

This is a rather lovely thing that happened in Hollin primary school in March 2019 where I had the pleasure of spending two days working with lower and upper key stages.

One of the main asks for my visit was to 'develop writing skills through the Romani storytelling experience' Romani storytelling is different to other forms of storytelling mainly because it was (and still is) at the heart of our oracy and communication not merely an add-on.

Educators and parents are often asking me what it is that I do to motivate children (even the most reluctant) to start to enjoy writing. I wish I could put it all down in a book or a program that people could follow, but unfortunately that's not possible as my methods are constantly changing. Only the core elements of storytelling and fun remain the same, everything else changes in response to the changes in how children learn what they are exposed to in society, video games and increased screen time, voice activated controls etc.

\* Writing is imagination made real

My philosophy is that writing is a byproduct of having fun with words and that all we are doing is simply capturing words and ideas that are already floating around, all we need to do is learn a few additional skills and we're creating ideas, characters and stories. Then it's simply recording those great ideas before we lose them, that then leads onto realisation that this writing stuff is rather fun. Taking the pressure off children allows them to explore their own imagination and creativity.

Imagine going to a party and having the hosts instruct you to immediately have a good time, before you have even had a drink or some food or got to know anyone, it probably wouldn't be your best evening. However if the host of the party made you feel welcome introduced you to people at the party and allowed you to slowly but surely feel relaxed, there would be a much greater chance that you would have a good time.

One of the key elements of my approach is to demystify writing and tackle problems, like not being able to get started, thinking they can't write, that their stuff is rubbish, that they have to be as good as professional authors who also happen to be adults.

It's also about giving children the right balance of restriction and freedom, I have certain rules including; no guns, no Zombies, no references to video games or super heroes (unless they are funny and or they are a new self-created super hero) these rules change all the time apart from horrible weapons. My reasoning there is why would you go to all the time and trouble to create a really good character then kill them off?

We have to show children not just tell them how to overcome the obstacles (real or imagined) they face when trying to write. I created the story roundabout for children who just couldn't get started, they had tried things like the story mountain but found it daunting (as would I) storytelling is much more circular than linear so I created the roundabout where you were allowed to start at the end and work in any direction to build your story. How many stories are told through film in flashback? How empowering to be able to start at the end for a change.

I created the Gination to show children just how amazing every child's imagination is.

I love the ordinary and I want children to appreciate the ordinary and see that it is more interesting than they first think by getting children to look afresh at the world around them, their neighbourhood, family and school begins to look a lot more interesting when you look and listen to it with storytelling eyes and ears.

Pens and pencils are often not seen as children's friends in fact quite the opposite so I created Mr Pen and Mrs Pencil's writing implement retirement home. It's a lot of fun wearing pens and pencils out for retirement, I'm constantly finding new ways to get rid of the negative and turning it into positive.

One size does not fit all so I cannot give schools an off the peg solution as my practice is constantly evolving if things don't work I get rid of them and find something else that does. There are lots of programmes already which claim to be able to do this, but when you talk to teachers they tell you they very often fail as they are too prescriptive.

Writing is about imagination so it is of course a mental as well as a physical practice, but I believe those two things are not mutually exclusive so aim to bring them together.

Which leads me onto the quote below from a very experienced teacher who is secure and confident enough in their practice to share this with us all. It is only because of teachers like her that I am able to keep on developing and improving my work in schools.

Regarding the boy in my class who wanted to continue:-

Usually he is a reluctant writer. His behaviour will include hitting himself on the head because he says he can't think of ideas. He gets extremely frustrated with himself. On this occasion, he had lots of ideas. I purposefully had given my class whiteboards as I know from experience that a whiteboard is less daunting to a reluctant writer. There is something overwhelming about facing a blank page which needs to be filled. I also find that the writing process comes more easily to them on a whiteboard because problems/mistakes can be easily rectified.

On this occasion, the child in question filled three whiteboards with ideas. When it was playtime he did not want to stop. He only agreed to go outside for a break when he was assured that he could continue after break! What a difference! He was also keen to share his ideas. Altogether a very positive experience.

Rosemary Moorhouse Assistant Head Teacher

### **Feedback from children following a visit from Richard the Storyteller on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

#### **Reception 1**

Funny. He told funny stories.

There were no pages or book to the story.

We liked when Colin the naughty cat got stuck in the tree.

I liked Colin learning some lessons and some rules.

Richard is a good author.

I liked us being in the story, pretending.

I liked the funny noises he made in the story.

## Reception 2

The children were able to recount the story to me including the catchphrase 'Don't climb up that beech tree.'

They were really enthusiastic whilst talking about their experiences.

We talked about it (the story) and we had to come up to the front and we did some acting.

It was fun.

He did funny voices.

He was joking.

He was making us laugh

## Year 1

He read the story but then we were playing the story.

The fun part was when the dungeon master went like this (showed thumbs down). Then we shouted Dungeon.

I liked it when the King said 'My Queen wants better pegs!' (The child who said this used great expression in his voice.)

## Year 2B

I liked it because Richard told us a story about a little man and it was funny.

I liked the riddles because they were hard but fun.

I liked his story because he used different voices and had expression.

I enjoyed it when Richard used funny voices.

I liked it when Richard was telling us about his mum and he changed character quickly and changed his body language.

**Feedback from children following a visit from Richard the Storyteller on 27<sup>th</sup>  
March 2019**

Year 3M

I really liked the oak tree stretch. It helped our wrists get ready for writing.

I liked when we had to say our names because it makes you feel more confident.

I liked the part when you (the class teacher) let us put two stories together.

I was quite funny, enjoyable. The stories that he told us were good to listen to because he changed his voice.

Year 3S

It was really fun. It encouraged us to write way more than we usually do.

You could write about anything. He gave us lots of ideas.

I had fun writing a story. I used my own ideas.

It was good because he made us do weird voices. It helped our writing to know what the voice of the character was like.

When it was playtime, I felt like I don't want to go outside because I was having fun doing the writing.

He gave us lots of ideas, so it was quite easy to write.

It was good because we could just make it all up.

Year 4C

He was trying to steal my story ideas!

He told short stories which helped us improve our writing.

We enjoyed sharing our writing in assembly.

He explained how a story is written using things around us.

He gave me lots of ideas!

We realised how we could turn an ordinary thing into an extraordinary thing.

### Year 5

So funny, and the best storyteller that's ever come to our school.

He's encouraged me to read more.

Taught me that writing doesn't have to be boring, it can be creative.

Made writing seem fun!

He allowed us to write in whichever genre we wanted, without following the teacher's lead.

Gave me the chance to allow my imagination to run wild.

He's inspiring myself and other children to write.

Gave us lots of tips on how to start writing if you don't know what to do.

Keeping my pencil on the paper gave me lots of ideas to write.

Encouraged me to be more productive with my ideas.

### Year 6

He gave us loads of ideas of what to do when we get stuck. He didn't mention the curriculum once!

Inspiring! He expresses his ideas in a dramatic way that made us feel interested in our own writing.

He made me love English. The story I wrote became precious to me.

He was really funny and his stories had suspense. When he said he was stopping the story and the children said 'Awww!' I wasn't surprised.

I never used to like writing, but he introduced me to what can be fun in it.

I used to just want to get my writing done and dusted but he showed me a different point of view.

I want him to be my Grandad!

We'd love him to come again and I can't wait to read his books.