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 Gateway to writing

<p>A child's interest in dinosaurs not only provides opportunities for the practitioner to share with parents and develop links with the home learning environment, but also to introduce different forms of writing through experiences that are exciting and meaningful for the children</p>	<p>Practitioner behaviour that supports children in becoming writers</p>
<p>On a 'welcome day' and subsequent home visits for children starting nursery, practitioners noticed that some children were particularly interested in dinosaurs. Thomas in particular had made a connection between his visit to the nursery, and his own collection of dinosaurs, and his parent told his new key worker how excited he was about starting nursery now that he knew there were dinosaurs there. His key worker, Jane, ensured that there were plenty of dinosaur models available, and set aside a small area of the nursery to display and organise them, with some non-fiction texts and pictures.</p> <p>During his first days at nursery, Thomas is seen to begin transporting the dinosaur models to the walk-in sand area. He sits on the side of the sand, and puts the dinosaur models in, arranging them in the sand or on the tiles at the side. Jane is sitting near him, quietly observing in an unobtrusive way. Thomas picks up a dinosaur and turns it over in his hands, fingering its features and looking at it very closely. He looks at Jane, and points to the spines on one model saying 'Look – it's got these spikes on its back...' Sitting next to Thomas and touching the dinosaur as he is doing, Jane replies 'Yes – just look at those spines', feeling them as she talks, using a quiet, reflective voice as though thinking to herself. 'They're really sharp.' Thomas picks up another: 'This one's bigger. Look, it's got a tail!' 'You're right,' says Jane – 'it's longer than that one, and it's got a long tail...' She looks over at other models and picks one up, using her facial expressions and slow, deliberate movements to model her curiosity about its features. Thomas getting very excited, puts his finger into the open mouth of a dinosaur, and touches its teeth. 'Look at the teeth!' 'My goodness. Can I touch them too?' says Jane, as she runs her finger along the teeth, using her face to express her shock to the child at their sharpness. Thomas manipulates the dinosaur model: 'if I move this like this, it makes a trunk. That's the word for the dinosaur, you know...I'm going to make a dinosaur house.' And looking around him pulls a nearby tray over to the sand area and places it in the sand. 'I can use that for my house. Dinosaurs need rocks – they have to have them.' Having picked up on Thomas's interest in volcanic rocks, during a home visit, Jane says: 'I think I know where there are some rocks. Would you like me to get them?' She gets up, and walks to the large cupboard while Thomas watches, and re-appears a few moments later with an armful of volcanic rocks and puts them down next to the child who becomes excited, smiling with satisfaction. 'These rocks are volcanic,' she says, 'they're from volcanoes!'</p> <p>Jane and Thomas have a talk about volcanoes. Thomas obviously already knows something about them – he talks about fire, using his hands to show fire coming out of the top. They handle the pieces of rock as they talk, looking closely at them and picking each up in turn. Jane suggests that they try and find out more about volcanoes and asks Thomas where they could look. At this point, they are joined by Michael who has been playing nearby. Michael says: 'I've got a book about volcanoes! Some volcanoes are covered in grass! And...some are in the sea.'</p> <p>Jane walks away and leaves the boys playing, while she sources some picture books with volcanoes. She returns a few moments later, opens a book at a</p>	<p>Building on children's interests, and providing books to support understanding of how books work, and the different forms of writing</p> <p>Supporting the development of positive dispositions and attitudes to learning</p> <p>Modelling language structures and vocabulary in a context that is meaningful to the child</p> <p>Developing learning based on children's interests</p> <p>Providing opportunities to talk, and promoting the use of books – helping to make links between reading and writing</p>

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<p>volcano picture, and places it on the floor. Michael picks it up enthusiastically, finds pictures and shows Jane and Thomas a picture of a volcano coming out from the sea.</p> <p>Another adult joins in the conversation, noticing the dinosaur play. 'I think I have some dinosaurs at home which swim in the sea! I could bring them in!'</p> <p>Over the next few days, Jane developed the sand area to include several books on dinosaurs, some large pictures of volcanoes and some more information books about volcanoes. Rocks, driftwood, leaves and branches were provided nearby, with 'builder's' trays' containing bark chippings, pebbles and other natural materials. The interest attracted a small group of boys, who came to this area first each day, on arrival at nursery. Michael and Thomas frequently transported their dinosaur models to other areas of the nursery, as they explored their new surroundings. This included the mark-making area, and resulted in some drawings by both boys of their dinosaur models, which became the subject of a 'learning story' display. The communication of this interest to the boys' parents resulted in a trip to the museum for one, to look at dinosaur remains and fossils, and formed the basis for regular exchange of information between practitioners and his parent as his interests developed.</p> <p>The practitioner continued to follow the boys' interests in dinosaurs. She observed the boys did engage in writing as part of their interest in dinosaurs. To support this further she introduced a dinosaur soft toy called 'Steggy' that wrote to the children. Three boys showed a clear interest in letter writing initially as well as other writing genres. They displayed these different genres of writing such as letters, notes, lists, messages and posters through their interactions with Steggy the dinosaur. The practitioner was keen to teach the different aspects of writing forms through both modelling in a shared writing activity and in small groups. She was able to teach the layouts of the genres to the children, which the three boys acknowledged in their writing. They demonstrated that they were aware of 'Dear' when writing a letter to Steggy and 'Love from' when they concluded their letters. They understood directionality and wrote from left to right and conveyed meaning in their letter writing. The three boys were very enthusiastic about what response they would receive from Steggy, which they often shared with their parents. The 'Steggy letters' were the catalyst for encouraging the boys to write in meaningful contexts, which in turn supported a continued interest in writing, which evolved from the boys' interest in dinosaurs.</p>	<p>Communicating that the child's interests are important, and providing materials to encourage writing</p> <p>Involving parents so that learning can be consolidated and extended at home</p> <p>Providing purposeful and meaningful experiences that encourage writing</p> <p>Using shared writing to model, explore and discuss some of the choices that writers have to make that are based on purpose, audience and content</p> <p>Introducing different forms and conventions of writing</p>
<p>What does the practitioner do to support boys writing, and what is the impact?</p> <p>Boys have become more interested in writing, when the purpose for it is made clear and understandable. Links with the home learning environment are now stronger, with parents sharing information with key workers about children's interests, and further supporting and developing those interests outside nursery.</p>	<p>The practitioner responded to the boys' interest in dinosaurs, providing a range of opportunities for the children to engage in a variety of writing genres. She was able to use this interest to plan adult-led sessions which gave children the opportunity to apply their developing skills, giving them a meaningful purpose for writing, and also to make links with the home learning environment through involving parents.</p>