

Extending Literacy: pupils' interactions with texts, with particular emphasis on the use of non-fiction texts.

Submitted by Maureen Lewis of the Faculty of Arts and Education, University of Plymouth, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, awarded by the University of Plymouth. June 2000.

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The remaining submitted publications are enclosed separately, in book form.

List of submitted, published works

Publications arising from the Nuffield Extending Literacy Projects (EXEL) 1993-1999

1. Wray, D. & Lewis, M. (1997) *Extending Literacy: children reading and writing non-fiction*. London & New York: Routledge.
2. Lewis, M. & Wray, D. (1995) *Developing Children's Non-fiction Writing: working with writing frames*. Leamington Spa: Scholastic.
3. Lewis, M. & Wray, D. (1996) *Writing Frames: scaffolding children's non-fiction writing*. University of Reading: Reading and Language Information Centre.
4. Lewis, M. & Wray, D. (1998) *Writing Across the Curriculum: frames to support learning*. University of Reading: Reading and Language Information Centre.
N.B. This has also been published in Australia as: Lewis, M. & Wray, D. (1999) *Writing in the Curriculum: frames to support learning*. Erskinville, New South Wales: Primary English Teaching Association
5. Lewis, M. & Wray, D. (1999) 'Secondary Teachers' Views and Actions Concerning Literacy and Literacy Teaching', *Educational Review*, 51 (3), 273 – 280
6. Lewis, M. & Wray, D. (Eds.) (1999) *Literacy in the Secondary School*. London: David Fulton

Publications arising from work outside the Nuffield EXEL Projects

7. Lewis, M. (1999) 'Developing Children's Narrative Writing Using Story Structures' in Goodwin, P (ed.) *The Literate Classroom*. London: David Fulton
8. Lewis, M. (1997) 'Factual Writing at Key Stage 1', *Early Years*, 18 (1), 20 – 27.

Where and when the work took place

Submitted publications arising from the Nuffield EXEL projects 1993 – 1999

1. Extending Literacy: children reading and writing non-fiction.

The major data collection and development phase took place from 1993 – 1997. I collected case study materials from 22 primary classrooms in Devon, Enfield, Lewisham and Doncaster. A further 10 teachers self reported on work they undertook in partnership with the EXEL project. Two questionnaire surveys were undertaken - one with 107 teachers and one with 450 children. A sub sample of 20 respondent teachers was interviewed. These surveys were undertaken in Devon and London in 1993.

2. Writing Frames: scaffolding children's non-fiction writing.

3. Developing Children's Non-fiction Writing: working with writing frames.

The frames were developed and trialled in the classrooms of nine Devon teachers in 94/95. I undertook observations in 5 of these classrooms as trialling took place. The remaining teachers self reported on their use of the frames. After amendments, final versions of the frames were then used in 8 further classrooms in Warrington, Lewisham and Enfield and further case study materials collected during 1995–1996.

4. Writing Across the Curriculum: frames to support learning.

This work was undertaken as action research with a group of six Devon teachers throughout 1997/8. I met with this group on a monthly basis throughout this time. Although based on the work outlined above, new materials were developed and trialled by this group.

5. Secondary Teachers Views and Actions concerning Literacy and Literacy Teaching.

This article is based on the responses to an anonymous questionnaire I distributed to all teachers in 8 secondary schools, in Greenwich, Enfield and Swindon. The data was collected in June 1998 and the replies analysed using SPSS.

6. Literacy in the Secondary School.

I worked throughout 1997-1999 collecting case study materials from 12 secondary schools (Greenwich 4, Enfield 2, Swindon 2 and Devon 4); undertaking a review of the major literature in the field; undertaking the survey outlined in 5 (above) and conducting a further questionnaire sent to 2200 individual secondary teachers, nationwide.

Submitted publications arising from work outside the Nuffield EXEL Projects

7. Developing Children's Narrative Writing Using Story Structures.

This work was undertaken by me, during 1998. I worked in collaboration with the classteacher, during ten, weekly visits to a class of 34 primary children in a Devon school.

8. Factual Writing at Key Stage 1

This work was undertaken by me during 1996, in two Key Stage 1 classrooms in a primary school in Exeter. A total of 15 writing sessions were recorded.

Abstract.

The submitted works explore how children use texts in the classroom and how they can be supported in becoming more effective readers and writers. Most of the work is based around pupil's use of non-fiction texts and provides case study examples of what happens when children engage in tasks which require their use. I argue that we can elaborate a model to describe the processes involved in such encounters. This proposed model is described and compared to earlier attempts to create a model of the process of interacting with non-fiction texts. It is further argued that specific strategies can be linked to certain stages of the model with the aim of making pupils' encounters with texts more effective. The use of these skills and strategies are examined within the context of purposeful, information using tasks. The robustness of the model was tested by applying it to this variety of classroom contexts, across Key Stages 1-3.

The role of teacher modelling, and the importance of scaffolding children's learning are important aspects of the proposed process. Particular attention therefore was given to developing strategies and materials that would encourage teacher modelling or offer explicit scaffolding, such as grids and writing frames. Such materials had the potential to make explicit to pupils, knowledge that may have been implicit in their previous encounters with texts. Writing frames were one such set of materials. I argue that these help pupils make explicit their implicit knowledge of how texts are structured. I claim that these frames enhance pupil's awareness of the textual structure and linked language features of a range of different text types. They also provide a scaffolded writing experience. Such experiences, it is claimed, enable pupils to achieve a higher degree of success in extended writing than they could achieve without a framework.

A further development of this work on textual structure was to explore whether children in the early years of schooling exhibit an implicit understanding of written generic structures. The usefulness or otherwise of making knowledge of structures explicit and its impact on writing was again explored by investigating children's writing when they had been made explicitly aware of generic, story structures.

Critical appraisal of the work submitted

Introduction

I began teaching in 1971 and quickly became fascinated with the processes by which children acquire literacy. Later, as an English co-ordinator, I wanted to understand more about how teachers could help children become fluent and enthusiastic readers and writers. Later still, as the parent of two children, both of whom became avid, fluent readers, I noted with interest (and some dismay) how my son moved away from reading narrative text and became increasingly a reader of non-fiction texts. I began to reflect upon why I should consider my son's reading of non-fiction texts as less 'worthy' than reading narrative texts. Gradually, I began to realise that, like many primary teachers in the 1970s and 1980s, my thinking about literacy and my classroom practice in supporting literacy development, had tended to focus almost exclusively upon narrative texts and pupils' engagement with stories and poetry.

That this should be so is, at first, unsurprising. It is claimed that narrative is 'a primary act of mind' (Hardy, 1977). In detailed studies of young children's use of language, it is shown that telling stories is the way children talk about their world, act and re-enact the tales of their society and begin to make sense of new knowledge (Paley 1981, Fox 1993). Likewise several important studies of children's writing (Britton et al. 1975, Wilkinson et al 1980, Bereiter 1980, Graves 1983, Calkins 1986) have demonstrated how the writing of simple stories, and the written recounting of personal, factual narratives are the route into writing for many children. Although these studies use differing frames for analysis and come from different theoretical perspectives, they all indicate that gradually the writing repertoire widens and moves from personal and narrative writing to include more formal and non-narrative writing. In the debate on reading development during the 1980s there was a focus upon children's 'natural' acquisition of literacy and the important role of high quality narrative texts in learning to read (Holdaway 1979, Smith 1983, Waterland 1985, Meek 1986, Cambourne 1988). Knowledge of a wide range of children's literature became part of the role of the school literacy coordinator. All of these influences had persuaded, and still persuade, me of the importance of narrative texts in children's

language and literacy development. However, I gradually became aware that much of the published materials about learning to read and write, available at the time, gave only passing mention to the role of non-fiction texts in these processes. With one or two notable exceptions (Southgate et al 1981, Wray 1985 1988, Mallet 1991) much of the small body of work about the use of non-fiction texts focused upon secondary age pupils (Lunzer & Gardiner, 1979, 1984; Marland 1981, Simons & Plackett 1986). Whilst acknowledging the importance of narrative texts there seemed to me a strange neglect of the kind of non-fiction reading and writing that occurred in much of the primary timetable.

Reflecting on my own classroom, towards the end of the 1980s, I acknowledged that there was limited use of non-fiction texts within the time I designated as 'English' or 'reading' or 'writing workshop' and I rarely considered the opportunities for specifically teaching children to read and write in subjects such as history, geography, science or mathematics.

This state of affairs seemed even more curious when I reflected that if we moved beyond the early years of schooling pupils are expected to engage with more and more factual material. In the world beyond school, the majority of our daily encounters with text are with the many varied information texts which enable us to operate in society. I was not alone however in this relative neglect of the role of non-fiction texts in developing literacy. Despite the apparent impact of the 'Bullock Report' (DES, 1975) regarding the importance of language across the curriculum, reports at the end of the 1980s (DES, 1989, 1990, 1991) indicated that the significance of non-fiction material in extending literacy was largely unnoticed and unconsidered in the majority of primary classrooms.

In 1988, the National Curriculum was introduced and the English orders included the expectation that teachers would use a wide range of reading materials and would teach children to write for a range of purposes including purposes that would give rise to non-fiction texts such as writing to inform and writing to explain. Leading up to, and soon after the introduction of the National Curriculum, projects such as the National Oracy Project (NOP), the National Writing Project (NWP) and Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) were set up to help teachers implement the new

English curriculum and develop and share best practice. These projects included, within their classroom development work and their publications, materials that focused upon the use of non-fiction texts in developing children's skills in reading, writing and speaking and listening. At the same time, and often linked to the work of these projects, many local authorities published booklets summarising local courses about non-fiction texts (North Tyneside Council 1991, Pryke 1991, Hilyer 1992, Kingston upon Thames 1992). Whilst containing several interesting case studies and examples based on using non-fiction texts in the primary classroom, such local authority booklets tend to have only limited circulation and impact upon practice. The NWP, NOP and LINC had wider circulation via their network of locals groups and their publications (NWP 1989, Carter 1990, NOP 1992). They were powerful advocates for good practice but their attention to non-fiction texts was still relatively limited compared to the attention given to literary texts.

It was against this background that my interest in pupils' interaction with non-fiction texts began and this interest has been the main focus for my work for the last eight years. The books and articles submitted for consideration for the award of Doctor of Philosophy by staff candidature on the basis of published works have resulted mainly from my work undertaken as research fellow, and then co-director, of the Nuffield Extending Literacy Project (EXEL). This project has been described as '*one of the most important and potentially influential pieces of research and practice in literacy, developed in the last ten years.*' (Plackett, 1997 p 50). This work has been undertaken collaboratively with Professor David Wray and a declaration as to the relative contribution of each of us to the work is to be found on pages 24 and 25. The main focus of the work has been to explore ways in which pupils can become effective readers and writers of information texts and it has taken place across all age phases from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4.

As a result of some of the work I developed within the Nuffield EXEL project - using generic, textual structures as a scaffold to children's writing - I have also developed a particular interest in pupils' writing and the role of children's knowledge and understanding of textual structures in their developing competence as writers. Thus, two further publications submitted represent the work which, whilst largely

undertaken outside of the Nuffield EXEL project, continued to explore children's knowledge about, and use of, textual structures in their writing.

Project design and methodology

To date, the Nuffield EXEL project has had three phases beginning in 1992 and ending in August 1999. These were:

- 1992 - 1994 *Extending literacy in the junior school,*
- 1993 - 1995 *Literacy for learning in the early years,*
- 1997 - 1999 *Accessing the curriculum: literacy for learning in the secondary school.*

The aims of the research were to investigate the nature of children's interactions with non-fiction texts in classroom and explore ways in which such interactions could be effectively developed. These aims suggested a holistic approach to data collection which focused upon the natural setting of the classroom and necessitated an interpretive approach.

The research and development work undertaken within each phase followed broadly the same project design and we undertook the following programme of work:

- explore teachers' and pupils' existing practices regarding non-fiction texts;
- consider these findings in the context of the literature in order to test our observations against existing models of the processes involved in interacting with non-fiction texts;
- use this understanding to construct a hypothetical model of the process that would then be tested in the classroom;
- consider models of teaching and learning that would enhance the effectiveness of this proposed process model;
- examine existing teaching strategies and develop new strategies and materials that would support this process model (much of this development work to be undertaken collaboratively with teachers);
- test the model and strategies in the classroom and provide case studies of the model in action;

- modify the model and/or strategies in the light of the case study materials if required.

For each of the three major phases listed above the following evidence was collected:

- quantitative data collection via questionnaire surveys to discover teachers' existing views and practices regarding the use of non-fiction texts;
- qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with teachers to discover their existing views and practices regarding the use of non-fiction texts;
- qualitative observation data of teachers and children during lesson which involved the use of non-fiction texts, prior to any interventions;
- collection of case study materials (planning documents, classroom observations, pupils' work samples, post unit-of-work interviews with teachers) after introduction to new ways of working with non-fiction texts;
- collection of case study materials by teachers working as action researchers in their own classrooms.

Multiple case studies seemed particularly appropriate to the research, in order to examine and interpret children's experiences within a range of different classrooms. Case study is an empirical approach which investigates the full situation and complexity of real events. Yin (1993) and Golby (1994) both stress that case study is not in itself a research method and that 'all methods are in principle admissible in case study' (Golby p 15.) It is not determined by any one method (Simons, 1980) so flexibility of approach within the case tends to be the norm. However within our research, we tried to ensure continuity of methods across the case studies. Case studies permit the researcher to create the case (Kemmis 1980) for case study relies on the arguments and interpretations of the case study researcher. Case studies are therefore 'strong in reality' (Kemmis 1980). The 'realism' of case study approaches enables it to illuminate discrepancies or conflicts within the case (Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis 1980). Within our multiple case studies we hoped to 'understand the individual case in relation to the generality' (Golby 1994, p16) and seek patterns across cases.

A common criticism of qualitative research is that it fails to adhere to standards of reliability and validity (Reichardt & Cook, 1979). With case study approaches there are problems of replication (Mishler, 1990); ethical issues to do with the possibility of identification of participants from the very creation of a 'realistic' case and the issues of bias that arise when the researcher is the primary source of data gathering and interpretation. In order to try to overcome these problems and ensure objectivity, reliability, clarity and openness some sessions were videoed to provide another form of recording to compare with the observations, some sessions were observed by an independent research assistant and most session notes were discussed with the teacher afterwards so they could pass an opinion on whether they perceived the session to be accurately recorded. To preserve anonymity, the names of all participant teachers, schools and children have been changed. When acknowledging their contributions, in forewords, this has been agreed with the participants.

The distinctive contribution to knowledge

The distinctive contribution to knowledge arising from the EXEL work has been in two main areas. Firstly, the development of a theoretical model of the processes involved in engaging with non-fiction texts and a theoretical teaching model to describe the move from the child's dependence upon the teacher to independence. Whilst both of these models build upon the work of others they also represent some new contributions to the field. The second distinctive contribution to knowledge is the development and dissemination of genre based writing frames.

A) Development of theoretical models.

The major theoretical strand of the EXEL project has been the development of a process model to describe effective interactions with non-fiction texts. My contribution to this development was to review the current literature on pupil learning and how pupils learn to read and write; undertake observations, using a structured observation schedule, in 6 primary classrooms whilst pupils were working on tasks that required them to use information books and write about what they discovered; consider the implications of the observations (Wray & Lewis 1992) and critically examine the existing process models used to describe children's use of non-fiction texts.

Over several discussions with Professor Wray, we began to hypothesise that existing models ignored crucial elements of the process I had observed in the classroom. In particular they failed to acknowledge the range of prior knowledge and attitudes a reader brings to any encounter with text and omitted any mention of what happens as the actual reading of a text takes place, including the range of different ways in which a reader may read the text. Existing models also made no explicit mention of the role of metacognition in developing more effective interactions with texts. We therefore proposed a new model – Extending Interactions with Non-fiction Texts. This model is fully described in Chapter 4 of *Extending Literacy: children reading and writing non-fiction*.

It must be stressed that the EXIT model is not conceptualised as a linear model, although its physical presentation on paper may suggest such a view. Rather, the stages are recursive and within any interaction a different ‘route’ through the process might manifest itself. Stages may be revisited on several occasions during the time a pupil is working with information texts.

The linking of teaching strategies to the process stages was an important further step in the development of the model. Many of the strategies incorporated into the model were already well known, found from the literature search or from practice observed during the first set of classroom observations. Further strategies were added as the project progressed. The significance of linking the practical strategies to the theoretical framework was that, potentially, it enabled practitioners to recognise why certain strategies and teaching materials might be supportive at particular stages. This could enable them to be more purposeful and focused in planning how and when to intervene to assist their pupils.

Development of the teaching model

The development of the teaching model also drew upon existing theory, the initial classroom observations and our literature review. However, it places particular emphasis on the ‘scaffolded phase’ of the model. As well as scaffolding pupils via interaction with a teacher or other adult we proposed that certain teaching materials

such as writing frames could act at this phase of the model. The teaching model is described in Chapter 3 of *Extending Literacy*

Testing these models

Several groups of teachers volunteered to work with us (from Devon, Enfield, Lewisham and Doncaster). These teachers had the proposed EXIT model and teaching model presented to them, on a one-day course. They were also introduced to some strategies such as text highlighting. Following on from the introductory day, the teachers then planned their next unit of foundation subject work.

I then undertook a further series of case study observations to test our proposed model against classroom reality. A research assistant also undertook some observations. We took field notes of individual lessons (lasting from forty-five minutes to one and half hours) in twenty-two Devon classrooms. The observations alternated between observing the teacher and observing a target group of six children. In four of the classrooms a series of lessons over half a term were observed. In these four classrooms, one lesson was also videoed. Work samples from the whole class were collected at the end of each session whenever possible. The teachers' reflections on the lesson and the work were also noted. The thirty-six lesson observations were then compared to the EXIT model to see if the model did indeed offer an adequate description of the processes involved. Representative examples of these case studies are given in Chapters 11 and 12 of *Extending Literacy*. The case studies were first published as articles in refereed journals but these have not been submitted as part of the thesis in order to avoid duplication with the book materials. However a complete list of the relevant refereed journal articles subsequently included in submitted books is given as Appendix 1, p23.

In Lewisham and Enfield the teachers were observed by each other, or by a member of the local education authority staff. Whilst these case studies were not regarded as a primary source of data they provided useful confirmation that the model was robust enough to operate in a range of contexts. The Enfield case studies were written up and published by the authority (LCAS, 1995) and some of the practical strategies from the Lewisham, Doncaster and Enfield case studies are used in Chapters 5-10 of *Extending Literacy*.

Much of the work of the last two years (1997-99) has involved me in working with secondary schools to further test the model. This has led to more case study material to support the robustness of the model. An interesting consequence of working with the model in secondary schools has been how it can prompt teachers to reflect on whether there are any aspects of the process that they consistently omit - and whether the omission is significant. The secondary based work is recorded in the submitted article, *Secondary Teachers' Views and Actions Concerning Literacy and Literacy Teaching*, and the submitted book, *Teaching Literacy in the Secondary School*.

The impact of the EXIT model and linked strategies

The significance of the model and its linked strategies has been recognised in several ways and they have had a major impact on policy makers and practitioners. It has become incorporated into the government's National Literacy Strategy (NLS). During 1998/99 all primary teachers in England should have been introduced to the process model and its linked strategies via the non-fiction training materials for the NLS (DfEE 1998). The significance of the model and the linked strategies to the secondary school sector has been disseminated widely via the nation-wide, Key Stage 3 Literacy Conferences held in the summer term of 1999 and attended by personnel from every secondary school in England (DFEE, 1999).

Criticism of the EXIT model

There has been some criticism of the EXIT model. For example, Riley and Reedy (2000) point out that 'new ways of perceiving and interpreting old experience' (p158) is not mentioned in the model and thus there is a danger that 'establishing purposes' could be too narrowly interpreted. They are concerned that learning could be reduced to an 'arid and uninteresting mechanical process' of a 'series of decontextualised series of steps' (p158). Whilst acknowledging that any process model is open to the individual interpretation of the reader and the EXIT model could be taken as a rigid set of steps leading to 'mechanistic' procedures, I would argue that we have emphasised the non-linear, often recursive and sometimes 'incomplete' nature of the process. The process is described within a series of real-time case studies that are far removed from the decontextualised steps feared by Riley and Reedy.

They are perhaps correct to point out that certain elements of the process are implicit rather than explicit in our stages. Perceiving and reinterpreting old information is relevant to many of our stages beyond activating prior knowledge but this is not explicitly stated. Riley and Reedy also comment that they spent more time on the first three stages of the EXIT model than on the subsequent stages. There is no suggestion in the EXIT model that all the stages require an equal amount of time. The use of the word 'stage' may well be unhelpful here for it suggests that each is separate from the others and perhaps also implies equal weight. Neither of these assumptions is valid. Several cognitive processes may happen simultaneously (for example one may be being both metacognitive and critical while interacting with a text). Measuring stages in terms of time was never our intention. The only time criterion should be that of the needs of the individual engaged upon a particular task. I would argue that the time spent on any one part of the process would vary considerably from task context to task context.

Although the EXIT model may yet be subject to further refinement, and the debate about the model beginning to be undertaken within the academic community will stimulate this, it does provide a framework which has enabled practitioners to think about what pupils do when they engage with non-fiction texts and has offered them practical strategies to support such work.

B) Research and development into supporting writing

The second area of distinct contribution to knowledge has been my development of 'writing frames'. These supportive frames have now become so widely used that the phrase writing frames has taken on the status of a generic term. The technique of sometimes giving starter sentences or the opening few lines of a piece of writing was commonly known before the EXEL project. However, typically within primary classrooms this technique was largely confined to use with narrative texts (Cairney 1989). Also, it seemed that many teachers using such techniques had no underpinning theoretical rationale for doing so. My work on writing frames provided a coherent rationale for using such a technique and developed original non-fiction, writing frames which have had a huge impact in primary and secondary classrooms.

The development of non-fiction writing frames rested upon my discovery, via a literature review, of some American work on 'paragraph frames' whose primary purpose was to scaffold pupils' non-fiction writing into appropriate paragraphs (Cudd & Roberts, 1989). Whilst useful for that, at first sight they appeared to have only a limited application. However, I began to consider these 'paragraph frames' in the light of the work on textual genre undertaken by Christie (1985), Rothery (1989), and Derewianka (1990). Briefly, they argue that, depending upon our purpose for using language, we generate a text to fulfil this purpose. These texts, they claim, will share some generic structures and language features determined by our purpose for creating the text (written or spoken). Whilst this work has been subject to much critical scrutiny (Barrs 1991, Stratta & Dixon 1992, Cairney, 1992) some of the criticism arose because the early exponents of genre theories seemed to suggest a rigid and narrow interpretation of how such ideas might be used in the classroom to support children's literacy development.

Littlefair, who had written on the work of this group of Australian theorists (1991) organised a conference in Cambridge at which Christie and Rothery delivered a paper. Listening to them, I began to speculate whether it would be possible to synthesise the practical idea of paragraph frames with the theoretical work of the genre theorists. I hypothesised that it would be possible to create genre-specific frames that would scaffold children's use of textual structure in order that they could write more extended and coherent texts in a particular genre. After further reading, and discussion with David Wray, trial frames drawing on different generic structures and their language features (such as the type of connectives used to link the text and the register of the sentence starters) were drafted.

Testing the frames

A 'genre group' of interested Devon primary teachers was formed and these teachers then undertook to trial the frames in their classrooms (n=9). Each type of frame was trialled by at least three teachers. They all followed the teaching model of sharing and discussing examples of the text type with the children before undertaking shared writing using a framework. Next they moved on to occasions when selected children would use the frames without the teacher.

I observed some of these writing sessions as they occurred in five of the classrooms. The remainder were self-reported by the teachers involved. Work samples were collected of the children's writing before using frames and when using frames. These were compared for their cohesion including the use of a range of connectives, use of appropriate register and length. A subjective assessment of the quality of the writing using the frame was also made i.e. did the teacher consider the 'framed' writing sample to be better than the child's 'normal' writing, the same as the child's 'normal' writing or worse than the child's 'normal' writing. At a series of subsequent meetings of the group we abandoned some of the frames and modified others in the light of the observations, feedback and the work samples. We also developed some less structured frames in order to address issues of differentiation.

Further case study evidence was gathered of the final frames in use. Again this consisted of self-reporting from the genre group teachers acting as action researchers in their own classrooms and I undertook at least one observation in each classroom. Writing samples were again gathered and evaluated. Several further classrooms in London and the north-west were also involved in trialling the final frames and evidence was collected for us by the LEA staff. The work on writing frames is reported in Chapter 10 of *Extending Literacy* and in the submitted booklets *Writing Across the Curriculum: frames to support learning* and *Writing Frames: scaffolding children's non-fiction writing*.

The impact of writing frames

Writing frames are now in widespread use and are familiar to many thousands of teachers and pupils. Their use is encouraged by the NLS. They have become an accepted strategy for supporting reluctant and struggling writers. (Frater: Basic Skills Agency, 1998). Over the last four years there have been many hundreds of unsolicited writing samples sent to the EXEL office from teachers around the country. These samples all consist of work produced using writing frames, which their senders claim represent an improvement on the writing they have previously achieved with their pupils without the help of frames. HMI have made specific mention of writing frames as one of the strategies to support writers (DfEE, 1997) and they have been mentioned positively in the last two annual reports by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMSO,

2000,1999). The published work on writing frames has prompted many others to develop and test frames for themselves, for example in geography (Jones et al 1997) and in maths (Rawson 1997).

Writing frames have also been taken up in other countries around the world. They are in use in Hong Kong and South Africa. Our 1998 book on writing frames, *Writing Across the Curriculum* was recently published in an Australian edition and we have been asked to prepare a version of our 1995 book, *Developing Children's Non-fiction Writing: working with writing frames* for publication in the USA.

Criticisms of Writing Frames

The significant of writing frames lies in the way they have made complex theoretical knowledge about textual structures and linked language features accessible and usable by teachers and pupils, and in the scaffolded writing experiences they offer the children as they attempt extended pieces of writing. Their danger lies in their overuse and in their possible misuse. If teachers use the frames without understanding the underlying knowledge about textual structure; or if they use the frames without first helping pupils see the links between the text they read and texts they write; or if they perceive the frames as formulaic templates that cannot be modified in use; or if they fail to recognise the importance of shared text construction before using frames with just a small group who need extra support then the frames can become little more than decontextualised worksheets. However, whilst frames can be criticised justifiably on each of these counts, it is in the *misuse* of frames that such criticisms are grounded.

Further research into writing

As a result of undertaking the development work on writing frames I became interested in exploring further the claim made by genre theorists that we all have an implicit understanding of how to structure a text (spoken or written) in order to achieve different purposes. This implicit knowledge, they claim, is acquired by our participation in a language community that uses language in certain ways in order to achieve certain ends. If this is how we acquire such knowledge, it would be reasonable to expect that children as young as five and six might show some

knowledge (albeit tentative) of how to structure texts in different ways for different purposes. I therefore investigated young children's writing to examine whether it contained any such evidence. This work involved collecting 90 writing samples during 15 writing occasions with five groups of children (three sessions per group). This is reported in the submitted article *Factual Writing at Key Stage 1*. The significance of the work lies in the indications it gives that young children can demonstrate the ability to write in different ways for different tasks, if they are encouraged to do so. Such evidence then begs the question of whether young children are given purposeful occasions to write in a range of non-fiction genres and whether teachers need to be more explicit in indicating the purpose and form of writing to children.

As another aspect of my interest in children's implicit and explicit understandings of textual structures I also wanted to explore whether the implicit knowledge of story structures children are thought to develop through their growing experience of stories could be used for explicitly planning their own story writing. Furthermore I wished to judge whether this explicit linking together of knowledge of textual structure with planning for writing would enhance the quality of the children's written outcomes. This work is described in *Developing Children's Narrative Writing Using Story Structures* and my findings offer some indicative evidence that helping children explicitly recognise textual structures can have a positive impact on their writing.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, my work represents the outcome of several years study mainly looking at how pupils use non-fiction texts and how non-fiction texts can be best used in the classroom to support children's development as fluent readers and writers. It has progressed from observation of existing practice to the development of a coherent model with linked practical strategies, which has been extensively tested in classrooms. This work is widely acknowledged as being of considerable importance in the development of our understanding of the significance of non-fiction texts in literacy development and to the improvement of classroom practice in this area. Arising from the work undertaken within the EXEL project has been further research looking at particular aspects of children's writing. This adds yet further detail to the

EXIT process model by exploring in more depth the final stage of the process – communicating information. The work presented for consideration therefore shows coherence and progression and has made some original contributions to our knowledge about literacy.

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Appendix 1

Articles originally published in refereed journals and incorporated into the submitted books

Wray, D. & Lewis, M. (1993) The Reading Experiences and Interests of Junior School Children. *Children's Literature in Education*, 24 (4) 251-263

Lewis, M., Wray, D. & Rospigliosi, P. (1994) Making Reading for Information More Accessible to Children with Learning Difficulties. *Support for Learning*, 9 (4) 155-61

Wray, D. & Lewis, M. (1995) Extending Interactions with Non-fiction Texts: An EXIT into Understanding. *Reading*, 29 (1) 2 - 9

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Lewis, M., Wray, D. & Cox, C. (1995) Young Researchers: Context and Purpose in the Infant Classroom. *Early Years* 15 (2) 46-51

Lewis, M., Wray, D. & Rospigliosi, P. (1995) "No copying please!" Helping Children Respond to Non-fiction Text. *Education 3-13*, 23 (1) 27-34.

Wray, D. and Lewis, M. (1997) Teaching Factual Writing: Purpose and Structure. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*. 20(20) 131 -139



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From: Professor David Wray
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17 January, 2000

Dear Dr Hannan,

Mrs Maureen Lewis: Application for the award of PhD via published work

I write in support of the application by Maureen Lewis to be permitted to submit for the degree of PhD via published work.

Maureen Lewis began work as my Research Assistant on the first phase of the Nuffield Extending Literacy (EXEL) project in 1992. I was initially her mentor and she worked closely under my direction during the early part of this project. She very quickly, however, proved capable of independent and original work, contributing both ideas and written outcomes to the project. During the past 5 years we have worked and written together as equal partners. Maureen has worked independently, initiating and writing up various strands of our research. Recently my input into her work and writing has decreased to less than that of a PhD supervisor. She has proved herself so capable of independent and original work that she now has a substantial national reputation in her own right.

On the next page is a list of the publications we have jointly produced in the past five years, with indications of the contributions of both parties to each.

Your sincerely,

David Wray
Professor of Literacy Education

Maureen Lewis and David Wray

Joint publications

1. Wray, D. & Lewis, M. (1997) *Extending Literacy: children reading and writing non-fiction*. London & New York: Routledge.

- The chapters in this book represent different degrees of co-authorship but the contribution of both authors to the book was of equal measure. Maureen Lewis was largely responsible for writing Chapters 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, and 12. David Wray was largely responsible for Chapters 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, Chapter 2 was outlined by Maureen Lewis and completed by David Wray. All chapters however were subject to discussion and revision. Most were first published as journal articles.

2. Lewis, M. & Wray, D. (1995) *Developing Children's Non-fiction Writing: working with writing frames*. Leamington Spa: Scholastic.

3. Lewis, M. & Wray, D. (1996) *Writing Frames: scaffolding children's non-fiction writing*. University of Reading: Reading and Language Information Centre.

- Maureen Lewis wrote the first draft of these publications. The latter is a shorter version of the former. They were subject to several stages of discussion with and revision by David Wray. The contribution of both authors to the book was of equal measure.

4. Lewis, M. & Wray, D. (1998) *Writing Across the Curriculum: frames to support learning*. University of Reading: Reading and Language Information Centre.

- David Wray wrote pages 1- 3.
- Maureen Lewis wrote pages 4-8.
- The frames p12 –43 were produced collaboratively with a teachers' group and it is not possible to identify individual authorship.

5. Lewis, M. & Wray, D. (1999) 'Secondary Teachers' Views and Actions Concerning Literacy and Literacy Teaching', *Educational Review*, 51 (3) 273 – 280.

- This was written by Maureen Lewis, based on questionnaire data. The questionnaire was jointly devised but Maureen Lewis considered the data and wrote the first draft of the article. David Wray made a number of minor alterations on this draft.

6. Lewis, M. & Wray, D. (Eds.) (1999) *Literacy in the Secondary School*. London: David Fulton.

- Chapter 1 was written by Maureen Lewis following her literature review and working experience in the field over the preceding two years. David Wray made a number of minor suggestions on the first draft.
- Chapter 2 was written by David Wray.
- Chapter 3 was written by Maureen Lewis, drawing on the case study material she had gathered over the preceding two years.
- Chapter 11 was written by Maureen Lewis after discussion of the issues with David Wray.
- The further chapters in the book were written by teacher partners in our research.