

Allowing children to take the lead

Case Study 7

St Oswald's RC Primary School – Victoria Jarvis

Vicky is the reception teacher in a maintained primary school. Over the last few years there have been a greater number of boys in the reception class. Vicky noticed they were more likely to be hesitant, less confident writers than the girls and they sometimes seemed to have less motivation. She decided to explore ways to catch their interest and channel their energy and imagination to initiate the desire to write. She changed her environment to provide a greater opportunity for child initiated learning to take place.

AIMS

- to initiate a desire to write, particularly in boys;
- to focus the study on two boys, one very young with a July birthday, the other a January birthday.

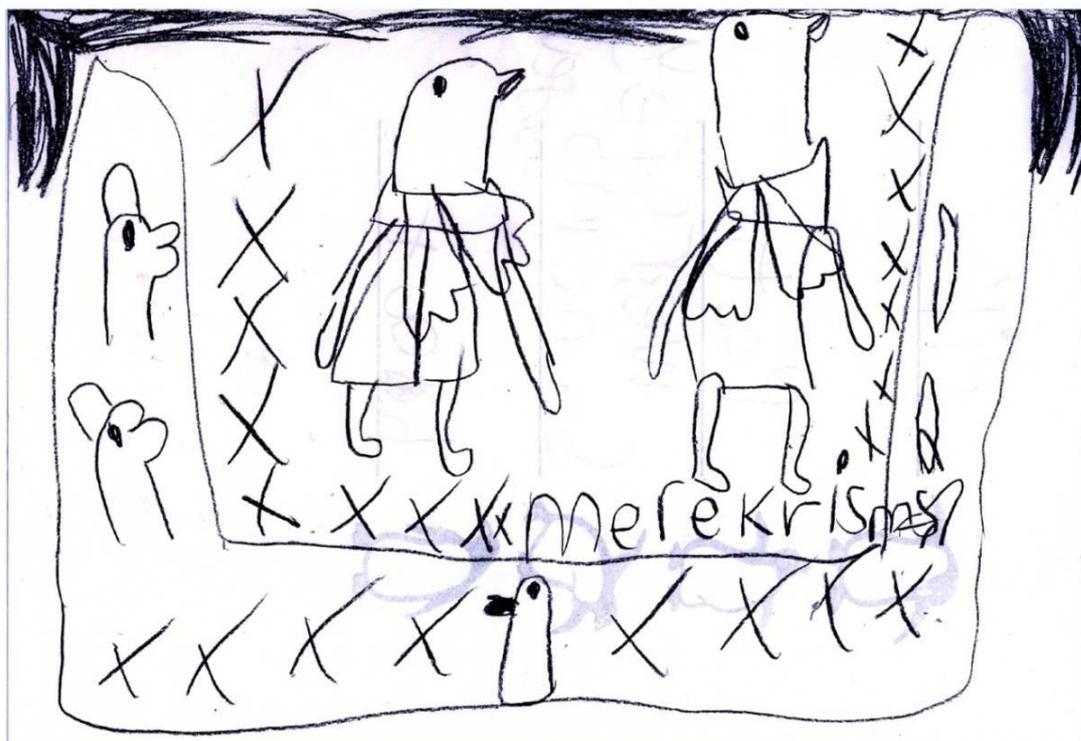
INITIAL STEPS

- Vicky observed the boys in their self-initiated play. This helped her to note that boys needed their writing to have a purpose;
- a particular example was that one of the boys decided to make a poster informing parents not to send 'pop' in packed lunches after a fizzy bottle covered the welfare assistant as she opened it! This spread and soon posters were written on any blank surface!

ACTION

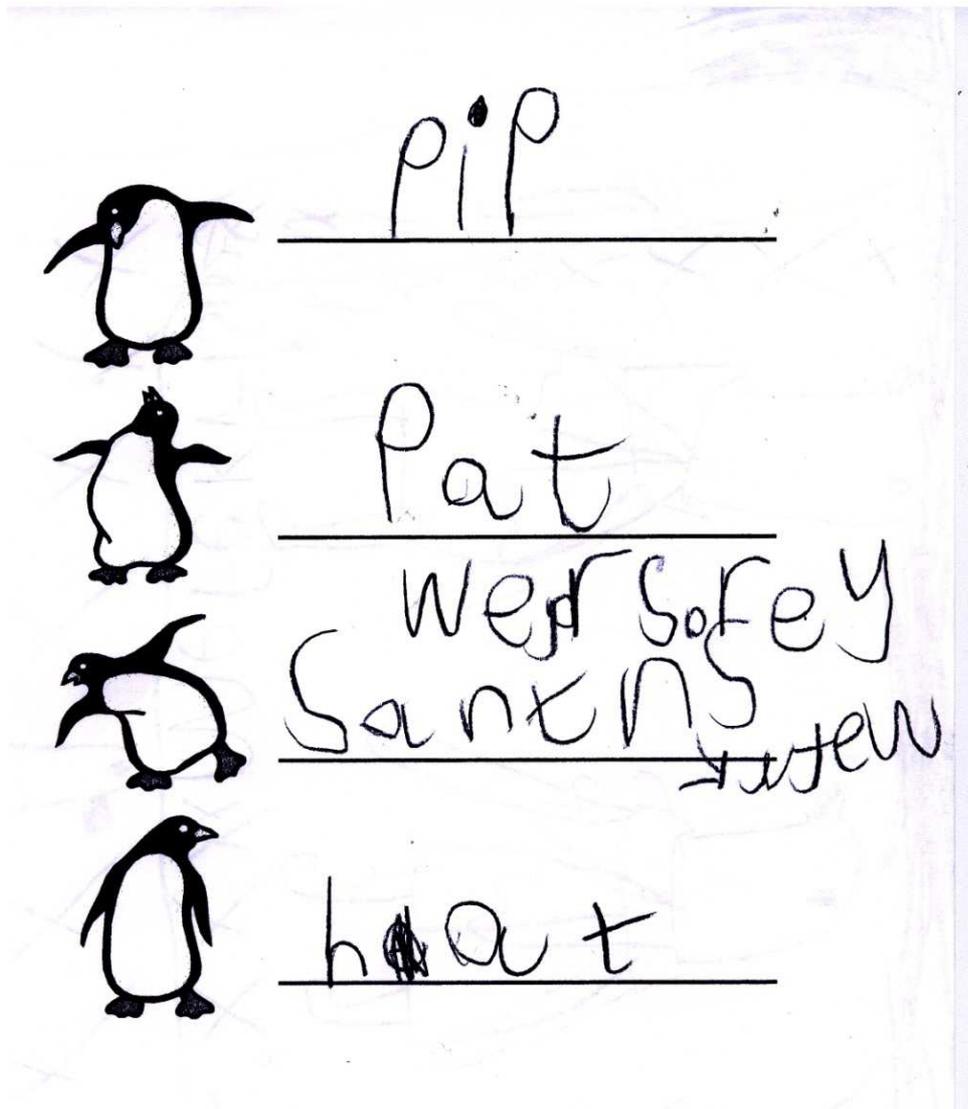
Vicky began to look for opportunities to make the writing more meaningful. Just before Christmas a School Governor presented the Reception class with two toy Emperor penguins – one was a metre tall and the other forty centimetres tall. The children loved them and it gave Vicky the stimulus she was looking for.

Vicky began writing stories about the penguins and what they got up to. They were very mischievous penguins initially they stole Santa's hat and this gave them the power to fly. They then stole hats from other staff and adults working in the school.



The two penguins Pip and Pat

The boys became so excited at the penguins antics that they began to write them notes and everybody in school became involved with the missing hats. The penguins eventually had to fly back to Antarctica from where they sent a letter to say how sorry they were for hiding the hats. On the last day of term in their own time the boys decided to write to the penguins. This was duly put into a large envelope complete with address and air mile stickers.



The boys initiated writing when they saw the need. Instead of initiating ideas herself Vicky began to take them from the children. Combined with their increasing knowledge of letters and sounds she noted that;

- their writing became more detailed;
- they began to teach each other the high frequency words;
- they became more confident;
- their learning became more relevant;
- the boys thought carefully about whole class need.

Examples of the boys initiating their own writing



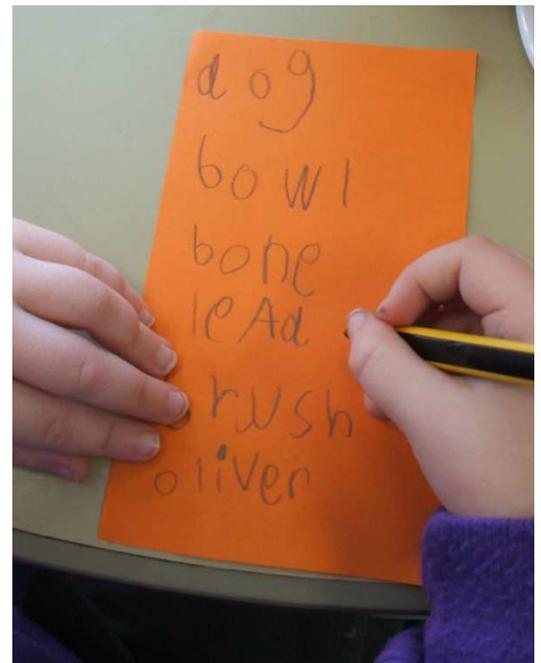
Using the letter stones to write their own names



Writing labels for the vet role play



In the role play and making a list of things a dog owner would want



NEXT STEPS

- to continue to plan an exciting creative curriculum to channel the boy's energy and provide a range of materials to initiate their independent learning and writing;
- to listen carefully and observe what the boy's are interested in, so giving them the opportunity to write for a purpose;
- to monitor progress and use this information and knowledge to help further achievement;
- to involve children in the discussions about classroom management and how their aims can be achieved.

WHAT VICKY HAS LEARNED FROM THE PROJECT

- opportunities for independent learning happen many times during the day and there is a need to observe and offer the environment and resources to encourage this to take place;
- boys need a specific reason to write;
- children want to see their writing displayed;
- boys want others to use their writing.