can also enact a problem that they anticipate during group work, and ask the whole class which strategies might be helpful to address them.

Talk Display and 'Group Contracts'

The Talk Display will allow you to highlight new vocabulary, remind children of talk rules and also to record children's appropriate talk behaviours. Having group contracts in which children have committed to work with rules.

Pictures of 'Talk Behaviours'

The goal of this activity is to establish a set of ground rules for talk in the classroom. Children work in small groups (3 or 4 children), and are given a set of statements concerning talk behaviours (see the picture resources on the following pages). Ask them to jointly agree on which behaviours are helpful and which are not helpful to encourage dialogue. Also, give children the chance to identify those behaviours they are not sure about. After the small group work, the whole class is encouraged to identify the most important behaviours that should constitute the class rules (4-5 rules to start with).

Examples of success criteria for the group work

- Listen to each other's' ideas.
- Explain your ideas to everybody in the group.
- Group the cards into those that are helpful (good ideas) for talk, not so helpful (bad ideas), and those that the group as a whole is not sure about.

For this activity to be successful children need:

- To be familiar with the talk vocabulary.
- To be familiar with the idea of explaining their reasoning to others. Previous activities should have encouraged children to use questions like: "What do you think?" or "Why do you think that?" and answers like: "I think that because..."
- To be able to read the statements (with or without the support of pictures). Reading abilities should be taken into account when grouping the children.

You can copy the cards on the following pages for use in the activities.

Talk

Take turns

Listen

Agree

Reasons

Disagree

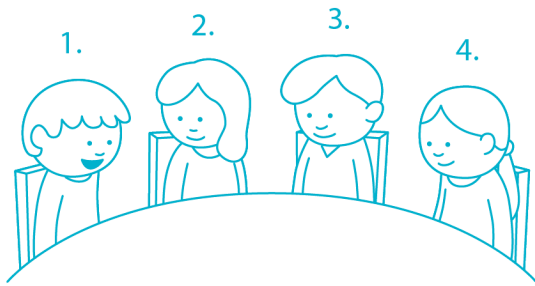
Interrupt

Compromise

Ignore

Why do you think that?

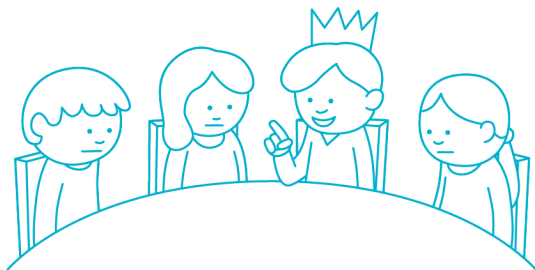
I think...because...



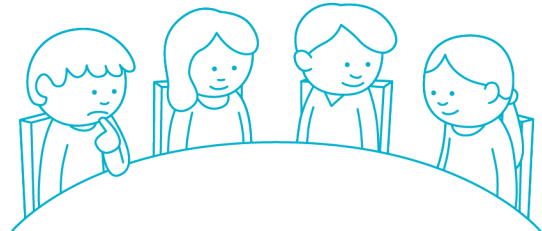
We will take turns to talk and listen.



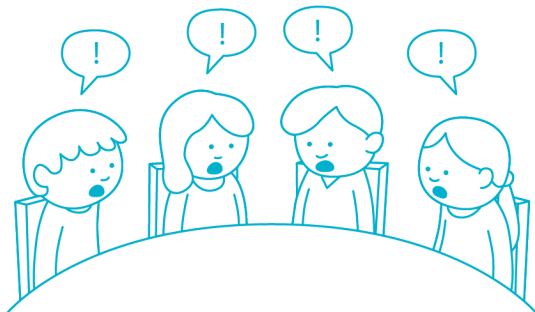
We will try to reach a shared agreement.



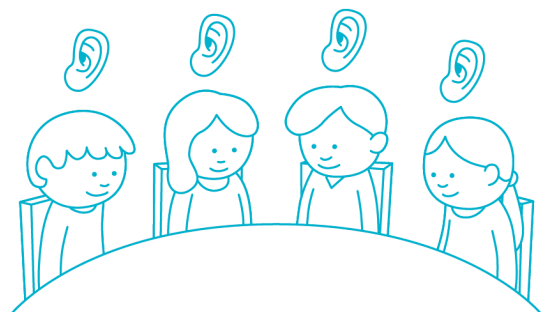
Everyone must do what the leader says.



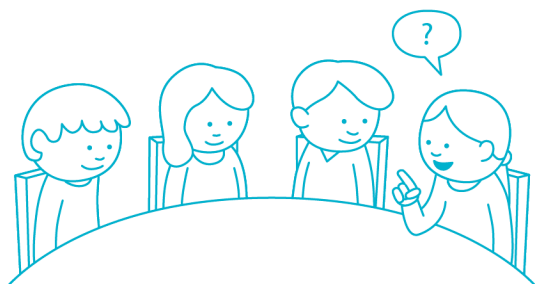
No one can change their mind.



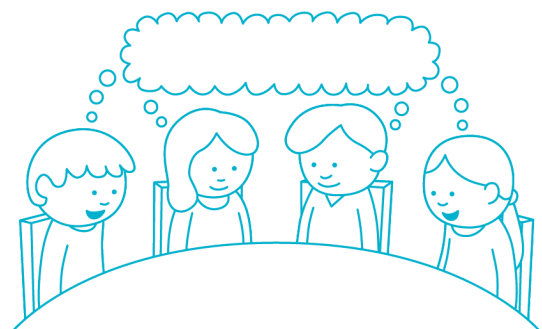
Everyone will talk as loudly as they can.



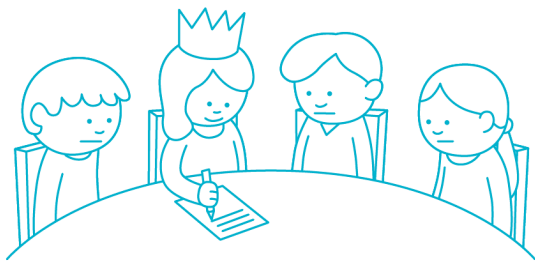
We will listen to and think about each others ideas.



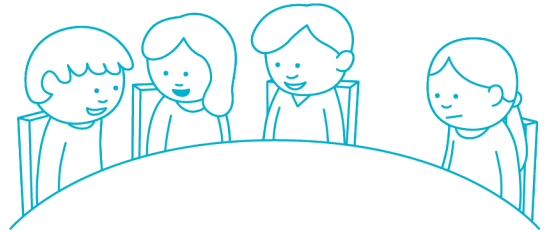
Ask for reasons.



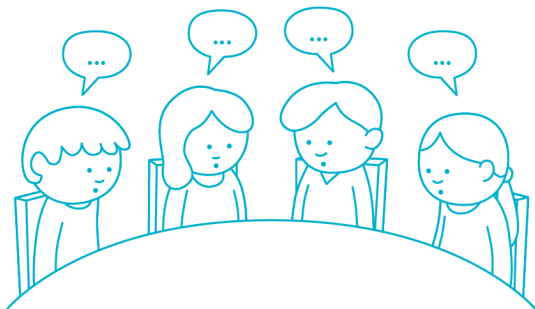
We think it's best to share our thoughts.



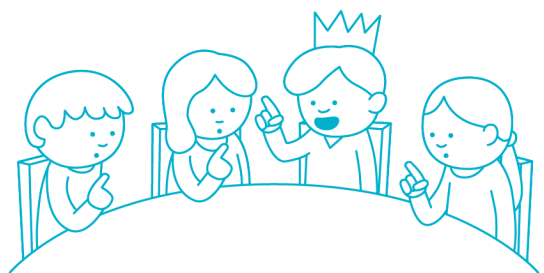
The person who is writing
chooses what happens.



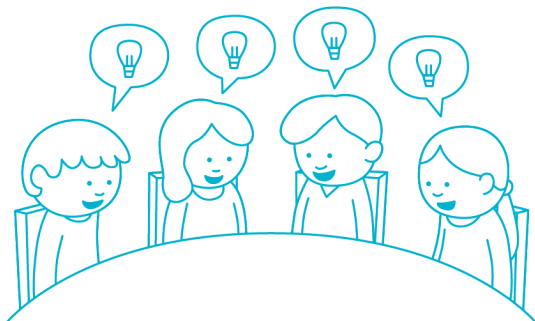
If people find it hard to join
in we can ignore them.



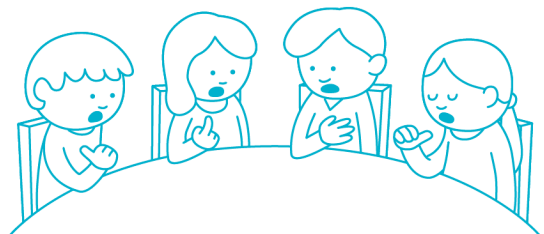
We will keep our ideas quiet so
that no-one else can copy.



The person who speaks first
will decide what to do.



We understand that talking is
thinking aloud together.



We are going to try to overrule
each other in our group.



We will make group decisions
that we can all agree on.



Good
TALK
ideas



Not
sure



Bad
TALK
ideas

Linking building and writing

Building with LEGO® bricks and creative tools is fun, but the transition from building to writing may not always turn out to be easy for children. Here we present some tips that the participating teachers found useful in linking the building activity and writing.

Tip 1: Attaching vocabulary to the LEGO model

Giving children new vocabulary that would be useful and physically attaching the vocabulary to their LEGO model can make a good link between their model and the writing. Children may have understood the words while not really applied them to their writing. When seeing the vocabulary in front of them, children could match the vocabulary with parts of their building, and use the provided words to produce their writing.

Tip 2: Asking children to write down exciting words

When children are building their LEGO models, they can be given a sheet of plain paper. If they come up with any exciting words or adjectives or adverbs or phrases, they can write them down and use these words or phrases later when they are writing.

Tip 3: Modelling using the LEGO model to write

Several teachers mentioned modelling as an essential step, that is, carefully showing children how you want them to use their model to write. You could get one of the models that the children have built and show them how to look back at it and write. This would help them understand how they could use their model as the prompt to support their writing, rather than just literally describing their LEGO model.

Tip 4: Asking children to explain their own models

After a group has finished building, you could ask children to explain their models. After children working on a table finish building, you could ask them to explain what they have built to other groups, especially when the model is abstract. This will get the children thinking about how they are going to tell the story, write their report, or whatever they are doing. Giving children the opportunity to verbalise their ideas will help them to construct a structure, sentences and specific vocabulary that can be used in their writing.



Tip 5: Looking back at their own models after finishing writing

Once children have completed their writing, it could be beneficial to ask them to look back at their models again, and to see how they have used their models and whether they need to use them differently. Children can think about whether their writing plans, or the ideas they have when building their models, have been reflected in their writing, and whether any improvements can be made to their writing.

Tip 6: Taking photos of LEGO models and using them to help writing

Keeping all the actual models that children have built may not always be feasible. To remind children of their creations, you could take photos of their models and use these photos to help them write. Children can stick these photos in their books and look at them when they are doing their writing.

Tip 7: Giving children a clear goal

It can be helpful to give children a clear reason for having fun. Having a clear goal in mind and knowing what they are going to do after building their models will be beneficial to their writing.

Example of PLaNS Lesson in Year 1

The following is a lesson that took place with children aged 5. In the story 'Room on the Broom', a witch and her cat fly over forests, rivers and mountains on their broomstick until a stormy wind blows away the witch's hat, bow and wand. They are retrieved by a dog, a bird and a frog, and each animal asks for a ride on the broom. They climb on, one after the next, until the broom is so heavy that it snaps in two...



Illustration from page 22 of "Gems from Mother Goose", McLoughlin Bros., Inc. (1899)

Before building

- Setting the context (reading the book “Room on the Broom” together)
- Explaining the task (retelling your favourite parts of story in the right order)

The teacher read the book “the Room on the Broom” to the children (they had heard the story before) and discussed what happened in the story with the children. She then took out a LEGO® set and explained to the children what they were going to do.

Teacher:

So we’re going to pick some of the bits of the story that we like the most. And we are going to try at the end of this morning is to write the story. We need to tell it in the right order, don’t we? So we need to think in what order things are happening.

The teacher asked the children what happened first, second, and next in the story, and the children retold the story in their own words. She then asked the children to work as a team to choose 3 parts of the story that they were going to make.

Teacher:

We need to think about different parts of the story. We need something from the beginning, something from the middle, and something from the end. You need to talk to your LEGO buddies because you are going to make your stories together.

Children looked at the book together and discussed which scenes they wanted to make. They decided to make a truly magnificent broom, a dragon, and a broom snapping into two.

During building

- Encouraging children to work as a team
- Reminding children of their plans and what they still need to make

Children started choosing LEGO pieces from the boxes to build their models. At first, two girls both wanted to make the truly magnificent broom, and one of them suggested that they could make it together. They decided to use two bases to make a long broom and there were lots of negotiations and compromises going on while they built their models.

The next pages illustrate their discussions while building and writing.



Ann: Shall we make this for the truly magnificent broom?

Emma: No. I'm doing the truly magnificent broom.

Ann: I thought you're doing the one in the first.

Emma: No. I'll start it off.

Ann: Maybe I'll just do that with you for now. Maybe we can... Let's use two boards for the broom because it's a really long broom.

(Ann joined with Emma and the two girls built together.)

Ann: This looks like a really comfortable seat (she put the seat on the base)

Emma: No. That's the wrong seat. We need the seat in the front.

Ann: Oh yeah!

Emma: I have a good idea... (She chose a LEGO piece from the box and showed it to Ann). That can be a bird.

Ann: I think the best bird is a bat.

Emma: Ok if you insist (She picked a piece of bat from the box and put it on). A bat! (The two girls laughed together)

Working together, the two girls built a seat, a dog, a cat, a bird, a witch, and mountains and lights for the truly magnificent broom of the story. After a while, the boy Charlie made a shower for the frog and happily showed his model to the two girls. However, Emma did not seem happy and said she was planning to make the shower. Ann apologised to Charlie for Emma and tried to persuade Emma to include Charlie's shower model into their truly magnificent broom.

Charlie: (smiling and showing his model to the two girls) Look! I did the shower for the frog on the broom!

Emma: (looking at the model and not seeming very happy) But...but I'm doing the shower for the frog on the broom!

Charlie and Emma both remained quiet for several seconds. Then Ann whispered "sorry" to Charlie.

Ann: Yeah. But Harry hasn't done anything for the truly magnificent broom, Emma?

Emma: (to Ann) But then...you've done most of it.

Ann: (to Emma) But you can help me!

Emma: I'm just doing this bit. That's all what I'm doing. I don't want any arguments in here! (to Charlie) But is it OK if I copy that?

Charlie: Yeah.

Emma: Thanks.

Charlie: But there is not much of the same bits.

Emma: Oh...

Ann: Maybe you can use Charlie's or it will be very sad of him because he would be without the truly magnificent broom.

After the three children built for about 20 minutes, the teacher asked what they've made. She then moved the finished truly magnificent broom model onto a display board and asked the children to work on other models that they still needed to build. The children then started discussing how they could make a dragon model.

Charlie: (showing a LEGO piece to Emma) Look, this can be the mouth.

Emma: (receiving the piece from Charlie and trying to make it open and close) Em...OK. Look, (showing it to Ann) it's open, closed, open, closed.

Seeing that Emma is using his idea, Charlie smiled.

Emma: And it was my idea to go closed, open.

Charlie: It was both of our idea. And I can still make the mouth with fire.



The children were then busying making their dragon model. They made the dragon's body, horn, eyes, and wings. When the two girls had different opinions, one reminded the other: "you need to listen to each other's ideas. We're LEGO buddies". When the boy wanted to make his own dragon model, a girl reminded him: "we are working as a team".

After building the dragon model, the children also made a model of the monster which was actually made up of the cat, the dog, the frog, and the bird. The children decided to use brown bricks to represent the mud surrounding the animals. They also made a witch lying on the floor to represent that she was fainting.



Transition from building to writing

- Using posters to help sequence the models
- Encouraging children to use their models to make sentences before writing

The teacher put all models that children had finished on a display board and took away all the unused pieces. She then took out some yellow posters and asked the children to use the posters to help them sequence their story.

Teacher:

We're using these to help us sequence the story, because we're going to retell the story. So looking at the LEGO models will remind you of some of the things that happened in the story. So what happened first in the story, who can make a sentence of what happened the first?

One girl made a sentence "once upon a time there was a witch who had a cat". She then wrote down number 1 on a yellow post-it and put it aside with the model which represented the first part of their story. The children then took turns to retell what happened next in the story, before writing down number 2, 3, or 4 on a yellow post-it and putting each post-it aside with the model which represented the second, third, and fourth part of their story.

Teacher:

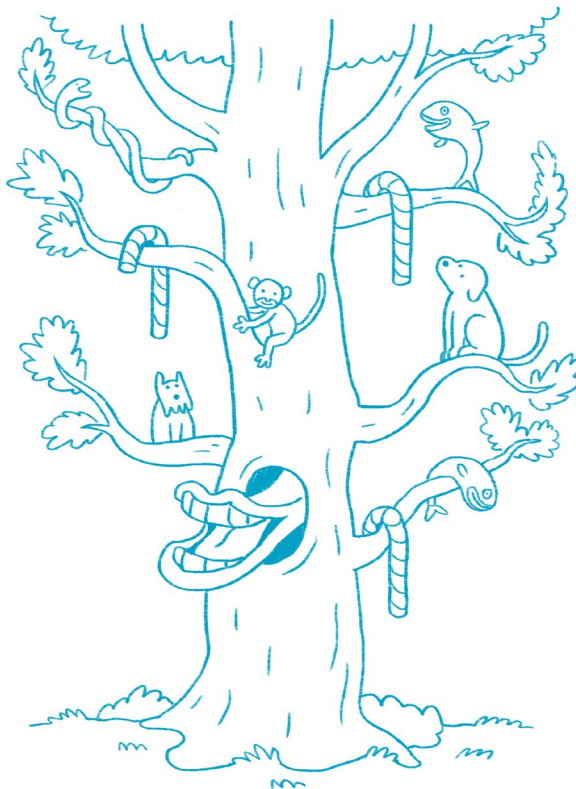
Now you're trying to write the story in the right order. You might want to use words like first, second, and next. Look at the LEGO model to help you remember what happened if you forget...If you could include some story book language like "whoosh! They were gone", that would be lovely.

The teacher wrote down "once upon a time there was a witch" on the flipchart and asked the children to continue their own stories.

The children were highly concentrated in their writing. They sometimes stopped writing for a bit and read what they had written before rubbing some words and revising them. The teacher helped them with the spelling of words occasionally. After 30 minutes, each child wrote more than one page of the story.

Example of PLaNS Lesson in Year 3

This is a lesson example with 7-year-olds working with the story 'The Enchanted Wood': When Joe, Beth and Frannie climb up to the top of the Faraway Tree, they meet Silky, Moon-Face and the Saucepan Man. Their new friends show them an exciting secret – how to visit lots of strange and magical lands and they have many thrilling and magical adventures.



The teacher introduced the lesson by asking questions about the story that the children had read.

Teacher:

Last time we read a little bit of the book and the children were up the tree and they found a magical land, do you remember anything about roundabout land? Do you remember what it looked like?

Children discussed what the characters in the book found on the top of the tree, such as running rabbit, mouse, trees, and music.

Teacher:

So the last line of that chapter was "I vote we don't ever come back to this tree". But of course, they did go up to the tree again. And every time they went up to the tree, they found a different land. Some of the lands were really nice lands, and some of the lands were not so nice lands. So do you think the roundabout land is a nice land or not?

Children discussed what they liked and not liked about the roundabout land.

Teacher:

So today we're going to be thinking about if we went up to the faraway tree, what land might we find? I've got a whiteboard each, and I'd like you to jot down any ideas. I might jot down some as well. We are eventually going to be building something together, so we'll have to compromise on it. But let's get some ideas first. They can be nice, or they can be not very nice.

Before building

- Setting the context (discussing the story)
- Explaining the task (creating your own faraway land)
- Inspiring ideas and writing down children's decision
- Reminding children of talk rules

Materials on the table: whiteboards, sheets, pens, and pencils.

Children and teacher wrote down their ideas on each one's whiteboard for about 2 minutes. Then teacher asked each child to explain their ideas.

The ideas that children came up with included no-vegetable land, dog land, chatterbox land, fish land, noisy land (where everything talks), and animal land. The ideas that the teacher came up with included flying land, chocolate land, giant land, trampoline land, and jelly land.

Teacher:

So lots of really good ideas. You're going to come up with your idea together, so you can combine different ideas. Before you start, you need to think about your talk rules. Can you remind me of your talk rules?

Children discussed their talk rules, such as "think about big ideas", "I'm not going to talk when someone else is talking", and "not shouting".

The teacher asked the children to discuss which ideas they are going to use as a group. She reminded them of the importance of compromise when working as a team.

After giving children 5 minutes to discuss, the teacher asked them to decide their ideas and wrote down their decision on a flipchart.

The children decided that they will have Zombie Land with armies of fish in the south, Gummy Bear Land in the north, Human Land in the middle, Giant land in the west, Gravity and Trampoline Land in the east.

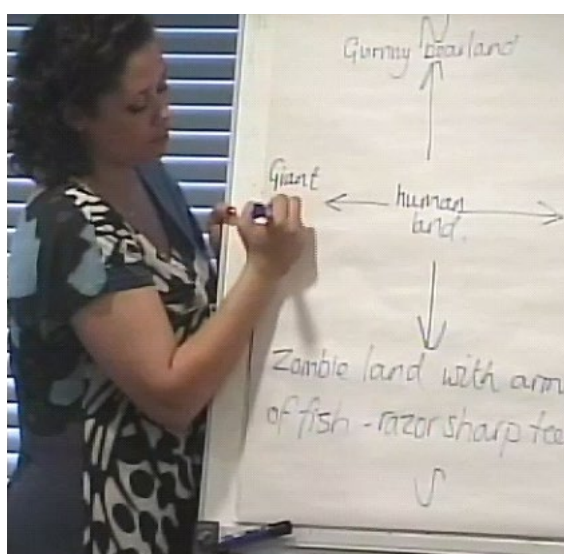
During building

- Encouraging children to plan before building
- Asking children to explain their models
- Reminding children of the time

Teacher took out LEGO® bricks and encouraged the children to decide what they were going to make each and to think how they were going to build them.

A girl and a boy decided to make Zombie Land together first, another girl decided to make Gummy Bear Land first. They decided that they would put all the lands together afterwards. They also came up with building ideas such as using tall figures to represent the giant and making a square to represent the trampoline land.

Children were given 40 minutes to build and were all highly engaged in the activity. They talked about building ideas (e.g. using blue cylinders to represent the eyes of the giant and yellow blocks to represent its head), negotiated about special LEGO pieces, and pretended talking as zombie and fish.





Ellie and Charlie were building a Zombie model together while Jane was building a gummy bear land.

Ellie: (to Charlie) Come on then, we can do this.

Charlie: (Singing) Babababa...How are we going to do the head?

Ellie: Just do a circle. (She added a brick on top of the model)

Charlie and Jane both laughed.

Charlie: That hat? Basically that hat?

Ellie: Yeah, just make it a bit taller.

Charlie: OK. (He helped add more bricks onto the model)

Ellie: Keep on building. (Ellie and Charlie continued working on the model)

Charlie: (excited) I know what the head can be. I've got a great idea. I found something (he found a cylinder LEGO piece out of a box and showed it to Ellie). This could be a head.

Ellie: Let me check it.

Charlie: Or they can be the eyes. I've got two.

Ellie: I think they should be their ears. Maybe they can be their shoulder parts like that.

Charlie: No, no, no, because we need four of them, you know.

Ellie: Yes I know. So pass me another one.

Teacher reminded the children when they had 10 and 5 minutes building time left, and encouraged them to think about what they still needed to build.

When the building time finished, the children had made a Zombie Land model, a Fish land model, a Giant Land model, and other models such as tractors and bikes.

The teacher then asked the children to pack up unused LEGO pieces into boxes.

Transition from building to writing

- Giving each child a chance to talk about their models
- Encouraging children to think about how to make good sentences
- Asking children to jot down their ideas and writing plans

After children packed up the unused pieces, the teacher asked them to explain what they had built.



Jean (pointing to her model): This is fish land and they've got some doors. And they're neighbours. And if you want to leave there, you just jump out the door and to the Gummy Land.

Ellie: And this is Zombie and Gratify Land. And this is our tractor! This is the child seat for the fish, the army fish (Moving the tractor model through the doors). And this is the way they come out to fight, and they come in.

Charlie: No. They come in the other way.

Jane: I think you should put the door the other way around.

Ellie: Oh. So they come out and come in.

Teacher:

Now what I'd like you to think about is to imagine that you were the children going up to the top of the faraway tree and come out to this land. So you're going to do quite a lot of detailed description, we want it to be a really fantastic piece of writing. So what sorts of things do we need to include?

Children came up with ideas such as full stops, capital letters, commas, fronted adverbials, adverbs, powerful verbs, and adjectives. The teacher then wrote these down on the flipchart so that children could see when they wrote.

Teacher:

So if you come out to the land, what's the important type of information that you're going to include, what they can hear, what they can smell, and what they can see? You can also say what they are feeling inside.

The children discussed what information they would like to include and spoke out descriptive sentences, such as "slowly and cautiously Joe steps onto the land".

Teacher:

Great! Lots of details! Now I'll give you 2 minutes to jot down any ideas you have that you're going to include in your writing.

Children started jotting down their ideas for writing on their own whiteboard. Teacher then asked them to start writing and reminded them that they could look at the model, use it to help them describe, and imagine that they were there.

The children started writing. They occasionally talked about words that they are going to use in their writing and discussed how their story would develop. They also used their models to act out what happened next for a bit and then came back with their writing.

The teacher reminded children of the time when they've got 15, 5 and 2 minutes left to write. When children finished writing, the teacher asked them to read through their writing, check the punctuation, and see if there is anything that they could do to improve it.



Example of PLaNS Lesson in Year 5

In this example, children aged 9 wrote their own Greek myth. The picture below shows some of the cards used in this lesson. On one side of the cards are pictures of the Greek myth characters (e.g. Perseus, Hercules, Cassandra), gods, goddesses (e.g. Athena), monsters (e.g. Typhon), or weapons (e.g. sword). On the other side of the cards are more detailed descriptions of the characters, gods, or weapons.



Before building

- Setting the context (Greek myth)
- Explaining the task (creating your own Greek myth story)
- Inspiring ideas of building and planning

Materials on the table: a box of LEGO® bricks, a pile of Greek myth cards, activity sheets, pens and pencils.

The teacher took out a pile of Greek myth cards and asked the children to sort them into heroes, gods, monsters, rewards and treasures. Children discussed Greek gods and creatures with the teacher while categorising the cards.

Teacher:

Now your activity this morning is to choose one or more of each of the sections (cards), and once you've done that, to think of a way that you can draw them all together to create a Greek myth story of your own... You're going to need to select a hero or some heroes, the tools they might be given to help them, the creatures or monsters they need to defeat, and which god might help them to do it. Perhaps one of the gods will be the person that gives them these things.

The children started choosing and talking about the characters on the cards. The teacher reminded them to work as a team and agree together what they were going to have and how they would string their ideas together. After talking about their ideas, the children decided to choose Athena, Cassandra, Perseus, Hercules, and Typhon to create their own Greek myth story.

Teacher:

So you're now going to have some time to get out the LEGO bricks and use the LEGO bricks to start planning your story. You might want to use the LEGO bricks to build the characters, and you need to think about the settings... We've looked at things like Greek temples, so what you need to do is to design your ancient Greek setting... If there is any ideas you want to jot down, you can do so, you also have the LEGO bricks there to build with as much as you can.

During building

- Asking children to explain their models
- Reminding children of their story plans
- Asking children to think how their models can help with their writing

The children were highly engaged in building their LEGO models, with lots of conversation going on. They exchanged ideas of how they were going to build their models, showed their models to each other, and acted out in a playful way with the models they had built. They used green pieces to build the Parthenon, red and yellow pieces to build a cabin for Typhon, and blue pieces to make a lake. After finishing building the settings, they started making the characters.



Kate: Look, look, look. I've done Athena. Athena, Athena (singing while one hand holding her model and the other holding the card of Athena). It's taller than any other gods.

Harry: (humming and dancing with his model) Look at this dragon!

Kate: (laughing) No, you don't need a dragon!

Harry: Yeah, I do. He (Typhon) is a half dragon guy.

Kate: You need a dragon's head.

Harry: I don't really mind. I'm just going to make a dragon anyway, because it will take hours to build the actual guy.

Kate: True.

William: (holding his model) Guys, look, look, Perseus, he is surfing in the air.

After the children had built some models, the teacher asked them to explain what they had made. He reminded them to think about their story and how they could use what they had built to represent the problems that the characters would encounter. He also asked them to think what they still needed to build according to their plan and how their models were going to help them write their story.

After finishing their models of characters, the children started making weapons and tools for their characters. One boy made a sword and used it to pretend slaying a dragon.



William: Look, look, Kate, I've got a sword (showing his sword model) and then you can swap it around whatever you're happy.

Harry: It's more of a stumped sword.

William: Where's the dragon? I need to slay the dragon. Dragon is right there! There is a seat!

Harry: I know. I know.

Harry passed the dragon model to William.

William: Put the seat on (he put a seat on the Pegasus model). OK, guys, you need to get out for the game.

Harry: Let me give you the sword.

William: Heracles, where are you?

Kate:(passing a model to William) Here it is. That's Cassandra.

Kate started singing on her chair. William and Harry joined the singing as well.

When the building time finished, the teacher asked the children to pack away all the unused bits into the box, leaving only the models they built, the cards, sheets, pens and pencils on the table, before they had a break.

Transition from building to writing

- Giving each child a chance to talk about their models
- Asking children to discuss the opening, build-up, problems, resolution, and ending of their story
- Asking children to jot down their ideas and plans

After the break, the teacher asked each child to talk about their models. The children explained that they had made Typhon, Perceus and his sword, Athena, Cassandra, Heracles, Pegasus and Parthenon.

The teacher then asked the children what happened in the start of their story. The children decided that three famous Greek heroes Cassandra, Heracles, and Perceus visited Temple Parthenon in the opening of their story. "Perceus comes into Temple Parthenon and wondering what he can do. Then he sees Heracles and he has a chat with him and asks him if he can do some training with him. He finds a shining sword. Cassandra goes into the Parthenon and sees them fighting."

The teacher then asked the children what was going to be the build-up that may lead to their problems. The children decided that "a cabin is being set fire and burning down", "and it defeats the evil", "out of the ashes of the fire comes up a massive Typhon".

The teacher then gave children some time to discuss what problems may be caused and how the characters were going to resolve the issues, and what happened in the end. The children discussed and jotted down ideas on their sheets.



Teacher:

Now you do have your LEGO models here, you are allowed to make use of this. But try to remember that this is here to try to help you to do your writing, not to stop you from doing your writing. If you need to change something as part of your story, to help you think, that's fine to do, but make sure after you move it, we stop and get back on with our writing activity, because that's the main point of this now we're moving to the writing.

The teacher reminded the children that they could look at their group plan while they were writing, and that they could use one of the VCOP sheets to help them think about their punctuation.

Kicking off writing

- Providing children with useful vocabulary
- Reminding children to use their models to help with their writing

Teacher:

You've discussed very well. Now we need to start writing. If you need any help with spelling, you've got things like the character's names, all written down here (teacher passing cards to the children). How you're going to write your story is up to you, but you've got your words there to help you write, to spell some complex words.

The teacher told the children to use their best spelling attempts, but not to worry too much about spelling things perfectly. He also explained how to make use of their LEGO models to help with their writing.

The children were highly engaged in their writing for about 40 minutes. They sometimes discussed their ideas of how the story would develop and read what they've read to the rest of the group. They also occasionally looked at their cards and LEGO models before continuing with their writing.

Ideas for playful writing

Year 1 activity ideas

Going on a micro-adventure - descriptive recount

- **Main purpose of the activity:** Write a descriptive recount of a story. Children had been working with a story about a journey of two characters that had been "micro-sized" to the size of an ant, and were going on a journey down a street, or through a garden.
- **Building instruction:** The teacher showed a video that had been taken with a camera very close to the ground in a garden, so that children could imagine the world from the perspective of a minute being. Children discussed in carpet time. They were then asked to create the character's journey with the mixed set.
- **Writing instruction:** Children were asked to write a descriptive recount of this journey and everything that the two characters could see, hear, or smell.

Creating a journey for a story character linked to The Lighthouse Keeper's Cat

- **Main purpose of the activity:** children had read the beginning of the story - The Lighthouse Keeper's Cat and got to a page where there was a large map. There was a path going around the page and the cat met lots of characters on the way and did lots of things until he got to the village at the end. The teacher set the children the challenge of creating a journey that the cat could go on. It could be similar to the one in the story or it could be completely imaginative.
- **Building instruction:** Children were given a whiteboard in their groups and drew the journey first. They decided what was going to happen to the cat, whether he was going to climb a mountain or jump over a river or meet a cow and lots of different things. Then they went back to their tables and they had their whiteboard next to them and they built the LEGO® representation of it.
- **Writing instruction:** to use your model to act out the journey the cat went on. Then write the journey as a story.

What happened next? – creating a different ending to Humpty Dumpty

- **Main purpose of the activity:** children had read the story of Humpty Dumpty. They need to come up with a different ending following the structure: Who made Humpty fall of the wall? How did they do it?
- **Building instruction:** Children had to build the recreation of what happened to Humpty.
- **Writing instruction:** to write one sentence describing who made Humpty fall and how. Remember the use of capital letters, 'finger spaces,' and punctuation.

Creating your own "Toy Story"- imaginative writing

- **Main purpose of the activity:** To create a story scene and characters and act out story with dialogue before writing their own stories.
- **Building instruction:** To build a scene from your story with all the characters (children had already planned their stories on a story board) and act out your story. Children made backgrounds on card to stand behind their LEGO models.
- **Writing instruction:** Write your own toy story using your story plan and LEGO model to help you.

Designing your own circus – imaginative writing

- **Main purpose of the activity:** for children to use imaginations to design own circus and write about it.
- **Building instruction:** decide as a group what you would like to have in your circus (e.g. which performers) and make it together using the LEGO bricks.
- **Writing instruction:** describe all the things and people that you included in your own circus. Explain what they look like and what is happening.

Hedingham Castle visit recount - non-fiction writing

- **Main purpose of the activity:** write about our visit to Hedingham Castle the day before using time connectives to sequence events.
- **Building instruction:** after a discussion session and looking at photos of our visit on the interactive whiteboard, children were asked to choose 3 different activities from our castle visit to model using the LEGO bricks and put them in the correct order.
- **Writing instruction:** write what happened on our visit to the castles trying to put events in the correct order and using time connectives, such as first, next, then, after that.

Australian Animals - producing an information page

- **Main purpose of the activity:** produce an information page about an Australian animal (as part of topic work on Australia).
- **Building instruction:** children work as a group to choose one Australian animal and make a model of it, and where it lives.
- **Writing instruction:** write sentences about your animal on an information page format and illustrate it.

Producing London landmark leaflets - linked to 'Katie in London'

- **Main purpose of the activity:** build one of the landmarks in the Katie in London story (St Paul's Cathedral, London Eye, Globe Theatre or Tower of London) to support non-fiction leaflet writing about the landmark.
- **Building instruction:** children previously went on a "Journey to London" (trip to federated classroom that was set up as London Landmarks) and explored the 'Katie in London' story. They were then encouraged to use photo of a landmark to support building it using LEGO bricks.
- **Writing instruction:** write leaflet with headings – "what you will see there", "what you can do there", and "other interesting information".

Year 3 activity ideas

Setting a scene in outer space - descriptive writing

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to use descriptive language and range of sentence openers.
- **Building instruction:** having listened to a part of George's Secret Key to the Universe (which described outer space) build what outer space looks like.
- **Writing instruction:** to use range of descriptive phrases (space adjectives, verbs and adverbs) to set the scene for an outer space adventure.

Writing a poem - in the style of "10 Things found in a wizard's pocket"

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to use the framework of the poem "10 Things found in a wizard's pocket" to write "10 things found in the Paperbag Prince's Pocket". The Paperbag Prince is a character from our key text.
- **Building instruction:** think about the character of the Paperbag Prince. Build something that you would find in his pocket that tells us something about his character.
- **Writing instruction:** to use the objects to write a poem, in the style of the poem "10 Things found in a wizard's pocket".

Telling an alternative adventure story – linked to "The Tunnel"

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to write an alternative adventure story of Jack when he goes through the tunnel (from Anthony Browne's "The Tunnel").
- **Building instruction:** to make three scenes showing: 1. Jack coming out of the tunnel; 2. What he finds; 3. Jack being turned to stone.
- **Writing instruction:** to write three paragraphs telling Jack's story based on the models.

Creating a hero for your own story

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to create a hero for children's own story, describe the character and write a story of it.
- **Building instruction:** to build a hero for your story. Think about any special skills (e.g. weapons) your character might need.
- **Writing instruction:** use the mini-figs to write their story.

What happened next? – completing The Adventure of the Time Travelling Cat

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to complete the rest of an adventure story that children already read up to a certain point in the book.
- **Building instruction:** to build models to show what happened next and how the story finishes.
- **Writing instruction:** to write the rest of the story, using the model to help with descriptive details.



Creating a habitat for a new creature - information text writing

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to create a new creature and also create the habitat to go with it.
- **Building instruction:** to build a new creature and build its habitat, making sure they include all the elements the creature will need to survive.
- **Writing instruction:** to write an information text about the creature and its habitat, using headings etc.

Saving the park - persuasive letter writing

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to write a letter to a council persuading them to save and rebuild the local park.
- **Building instruction:** to build the scene where the protesters are in front of the council explaining what they want.
- **Writing instruction:** to write a persuasive letter in order to save Stanley Street Park.

How to make a mummy – instruction writing

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to write a set of instructions.
- **Building instruction:** to use the LEGO to act out embalming a dead Pharaoh. The children had to pretend they were chief embalmers training new apprentices.
- **Writing instruction:** to write the instructions for how to embalm a body, using the features of instructional writing.

Finding of Tutankhamun's Tomb - newspaper report writing

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to build the tomb and the characters involved- Howard Carter, Lord Carnarvon, Lady Evelyn and then write a newspaper report – using newspaper features and languages.
- **Building instruction:** to build the tomb and represent those present at the field.
- **Writing instruction:** to write a newspaper report about the tomb finding.

Year 5 activity ideas

Creating a comic strip - mixing ICT and Art with literacy lessons

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to tell a story of climbing into a painting and changing it – in comic strip form. Children previously went to an art gallery and picked a painting, within their groups, that they wanted to recreate with the LEGO set.
- **Building instruction:** each group were given a camera and a LEGO minifigure. They had to take five photos of their models, one for each scene of the comic strip. They were also given the task of changing an aspect of the paintings, as the minifigure was to break into the painting and leave, or change, something to show that they had been there.
- **Writing instruction:** add text to your photographs to tell the story. The writing section of this task was spread over a length of time, and over the progress of the task.

Recreating a bedroom – linked to “Through the Keyhole”

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to create and describe the bedroom of a character from our story using subtle descriptions (hints about whose room it was).
- **Building instruction:** to recreate the bedroom you imagine the character to have.
- **Writing instruction:** to write a description of the bedroom without mentioning the character’s name.

Writing a play script - modernising a Shakespeare scene (Hamlet)

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to decode an original Shakespeare scene using LEGO bricks and write it as a modern play script.
- **Building instruction:** to create the scene and read through it with each group member taking a different part, speaking their lines and moving the character (acting with it) appropriately.
- **Writing instruction:** to rewrite the Shakespeare scene in a modern style.

Writing a poem: “go tiptoe through the woods”

- **Main purpose of the activity:** for children to plan the scene of their poem, considering effective imagery and appropriate vocabulary. The poem that they were basing theirs upon has a specific structure and pattern that they were asked to follow.
- **Building instruction:** to create your images independently for 15 minutes. Share and listen to ideas. Work together to build one group model. Attach descriptive vocabulary to your model.
- **Writing instruction:** to create your own poem based upon the example and follow its structure. Use the LEGO model to help you describe each section.



Creating freeze frames - alternative story ending writing

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to combine children's predictions and imaginations to create an ending for an author's chapter.
- **Building instruction:** to create freeze-frames using the LEGO bricks (they then did actual freeze frames after as well).
- **Writing instruction:** to write the ending of the chapter, using paragraphs and connectives.

Retelling the story of Romeo and Juliet

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to build two scenes per group of three to add to the class storyboard-telling the whole story as a class. Clues to who the characters are must be present and body language should be considered.
- **Building instruction:** children had a synopsis of the story, which they were already very familiar with and their two sections were highlighted. They were to build the two scenes providing clues to characters and feelings so that they were easily readable to others.
- **Writing instruction:** to use synonyms to introduce the story; use causal connectives to retell the middle of the story; use the conditional to explain the regrets of the characters at the end. Each child had a storyboard of photos of all of the scenes produced.

Representing a tense encounter – linked to 'Theseus and the Minotaur'

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to create the scene where Theseus encounters the Minotaur.
- **Building instruction:** to create a crucial, detailed scene when Theseus comes across the Minotaur.
- **Writing instruction:** to describe in writing the feelings of a character at a point of tension.

Creating a crime scene - police report writing

- **Main purpose of the activity:** to create a crime scene and then retell what had happened in the format of a police report.
- **Building instruction:** to create a crime scene based on the book "Tuesday".
- **Writing instruction:** to write a police report ensuring that it is written in the third person, with quotes and direct speech, and that it is written with evidence.

Credits

This teacher handbook is written by

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Follow this link to access the ChAT handbook:
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bzu8VsCz0-yaRjZrOU1YM3gzYzg>

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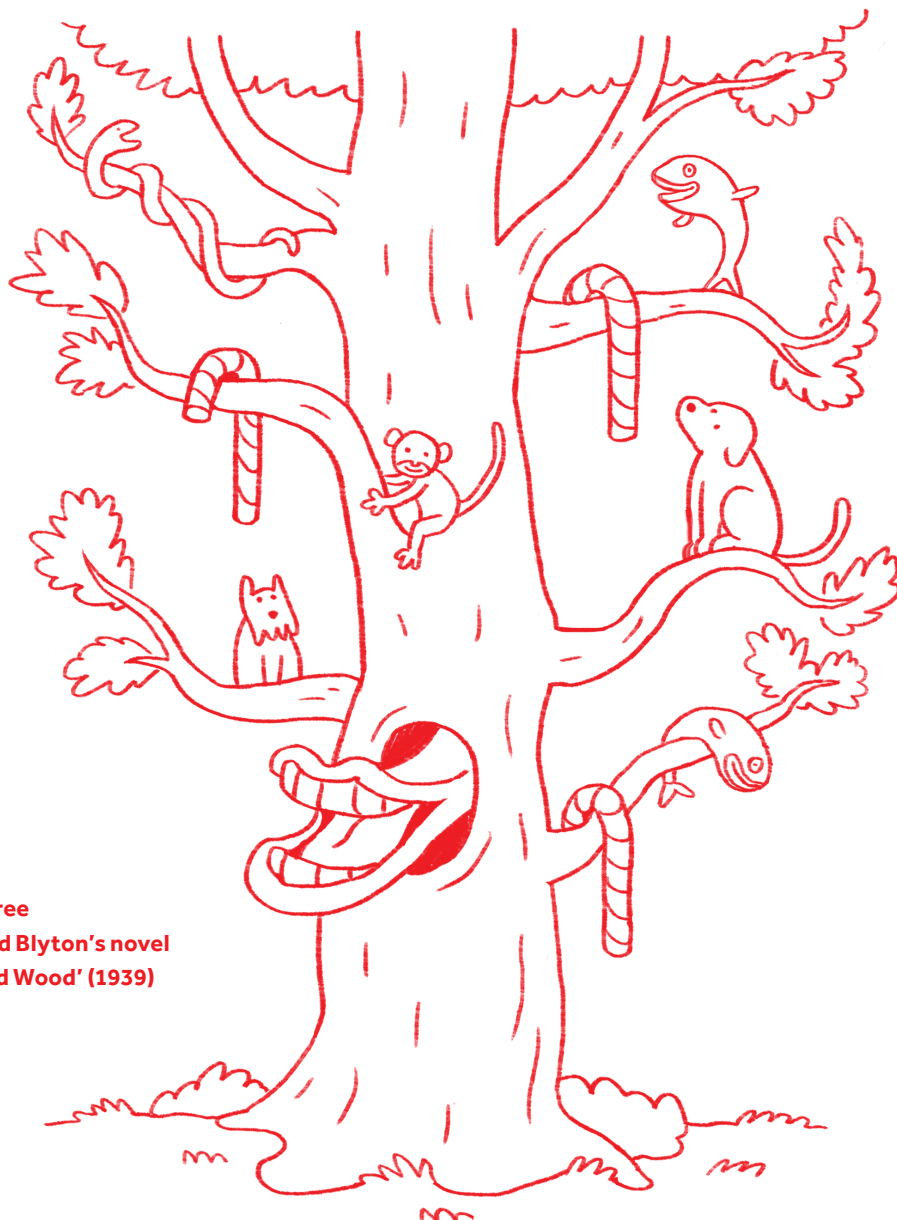
About the PEDAL Centre

The PEDAL centre is located in the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, and was launched in October 2015 with funding from the LEGO Foundation. Our mission is to conduct academic research into the role of play in young children's education, development and learning to inform wider practice and policy.

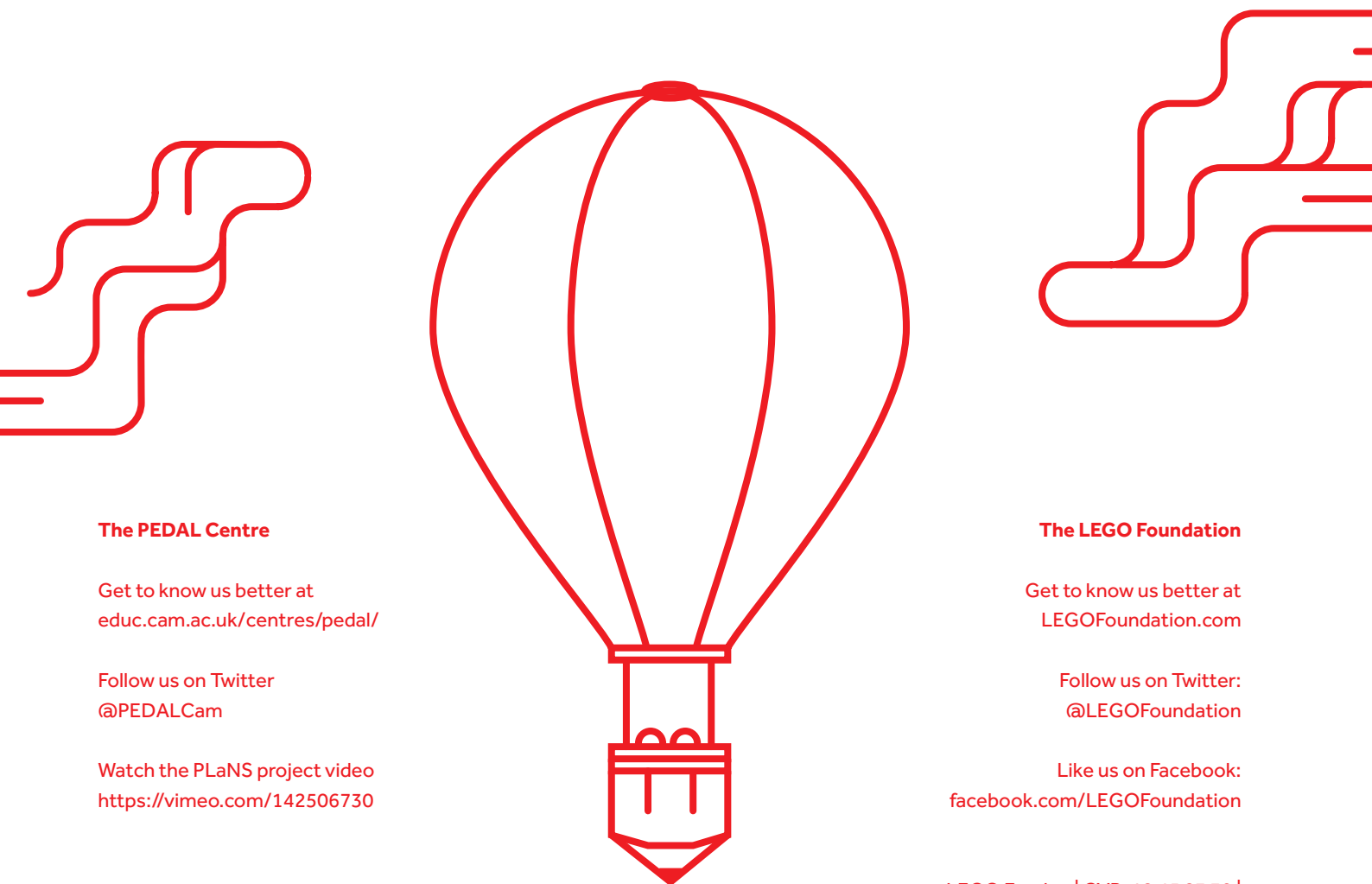
About the LEGO Foundation

Founded in 1986, the LEGO Foundation is built on the enduring values of the founding family behind the LEGO Group. Our aim is to raise awareness of the role of play for creativity, learning and development and to build and share knowledge on how to engage children in learning-rich play activities. We collaborate with leading academic institutions to cultivate and spread this knowledge, and we strive to equip and empower children to build a better future for themselves and their societies.

The Faraway Tree
Inspired by Enid Blyton's novel
'The Enchanted Wood' (1939)



Together, we champion learning through play



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