Year Two Report: Build and Test

Penryn Creativity Collaborative
Action Research Report

Research Question:
How can teaching writing through embodied immersion
impact innovation, imagination and playfulness?

Lead Action Research Teacher:
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Creativity Collaboratives Network Partner:
KEAP (Kernow Education Arts Partnership)

PERRAN-AR-WORTHAL
CP SCHOOL

KEAP

Penryn Creativity Collaborative Action Research Report

This Action Research project is part of the Penryn Creativity Collaboratives.

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Context

Creativity Collaboratives is a national pilot programme of eight clusters of schools across England who are working together to test innovative practices in teaching for creativity, sharing learning to facilitate system-wide change. The programme, launched in October 2021, is funded by Arts Council England with generous support from the Freelands Foundation. Creativity Collaboratives: Penryn Partnership is the South West pilot for the programme and over the course of three years is focused on exploring one central question: Does teaching creativity across the curriculum lead to young people who are better prepared for their future in a changing workforce?

The Penryn Creativity Collaborative is led by Penryn College with eight local primary schools and research partner, the School of Education at the University of Exeter. This report presents findings from one of thirteen action research projects which took place during Year 2 of the Penryn Creativity Collaboratives programme. Each action research project was led by a teacher with students from their own school, included a link with a partner from a local industry and the lead teacher was supported by researchers from the University of Exeter through a programme of training and mentoring.

Full findings from Year 2 can be found in the research report. To cite this report please use:

Crickmay, U. Childs, S. Chappell, K. (2023). *Preparing for a Creative Future: Year Two Report Build and Test* https://penryn-college.cornwall.sch.uk/creativity-collaboratives

This action research project involved 15 Year 5 pupils of Perran-ar-Worthal Primary School. Perran-ar-Worthal School is a 6-class school who is committed to delivering a curriculum that suits the needs of the children within the local area. At Perran-ar-Worthal School, our vision is to make 'every moment matter' for each and every child, where we recognise 'every moment' as a learning opportunity that cannot be wasted. The project was carried out over a 6 week half term following training delivered by KEAP and was led by Ben Teasdale who is the Assistant Headteacher and Raising Standards Lead at Perran-ar-Worthal School.

The project explored using the five creative skills as developed in Year 1 of the Penryn Creativity Collaboratives Project (Crickmay, Childs & Chappell, 2023), to impact innovation and risk taking in writing. The 'immersive sessions' were hour long writing sessions where the children would experience a range of different immersive experiences including sitting around a fire before writing using their senses, bringing in items from home with narrative potential to structure a story and being provided with a range of shoes to describe a character from the shoes up. Within the sessions which were taught through embodied immersion, utilising material from the KEAP imagination firelighters project there were opportunities for peer and self-assessment together with opportunities for the teacher to model and scaffold ideas and using the creative skills wheel, have the opportunity to develop metacognition.

The role of the industry partner, KEAP, was to deliver teacher CPD about writing creatively, offer support to teachers when they require it and deliver immersion events to the children. Being a strategic leader in creative education in Cornwall, KEAP were invaluable as a partner for this project and they delivered 'Imagination Firelighter' CPD sessions to myself and two of my colleagues which highlighted the value of immersion in writing sessions. The children who took part in the 6 week programme were invited to take part in a creative writing morning at 'The Ladder' where they engaged in 'writing like an author'.

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DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Creative Skills

The research drew on the Penryn Partnership Creative Skills Framework developed during Year 1 of the Penryn Creativity Collaboratives programme (Crickmay, Childs & Chappell, 2023). The framework defined creative skills in a five-part model and this action research used the five sections of this model as follows:

- **Dialogue and collaboration:** Drawing in notions of dialogue, questioning, communicating and collaborating, in both verbal and embodied ways
- **Honing and developing ideas:** This combines the skills needed to develop creative ideas, incorporating aspects of self-reflection together with development of techniques and understanding of the rules, and the persistence needed to progress creative ideas and actions
- **Empowered action:** Foregrounding pupils' own agency in creative action, as a skill this includes the ability to take risks and question accepted ideas, the capacity to be immersed, and the ability to act on creative ideas
- **Being imaginative and playful:** This is the ability to utilise imagination, to improvise playfully, and to generate and try out possibilities: as with possibility thinking, it is the ability to go beyond an understanding of 'what is' to consider instead 'what might be'
- **Generating new ideas that matter:** This includes the ability to combine innovation with critical attention to the consequences of ideas, considering the ethical impact of creative actions, and understanding diverse values

- KEAP: Kernow Education Arts Partnership, strategic leader in arts and creative education in Cornwall
- Embodied immersion: Embodied immersion refers to pedagogical approaches that focus on the non-mental factors involved in learning and which signal the importance of the body and feelings (OECD., 2018)
- Imagination Firelighters: training delivered by KEAP. Immersion writing sessions were called 'Imagination Firelighters' for the 6-week project
- Peer-assessment: provides a structured learning process for students to critique and provide feedback to each other on their work
- Self-assessment: a way of encouraging children to evaluate and assess their own learning
- Modelling: an instructional strategy in which the teacher demonstrates a new concept or approach to learning and students learn by observing and making learning notes
- Scaffolding: a method where teachers offer a particular kind of support to students as they learn and develop a new concept or skill
- Metacognition: support pupils to think about their own learning more explicitly ('learn to learn') (EEF, Metacognition and self-regulation)

AIM OF THE RESEARCH

"…arguing less for creativity in education as connected to young children being innovative for its own sake, but more for creativity in education as being a collaborative and communal endeavour which is grounded in the body, and which can contribute to developing a whole person who considers the impact of their actions." (Chappell et al., 2016, p. 21).

As per the work of Chappell et al., I was interested in the embodied dimension of creativity - in particular through the idea of embodied immersion in writing. Chappell et al. explored embodied creativity in the Early Years of education, so I wanted to apply a similar study to writing in Key Stage 2.

The specific issues the study tackled:

- Explore if teaching the creative skills through writing enables children to take creative risks
- Explore if teaching writing through embodied immersion encourages innovation
- Explore if teaching writing through embodied immersion encourages imagination

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METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

Research Design

Qualitative data was collected in this project to explore imagination, innovation and risk taking in children when writing. The data collection methods included artefacts (children's work); photographs (of children during immersion sessions); observations of children (during immersion sessions) and transcription of focus groups (following immersion sessions). To guide data collection, I used the 'Preparing for a Creative Future' wheel, is a data collection tool which was designed for the Penryn Creativity Collaboratives project. Around the edge It includes the five part definition of creative skills developed during Year 1 of the project, with each skill broken down into three detailed sections. Inside the wheel, teachers or students can mark whether they noticed each of the skills being used a little, some, or lots. I used the wheel to initiate conversations in focus groups before using it as a tool for teaching in the lessons to aid metacognition.

Participants

Fifteen children participated in the action research, aged nine and ten, with parental consent. There were nine girls and six boys of mixed writing ability.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out via immersion in all data, followed by transcription of selected audio. Photographs were coded using the See, Think, Wonder technique from Harvard Project Zero. All data was then systematically coded using low level through to higher level coding which led to a thematic analysis. Triangulation of data against the research questions was carried out to explore the impact of teaching writing through embodied immersion. This is written up below in this report.

Credibility

The research project was planned to ensure rigorous methods were utilised, triangulating observations, photographs, and pupil voice from the focus groups. The inclusion of the Creative Skills Wheel as an additional data collection method further enhanced credibility. Transparency was considered through providing information to both pupils and parents. A standard thematic coding process was followed to ensure rigour. The teacher researcher engaged in discussions with colleagues throughout to enhance reliability, trustworthiness and credibility.

Ethical considerations

Ethical research practice was ensured by following the ethical guidelines of the University of Exeter ethics committee which are grounded in the British Educational Research Association (2018) guidelines; protocols involved seeking informed consent for all research activity from all participants alongside careful data protection practices.

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MAIN FINDINGS

Brief Summary

- Creative skills were not innate in the participating children, there was a need to teach and develop them
- Embodied immersion enabled all children to access the content, not just those with greater 'life experience'
- As the focus in the writing sessions was based in creative processes, spelling, punctuation and grammar was taught separately
- Modelling and scaffolding were used in each process
- Children had the opportunity to be creative

Creative Skills

Data was analysed in relation to the Penryn Creative Skills Framework to assess which creative skills were being utilised/developed by children during their writing in the immersion sessions. Each part of the framework is presented here with a comment about the level to which each skill was demonstrated/developed and some examples of data including children's own reflections and extracts from their work.

Dialogue and collaboration

There was some evidence for dialogue in the analysis; there was really strong evidence for students working collaboratively in small groups towards a shared goal (working together is mentioned regularly), although there were few opportunities to work in large groups.

"It was hard to not just use your idea and use other people's to write a better story but we all did it and it's worked well." Year 5 student, post-session focus group.

When peer-assessing each other's work, collaboration was also evident:

"I wouldn't like it if someone highlighted all of my work. It means there is nothing to improve on." Year 5 student, post-session focus group.
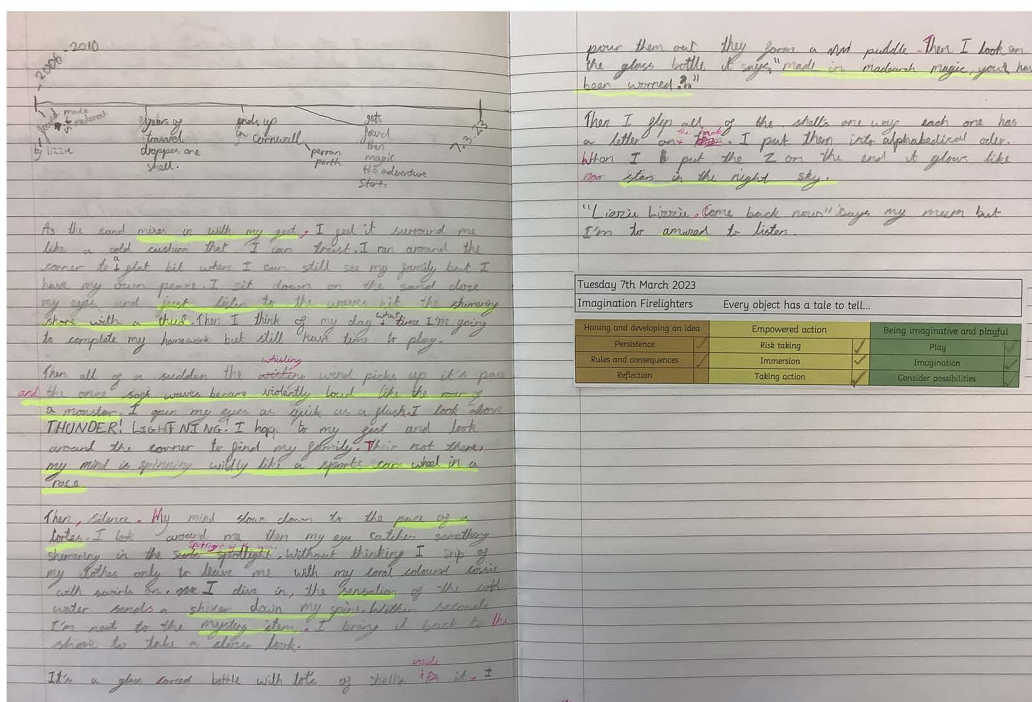
The pupil's book is below:

Figure 1: Group of 3. Strong evidence of collaboration when peer and self-assessing

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"Well, if I've got an idea I might try and change it so it sounds something that I don't normally, like…so it sounds like something that I wouldn't normally say, so it kind of sounds different. But it also sounds better to, like, my peers and, like, other people around me." Year 5 student, post-session focus group.

Honing and Developing Ideas

There is strong evidence of 'reflecting, analysing and evaluating' as it is mentioned or evident in each of the areas of data.

 "And then if we have, like, five minutes after that to write, like, a paragraph, like, you look back at the sentence and say, 'That's actually a good idea but I can put that idea into different words and make it sound better.'" Year 5 student, post session focus group.

There is weak evidence of students demonstrating persistence from the focus group discussions, but it was shown in the observations. For example, when engaging in 'What is in the box?' one child commented:

"I had to be resilient because thinking what 8 things someone might have in their box is hard." Year 5 student, observation.

Understanding rules and consequences is less obvious from the focus group data but can be seen in children's work, for example:
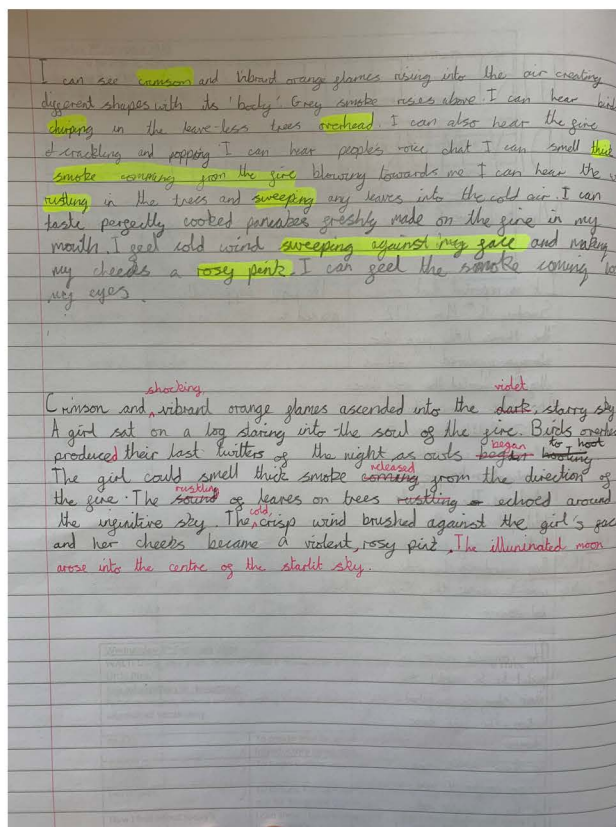

Figure 2: Reflecting, analysing and evaluating

The child is reflecting, analysing and evaluating as well as considering rules and consequences of spelling and grammar rules: 'Crimson and vibrant' modify and describe the noun (orange). The child has realised the rule of the past tense suffix '-ed' when evaluating 'produced'. 'Sound' has been upgraded to 'rustling' which is good evidence of reflecting, analysing and evaluating.

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Empowered Action

There is strong evidence of taking risks (going out of my comfort zone), being immersed and putting ideas into action (particularly in relation to taking risks) in all areas of the data.

 "Because I never used to take risks. 'Cause I always used to think I was going to make a mistake. But now that we've been doing imagination firelighters, it's helped me a lot." Year 5 student, post-session focus group.

"But now being able to take risks I've been like, just…I'll start off with something and then I can build on it." Year 5 student, post-session focus group.

The recognition of taking risks when sharing ideas to a group was also evident:

"We had to take risks with sharing our ideas and if we wanted our idea to be heard we had to be brave to do it. Then everyone wanted to listen to the idea." Year 5 student, post-session focus group.
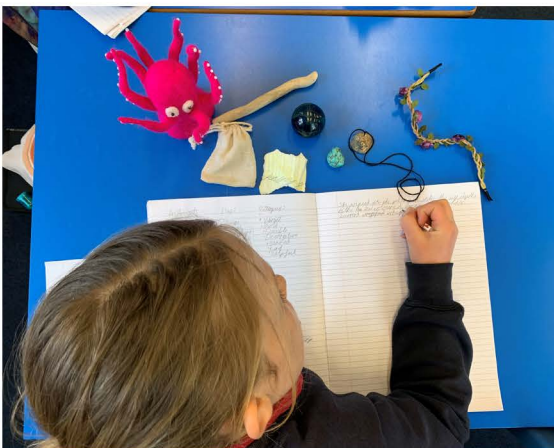

Figure 3: Items with 'narrative potential' brought in from home

This is good evidence of creative risk as the children could only choose 8 items with 'narrative potential'.
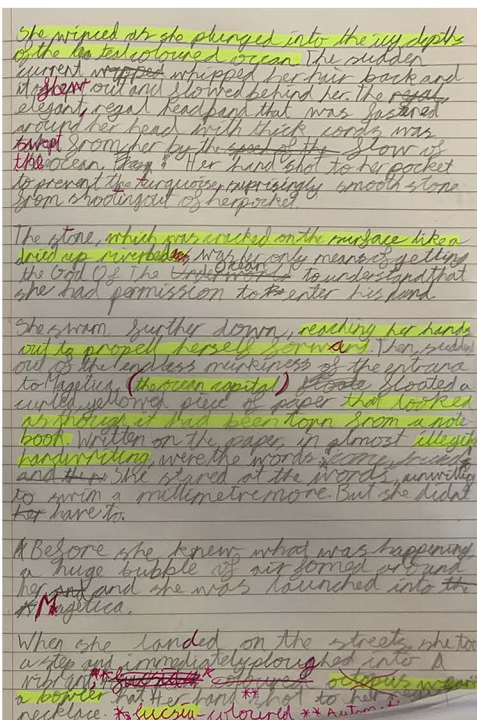

Figure 4: Creative Risk Writing

This is good evidence of creative risk. The child is taking their ideas and putting them into action whilst taking risks within a narrative. The items (above) were ordered which became the timeline of the story. Selecting the order of the objects already selected from home took the child out of their comfort zone as they had to plan and act with action.

The same child as in the photo and who produced the writing: In response to the teacher asking the question, 'And it looks like it had cracks everywhere. But how do you know that's what a…you've used a simile 'like a dried-up riverbed', yeah?' The child has demonstrated the level of immersion in the content whilst taking risks using what they know.

"Because in our other lessons we are looking at climate change and there's lots of pictures of, like, cracked ground because of dried up.. like, because the land is drying up." Year 5 student, post-session focus group.

Being Imaginative and Playful

There is strong evidence of each of the areas of the creative skill 'being imaginative and playful' in each area of the data. These comments from a focus group underline the links between students exploring possibilities and taking risks in their writing, the importance of play, as well as the interrelation between considering possibilities and students' skill in honing and developing their work:

> "I used to be quite afraid of making mistakes. Because I always thought that you were looking for the best, like you wanted me to do as much as I could. But now I've learnt it's all about the quality not the quantity." Year 5 student, post session focus group.

> "Well, instead of just using one idea, like thinking about all the different ideas and then seeing which one is best or works best." Year 5 student, post session focus group.

This student has previously been a reluctant writer in writing sessions. This is good evidence that the children are able to generate more than one idea which is more possible through immersive writing sessions.

> "I think that if you manage to develop ideas and then if you manage to play with them, then it can develop your sense of creativity and kind of help you understand how to create more interesting work." Year 5 student, post-session focus group.
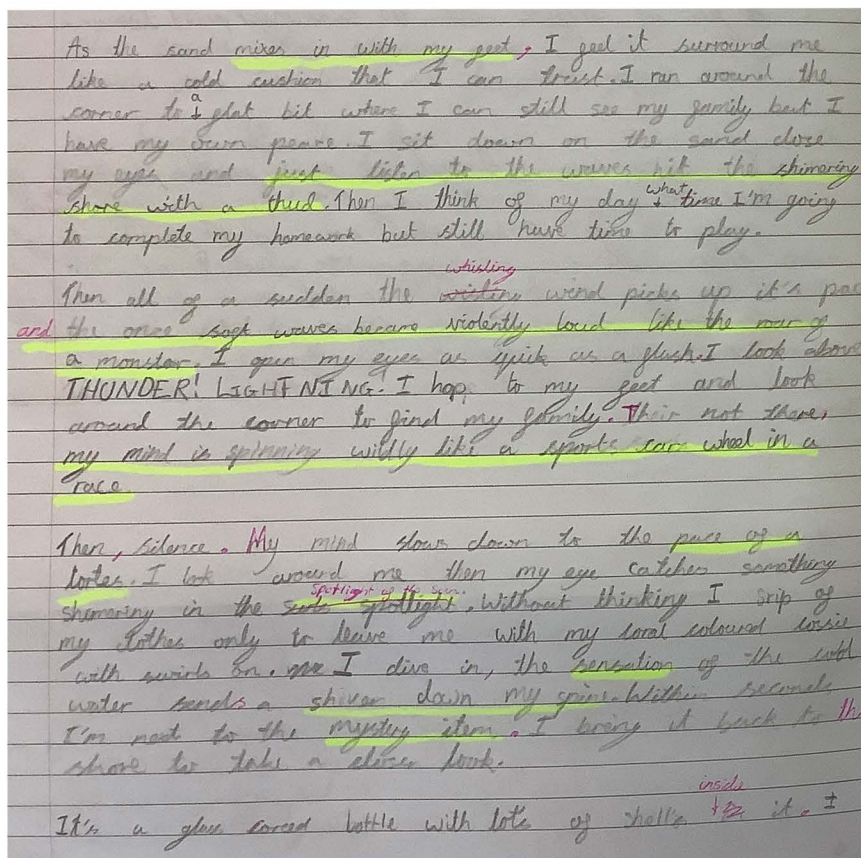

Figure 5: Based on item brought in from home with 'narrative potential'

The use of onomatopoeia (thud), similes (like the roar of a monster) and a metaphor (shiver down my spine) is evidence that this child is improvising whilst writing (play), being imaginative and considering possibilities.

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Generating New Ideas that Matter

There is weak evidence of considering the ethical consequences of creative work but strong evidence of understanding diverse values (other people's enjoyment).

> "Now I feel like I'm changing how I write it and, like, putting it into different points of view." Year 5 student, post session focus group.

> "I understand that different things are important to different people." Year 5 student, post session focus group.

There is strong evidence of exploring new ideas that matter to them (innovation).

> "I have to have original ideas and not just use the first idea in our heads. We built on each other's ideas and that was new to us." Year 5 student, post session focus group.
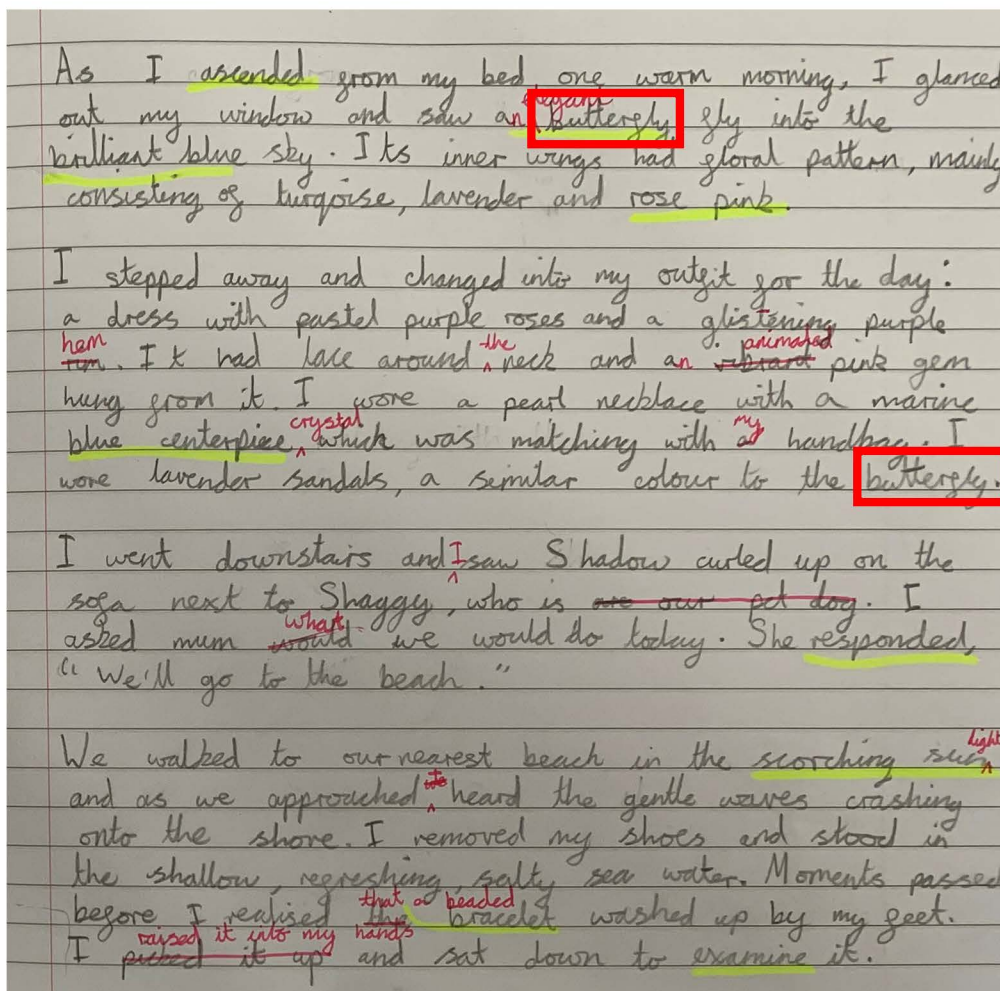

Figure 6: Evidence of Innovation and Consideration

This writing shows both evidence of innovation and consideration for the enjoyment of the reader: the student links the two paragraphs with a description of the butterfly and a colour comparison to the butterfly. Building cohesion across paragraphs is evidence of Upper Key Stage 2 greater depth writing.

Creative pedagogies

Based on the characteristics of creative pedagogies identified in Year 1 of the Penryn Creativity Collaboratives project (Crickmay, Childs and Chappell, 2023), two aspects of creative pedagogies were particularly evident during the 'immersion' sessions.

Empowerment, autonomy, agency: There was strong evidence within the data that the 'immersion sessions' enabled learners to have a sense of empowerment, autonomy and agency. This was particularly demonstrated in the focus group discussions.

> "I think that if you manage to develop ideas and then if you manage to play with them, then it can develop your sense of creativity and kind of help you understand how to create more interesting work." Year 5 student, post session focus group.

> "I've thought more about what's silly, what's grotesque and what's interesting. Like, not just for me but for other audiences." Year 5 student, post session focus group.

From a teacher's perspective, the 6 week immersive teaching process (following CPD from KEAP) enabled me to be more creative and take more risks in my practice. For example, allow the children to guide the writing session rather than have specific outcomes defined at the start of the lesson. This, in turn, allowed me to spend time planning the exact process of the lesson which reduced my workload.

Risk, Immersion and Play: There was strong evidence that teaching during the 'immersion sessions' allowed each of these processes to occur. This was particularly demonstrated in the focus group discussions:

> "I think now I kind of look at my ideas from a different point of view, like from a reader or from another person, like another character in the story. And then think what might happen because that's happening, what might they do, what could this lead to for the rest of the story." Year 5 student, post session focus group.

> "I think that I…during imagination firelighters I've also become a bit…it's kind of risk-taking but almost less scared to use new ideas, instead of, like, using the same language over and over again." Year 5 student, post session focus group.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROJECT AND FINDINGS

Impact

The evidence demonstrates the creative progress the children made in six weeks of teaching through embodied immersion. During our immersion sessions, the children have become more innovative and are able to generate a greater range of ideas; their willingness to take creative risks has increased which has evolved their imaginative processes. This is evident through the children's quotes in post-session focus groups.

The engagement that has been evident within those six weeks is also noticeable. The previously 'reluctant' writers in the class have engaged in the lessons and have taken pride in the work they have been producing.

Highlights

Participating in the CPD sessions with KEAP were inspiring. Attending the two sessions with experienced authors and play writes allowed me to immerse myself in the writing process, therefore giving me autonomy to develop my own immersion sessions with the action research class.

Seeing the enjoyment in the children during every single immersion session was an amazing moment and one that inspired me to push on with the research.

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Limitations

A limitation of the research was that only 15 out of 29 children consented to participate in the research. The full class participated in the lessons, so none of the children missed out on the delivery, but it would have been beneficial to the research to have a greater range of data to draw on.

Future

The next step is to introduce this method of teaching writing across the school. This will require training to be delivered to all staff through INSET days (in-service training day). Firstly however, the other members of staff will need to see the creative skills being taught explicitly and the progress that the children make as a result to ensure that the training is carried out for a specific purpose.

Another step is to introduce the creative skills to each area of the curriculum in school, taking the action research of 'writing' to other curriculum areas (both core and foundation).

Final Thoughts

There is strong evidence to show that teaching writing through embodied immersion impacts innovation, imagination and playfulness. Realising the impact that this teaching method has had on the children in school has given me the inspiration and motivation to transfer this pedagogy to each element of the school's curriculum.

REFERENCES

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Creative Skills
PENRYN PARTNERSHIP

"Does teaching creativity across the curriculum lead to young people who are better prepared for their future in a changing workforce?"

Dialogue and Collaboration
- Question Posing/Responding, Problem Finding/Solving
- Individual/Collaborative/Part of a Community
- Negotiating Difference, Responding Appropriately

Honing and Developing an Idea
- Reflection
- Understanding Rules & Consequences
- Persistence

Generating New Ideas that Matter
- Understanding Diverse Values
- Considering Ethical Consequences
- Innovation

Empowered Action
- Risk Taking
- Immersion
- Taking Action

Being Imaginative and Playful
- Play
- Imagination
- Considering Possibilities