*Writing the Game*

Evaluation 2013-2015

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*You can't build a skyscraper without foundations. Hope is like the foundations for us, so it's building up that hope in us that everyone can improve. It's not just about getting a level. It's about you. (Pupil, Writing the Game)*
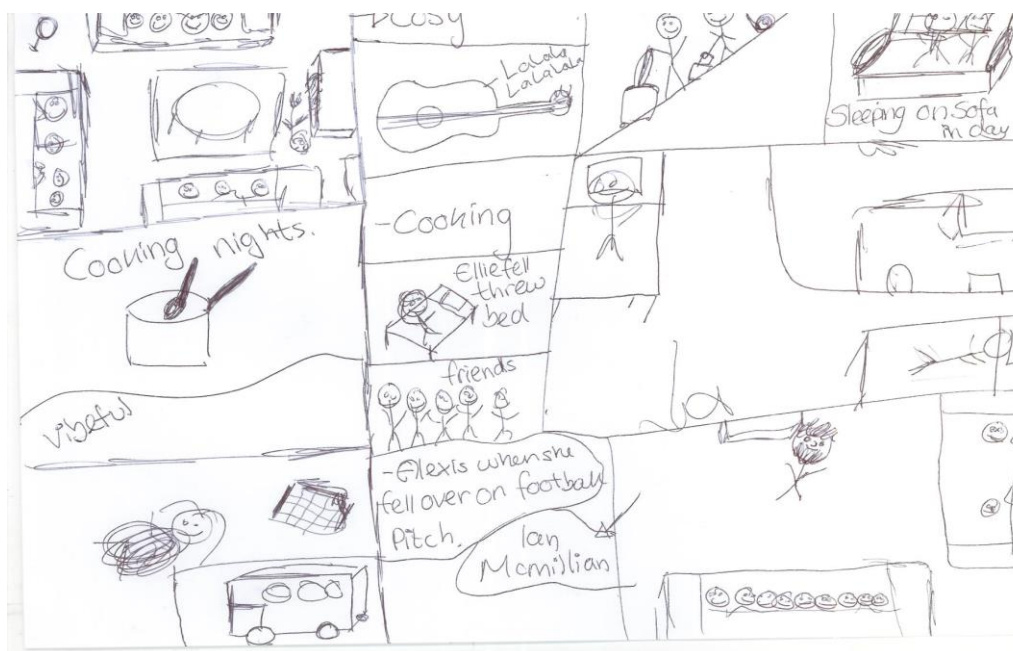


*Pupil memory map, Writing the Game Lumb Bank residential*

# *Writing the Game* 2013-2015

# 1    Executive Summary

*Writing the Game* is an Arvon programme that aims to harness young people's love of football in order to engage them with writing and learning. Originally funded by the Football Foundation and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the 2009-2013 programme benefited almost 100 young people from 6 schools in disadvantaged areas in the north and south west of England.

This evaluation focuses on *Writing the Game* 2013-2015, led by Arvon and funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to develop and extend the effects of the programme, and examines how practice can most effectively be embedded in schools. The project targets individuals who are currently underachieving and have negative attitudes to writing and limited experience of participation in the arts, but whose passion for football has the potential to provide a route to positive change in their life. The project aims, articulated at the start of the 2013-2015 programme, are to:

- Offer arts experiences that improve young people's self-expression, enjoyment of creative writing and writing skills

- Increase young people's well-being (including confidence, emotional wellbeing, relationships and satisfaction with school)

- Develop a robust model of creative learning for young people aged 13-16 who are underachieving to support their writing development

- Develop teachers' ability to support young people's writing development more effectively and to share their learning with others

- Evaluate and disseminate learning from the project, working in partnership with a wide range of educators, writers, and creative writing and reading organisations to share and adapt the model for use within other contexts, creating a community of practice at national level.

*Writing the Game* is a key project within Arvon's Learning & Participation programme, and grew from Arvon's history of working with young people in disadvantaged areas; its relationships with writers who play a critical role in informing the development and delivery of this work; and its ambition to grow partnerships that support sustainable outcomes. It is an ambitious and innovative project, with explicit outcomes that relate to young people's well-being; raised educational attainment; enhanced creative capacity; changes in attitudes to writing; deepened engagement with writing as a valuable form of self-expression; and supporting teachers to embed learning from the programme into their classroom practice. These aims reveal the extent to which *Writing the Game* has been developed with young people's experiences at the heart of the programme. The aims of the

programme reflect Arvon's vision for learning that seeks to welcome, inspire and support young people; and in doing so to transform outcomes in specific areas.

**Summary of programme outputs**

- Five *Writing the Game* programmes have been delivered with schools from South Yorkshire and London; a sixth programme will take place in February 2016.
- 80 young people have taken part in *Writing the Game*. Activities have included a week-long residential at an Arvon centre; preparatory and follow up workshops; the production of writing anthologies; and sharing events in schools.
- 10 teachers have engaged directly in *Writing the Game* from the 5 participating schools
- Arvon has developed partnerships with 4 football clubs that have worked with schools, young people and writers
- 32 young people are progressing to Arts Award accreditation as a result of engagement with *Writing the Game*
- Professional development session for 14 literacy co-ordinators and teachers in Barnsley
- *Writing the Game* presentation for 9 staff at George Mitchell School, including head teacher PE and English teachers
- Presentation to Partners in English about *Writing the Game* in the context of creative writing and educational change (19 participants)
- Two visits to Barnsley Football club for skills training, advice and a match
- Kick it Out national creative writing competition for young writers aged 7-18, open to all English primary and secondary schools, involving an estimated 2,000 young people. Including 3000 leaflets to schools, online presence, and twitter campaign

**Summary of programme outcomes**

- Partnership development: Arvon secured a donation of £19,000 to support an extended *Writing the Game* programme in partnership with Crystal Palace Football Club, the residential, post residential workshops, production of a junior fanzine, and match day experience for young people at The Norwood School (London).
- *Writing the Game* has enabled Arvon to develop its relationship with Leyton Orient Football Club, developing a £65,000 bid to Comic Relief to support embedding of learning from *Writing the Game* in a Supporter to reporter programme at LOFC.
- *Writing the Game* has promoted **pupil well-being and achievement** by developing their self-confidence; strengthening their capacity to learn and developing both independence and social bonds (3.5)

- Over 95% of participants identified that *Writing the Game* had contributed to **improved outcomes in their writing skills and abilities**, including use of English and grammar, creativity and imagination, and vocabulary (3.3)
- All teachers who engaged directly with the programme reported enhanced understanding of creative writing, and the development of more effective teaching strategies (3.4). Teachers have identified the opportunity to embed new pedagogic approaches that include developing a 'commission' approach to writing tasks; increasing pupil choice in form and content; reducing scaffold in order to increase independent learning; increasing dialogue and collaboration as a route to effective writing; developing their own writing practice in the classroom; and exploring opportunities for one to one engagement with pupils to support writer development (3.6.1, 3.6.2).
- *Writing the Game* has promoted a distinct Arvon pedagogy and robust learning model that focuses on the creative act of meaning-making through dialogic, collaborative approaches to teaching and learning that enable young people to take control of form and content and build their knowledge through practice.

**Summary of challenges**

- Arvon has faced challenges in securing school engagement during *Writing the Game* due to the pressures that schools face in relation to anticipating inspection visits and responding to inspection outcomes; loss of key staff within schools; curriculum timetable pressures; and a fractured education infrastructure that impacts on relationships with facilitating strategic bodies such as local authorities (4.1)
- Managing multiple objectives: the programme has been responsive to developments in arts education such as Arts Award and the New Philanthropy Centre's Well-Being Measure. Such initiatives are valuable in promoting and supporting young people's achievement and well-being through arts activities. However they have on occasion acted as a distraction from the central aims of the participants' experience of *Writing the Game,* and, in the case of the NPC Well-Being Measure the questionnaire was not well received by young people (4.2.2).
- Targeting participants: The writers who were most closely involved in the design of *Writing the Game* identified that target participants were young people who were 'failing' at school (and in particular in writing), and who had a passion and enthusiasm for football. As the programme has developed, target participants are more likely to be under-achieving (rather than failing) due to lack of confidence and motivation; and while many of the participants were passionate about football a number of them were not. The evaluation has identified clear reasons for the targeting of under-achieving students and for widening participation beyond those who are passionate about football (4.2.1)

- Engagement with football clubs: the original aim of ensuring that participants always had an opportunity to spend a day at a local football club – meeting players and staff, touring the ground, and playing football together – has not always been possible due to timing the tour within the programme schedule. This has been exacerbated by sometimes late confirmation of school engagement in the programme (4.2.3).

# Recommendations

*Writing the Game* 2013-2015 has successfully met the aims that were identified at the outset of the programme, and is developing new opportunities for extended engagement in the programme and enhanced opportunities for young people's writing through the leverage of additional funding opportunities. The recommendations that are proposed here are therefore focussed on developing the programme opportunities, embedding the pedagogy that is promoted through *Writing the Game*, and addressing challenges that have emerged during delivery 2013-2015.

## Recommendation 1

The ambition to create more opportunities for young people to develop their creative writing through collaborations between Arvon, writers, schools and football clubs has been developed through Arvon's relationship with Leyton Orient Football Club. While the Arvon residential and the *Supporter to Reporter* programme hosted at the club is dependent on a successful bidding outcome (due July 2015), the relationship provides a model of collaboration that should be explored to embed and extend the programme in partnership with the other clubs and partner schools that have worked with Arvon on *Writing the Game*.

## Recommendation 2

The residential experience has not only provided powerful outcomes for young people, but has influenced teacher knowledge and understanding of creative writing. Teachers have experienced an alternate pedagogy that has inspired new approaches to teaching and learning. This pedagogy is expressed through *Writing the Game*, but also extends beyond this programme: it is a pedagogical imperative in all of Arvon's work with young people. In order to further explore, embed and develop this pedagogy, Arvon should seek to develop opportunities across its learning programmes for teachers to come together to participate in residential programmes that support pedagogy, and enable them to confidently disseminate and cascade learning to colleagues in their own schools and school clusters.

## Recommendation 3

The area based approach to *Writing the Game* is building a network of teacher 'alumni' who have experienced and are advocates of the pedagogical principles of the programme. Consideration should now be given to developing a *Writing the Game* teacher network that harnesses the advocacy power of these individuals, builds contact with peers through CPD, and locates *Writing the Game* as a pedagogy focused professional development programme for teachers. In the absence of local authority capacity, teaching schools and academy networks may provide useful routes to targeted activity for effective dissemination.

**Recommendation 4**

*Writing the Game* residentials could benefit by creating a pool of *Writing the Game* tutors to be called on as guests for each other's courses. In addition, *Writing the Game* offers an opportunity for Arvon to innovate within the traditional model of guest writer and consider guest sports people who can feature as part of future programmes. This has the additional advantage of strengthening relationships with local clubs, and reinforcing young people's sense of belonging to a community that is successful and in which they take pride.

**Recommendation 5**

Activities that support the programme but are not intrinsic to the central aims of developing young people's well-being and achievement in creative writing should take place outside of the residential experience.

## 2    Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation of *Writing the Game* employs a mixed methodology, with an emphasis on qualitative data drawn from participants, and utilising quantitative data that is pertinent to specific outputs and outcomes. The evaluation seeks to contextualise findings in relevant research that sheds light on how outcomes are achieved, so that the theoretical foundations of Arvon's approach to improving outcomes for young people is better understood and can be shared more widely. The evaluation analyses evidence against both the programme aims, and Arvon's overarching education mission.

The vision for learning at Arvon echoes the organisation's mission to offer inspirational and inclusive courses within and beyond the writing centres. Learning is a central part of the organisation's business, and is key to Arvon's aim of ensuring that its programme is accessible to all, and that the organisation fully enacts the four values that inform its work:

- To be **welcoming,** enabling all participants to contribute fully and explore their capabilities

- To be **inspirational,** working with people and in environments that stimulate participants' imaginations, emotions and creativity

- To be **supportive**, balancing one-to-one support with collaborative and group workshops; structured activities with freedom and informality; and fun and engagement with stretch and challenge

- To be **transformational,** creating the conditions that enable participants to reflect, grow and change, strengthening their capacity to achieve their full potential

This vision underpins programme design, and reflects Arvon's commitment to creating an environment in which creativity can thrive, and in which young people can find their voice through creative writing.

### 2.1    Gathering Evidence

The focus on young people in the aims of *Writing the Game* demands an approach to evaluation that places high value on the voices of young people directly involved in the programme. The evaluation has engaged directly with young people in order to understand the impact of the programme on participants. This has facilitated a process that empowers young people to interpret the aims of *Writing the Game* and articulate these aims in their own experience of engagement in the programme.

The views and opinions of all young people engaged in the project have been captured through participant questionnaires. In addition, 3 cohorts of young people (total 48) have been involved in case study investigation to support deeper engagement. This enabled small groups of young people (4-5 participants) to take part in focus group discussions with the evaluator. Young people have also contributed to interviews that took place during film-making (approx. 32 participants). Creative approaches to visualising impacts have been used to draw out young people's understanding of the programme through the making of memory maps, which enabled young people to reflect on and identify the impact of their residential experience; and Role on the Wall activities, which gave young people the opportunity to visualise how the programme supported their writing.

Evidence has also been gathered from teachers and writers involved in *Writing the Game*. Evidence from teachers has focussed on how the programme has impacted on young people's achievement and attainment, and has provoked further inquiry into the broader pedagogical and policy context in which *Writing the Game* operates. This has connected to writers' vision and understanding of how *Writing the Game* achieves impact, and how the conditions for building capacity and raising achievement can be supported and developed both within and beyond the programme. The evidence gathered from teachers and writers has been contextualised in relevant research that explores pedagogical theory and frameworks relating to writing and young people. In developing this evidence base, the evaluation reflects on the barriers and opportunities that exist in embedding the principles of *Writing the Game* in schools, exploring how the project contributes to pedagogy by developing teachers' knowledge and confidence in creative writing, promoting curriculum innovation, and improving outcomes for young people.

The evaluation has therefore drawn on the following data:

- Focus groups with young participants (48 participants)

- Interviews with young people during film-making (32 participants)

- 79 residential student evaluation questionnaires

- Interviews with teachers and senior managers (from case study schools)

- 8 residential teacher evaluation forms

- Interviews with teachers during film-making (2 teachers)

- Interviews with writers (4 writers) and writer evaluation forms

- Desk research exploring the pedagogical context of *Writing the Game* (bibliography attached)

Interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded during the evaluation. All data has been fully anonymised, and participants in the evaluation are identified as 'pupil' 'teacher' and 'writer'. Quotations from recordings have followed an intelligent verbatim transcription methodology, omitting 'um', 'er' 'you know' etc, and transcribing for best clear written meaning. In addition, emails, conversations and meetings with the Arvon team leading the project have informed the evaluation and formed part of the dataset.
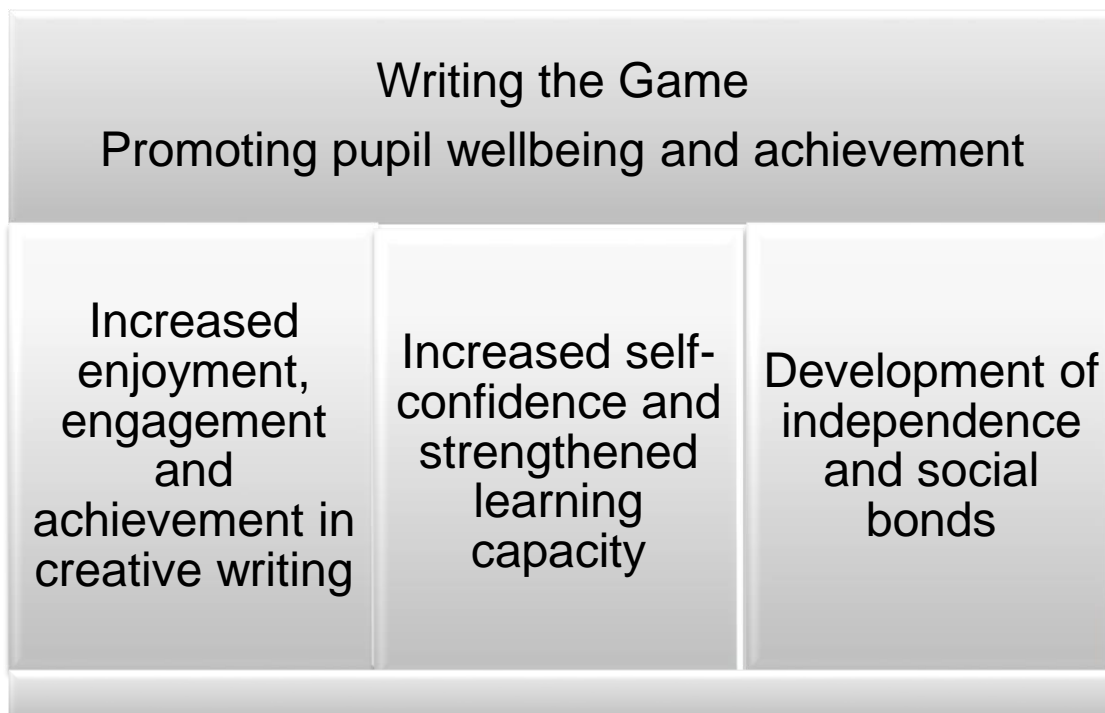
## 2.2    Interpreting Evidence: A thematic analysis

The focus on participants' experiences in this evaluation has driven the need for an interpretive analysis of data that is capable of viewing the evidence from different perspectives in order to explore the full complexity of not only the impacts of *Writing the Game*, but the context in which it operates. The interpretive approach is influenced by the idea that *'the reality that we perceive is always conditioned by our experiences and our culture'* (Willis, 2007). In brief, full understanding of *Writing the Game* cannot be achieved by simply assessing the extent to which the programme meets its own aims; rather, the evaluation seeks to contextualise the meaning of these aims in the broader landscape of pedagogy and policy that informs participants' world views.

In this evaluation, the interpretive approach enables the analysis of data not only to investigate the outcomes of *Writing the Game* against the explicit aims devised by Arvon, but to acknowledge and analyse the subjective interpretations of these aims in the lived experiences of participants.  This enables us to adjust the lens through which we view *Writing the Game*:  by 'zooming  in' we can achieve a a close view of individual experiences, bringing details into sharp focus. However, the close-up cannot give the big picture, can lack perspective, and can at times be too close to enable us to make sense of what we are seeing.  By 'zooming out' we add perspective, and are more able to see broader territory, patterns, and context —but perhaps miss some subtleties and nuances of experience. Both perspectives have strengths and weaknesses for evaluation methodology. By applying a thematic analysis to the interpretation of data, we are able to zoom in on an individual's views, ideas and opinions; and zoom out to consider how perspectives connect to each other, and how broader societal policy and pedagogy contexts inform participants' understandings. This evaluation proposes that

multiple perspectives are required to achieve a full understanding of the impacts, challenges and opportunities that exist in *Writing the Game*.

The analysis of data in the evaluation has therefore been developed from the recurring themes that are explored by participants, identifying patterns that reveal key concepts and ideas that emerge from the evidence of both participants and the broader research field. The key concepts that have emerged from the analysis of data are underpinned by a unifying theme of *Promoting Pupil Well-being and Achievement*. The analysis of data has drilled into this to identify three thematic strands that are evidenced in the data and that exist in an holistic conceptual framework:

| Writing the Game Promoting pupil wellbeing and achievement | | |
|---|---|---|
| Increased enjoyment, engagement and achievement in creative writing | Increased self-confidence and strengthened learning capacity | Development of independence and social bonds |

Well-being and achievement are conceptualised as overarching themes that inform understanding of impacts on pupils. The original intention to investigate well-being through the use of the New Philanthropy Centre Well-Being Measure was reviewed in the light of pupil repose; a number of pupils were reluctant to answer the questionnaire, and commented that *'it asks weird questions…it's a bit like private stuff', 'it was a bit nosy '.*  Focus groups and interviews were used to create a safe space in which pupils could explore ideas connected with well-being in a way that they felt comfortable and able to engage more fully in a discussion, rather than through a questionnaire. This

was felt to be a more appropriate mechanism for the development of trust with young people during their residential week.

Within the holistic framework identified above, well-being and achievement are explored as elements of each of the three key themes that emerge from the data:

- **Increased enjoyment, engagement and achievement in creative writing**

The evaluation evidences that *Writing the Game* participants have identified that the programme has positively influenced their understanding of creative writing as an activity that they enjoy; and that they have demonstrated improved achievement in writing through their participation. This is in contrast to participants' usual experience, where they are often reluctant to write, and self-identify as 'poor' at writing.

- **Increased self-confidence and strengthened learning capacity**

This theme explores the programme's impact on young people's emerging sense of themselves as individuals with valid and valuable viewpoints and ideas, and with the capacity to express their ideas successfully through writing. This connects to young people's understanding of themselves more broadly as learners, and their recognition of their own potential to achieve and surpass expectations.

- **The development of independence and social bonds**

*Writing the Game* emerges from the evaluation as a programme that both supports young people's independence through individual agency, and encourages collaborative activity through creative writing and through the domestic and social experience of living together during the residential. The evaluation examines how learners' joint participation in creative writing enables them to develop strong social bonds, and acquire new knowledge of themselves, each other, and the world around them.

This evaluation contextualizes the thematic analysis in an understanding of Arvon's pedagogical approach to *Writing the Game*, and positions this pedagogical philosophy at the heart of learning outcomes (3.6 below).

**2.3 Contextualising Evidence: Articulating an Arvon Pedagogy**

The themes that have emerged from the collection and analysis of data are contextualized in the articulation of a distinct Arvon pedagogy that emerges both from the *Writing the Game* programme, and from Arvon's overarching vision for learning. Arvon's vision to be welcoming, inspiring, supportive and transformational in its engagement with young people provides a philosophical underpinning for a pedagogical approach to the development of the programme. This has previously been explored in the evaluation of *(M)other Tongues* (Murphy 2014), which found that the programme embodied Arvon's values through a methodology that connected personal, social and cultural development of young people involved in the programme. In this evaluation, a more explicit analysis of pedagogy is advanced in order to develop fuller understanding of how outcomes are achieved; map the contextual landscape in which *Writing the Game* operates; and identify the barriers and opportunities that exist in embedding learning in schools.

The explicit articulation of an Arvon pedagogy is considered as a central concern in this evaluation for three key reasons:

- A narrative of greater freedom in designing and developing the school curriculum has emerged over recent years, specifically through the review of the national curriculum that was launched in 2011 and implemented in 2014. The slimmed down Programme of Study for KS3 continues a pedagogical emphasis on grammar. The new curriculum offers detailed guidance to support teachers' knowledge and understanding of key grammatical concepts and technical aspects of English at KS3. However, the curriculum also states the expectation pupils will be taught to *'write stories, scripts, poetry and other imaginative writing'*, but does not offer teachers guidance about the body of knowledge that teachers may need to do this successfully. The articulation of an Arvon pedagogy will therefore help to address the lack of knowledge and confidence that many teachers feel in developing successful teaching and learning strategies in relation to creative writing (Cremin 2005; Cremin and Myhill 2011).

- Arvon's position as a leader in developing innovative and ambitious programmes for young people grows from the philosophy on which it was originally established in 1967, with the aim of 'providing time and space away from school for young people to write'. As Arvon has grown and developed, it has become important to create stronger pathways that enable teachers and young people to take learning from Arvon back into the classroom. While time and space away from school remain valuable, it is now more important than ever that the value of this experience is sustained. This is ambitious and challenging, and can only be achieved in the context of an Arvon

pedagogical framework that helps teachers to raise young people's engagement and achievement in writing beyond the life of the programme.

- As Arvon's learning programmes have developed and grown, the potential for exploring new ways of working with schools continue to emerge. Arvon's aspiration to evolve and develop its programmes ensures that new programmes respond to the most pertinent challenges for schools and young people. As the landscape for delivery of professional development has changed and fragmented, Arvon's offer to teachers needs to be aligned to both a radically new structure of delivery (which includes a much reduced role for local authorities who in the past have provided both practical and advocacy routes to teachers) and an understanding of how an Arvon pedagogy relates to objectives that exist in the classroom.

This evaluation proposes that the themes identified in 2.2 above arise from an Arvon pedagogy that is distinctive and that relates to how learners' minds are conceived in developing capacity and achievement in creative writing.

# 3    Findings

## 3.1    Programme outputs

| *Writing the Game* 2013-2015 | |
|---|---|
| Number of school cohort residential weeks delivered | 5 |
| Number of pupil participants engaged in *Writing the Game* | 80 |
| Number of teacher participants engaged in *Writing the Game* | 10 |
| Football club partnerships with *Writing the Game* | 4 |
| 4 School community *Writing the Game* sharing events | 160 |
| No of pupils progressing to Arts Award | 32 |
| Professional development session for literacy co-ordinators and teachers in Barnsley | 14 |
| *Writing the Game* presentation for staff at George Mitchell School, including head teacher PE and English teachers | 9 |
| Presentation to Partners in English about *Writing the Game* in the context of creative writing and educational change | 19 |
| Two visits to Barnsley Football club for skills training, advice and a match | 32 |
| Kick it Out national creative writing competition for young writers aged 7-18, open to all English primary and secondary schools. Including 3000 leaflets to schools, online presence, and twitter campaign | 2000 |

This evaluation draws on five *Writing the Game* school cohorts, which have taken place during 2013-2015, as summarised below:

| School | Residential | No of pupils | Football club partner |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Carlton Community College, Barnsley** | July 2013 | 16 | Barnsley |
| **Darton Community College, Barnsley** | December 2013, Lumb Bank | 16 | Barnsley |
| **Darton Community College, Barnsley** | December 2014, Lumb Bank | 16 | Barnsley |
| **The Dearne School, Barnsley** | March 2015, Lumb Bank | 16 | Sheffield United |
| **The Norwood School, Lambeth** | April 2015 Totleigh Barton | 16 | Crystal Palace |

A sixth school, George Mitchell School in Leyton, will take part in *Writing the Game* residential in February 2016 (see 3.2 below).


### 3.2    Funding the programme 2013-15 and beyond

Funding of £88,000 from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation has supported the delivery of the *Writing the Game* programme to the four South Yorkshire groups indicated above, and the programme evaluation. This funding has enabled Arvon to lever additional resource into the programme, and extend the range of young people involved in *Writing the Game*. Original plans had identified that Arvon would seek to work with a school and football club in the North West. Whilst it has not been possible to secure the engagement of a school and football club partnership in the North West, Arvon has been able to work with an individual donor to support the residential, post residential workshops, production of a junior fanzine, and match day experience for young people at The Norwood School in partnership with Crystal Palace Football Club. A donation of £19,000 has been secured by Arvon to support this activity.  The work with Crystal Palace will continue to develop in Autumn 2015, with four sessions planned for young people to form an editorial team to develop and produce a special edition of *The Eaglet* junior fanzine. The embedding of *Writing the Game* activity in Crystal Palace's engagement with young people offers the potential for an extended partnership to be explored beyond 2016.

Arvon is currently working with George Mitchell School in Leyton towards a residential week planned for February 2016. Arvon has facilitated the school's engagement with Leyton Orient Football Club through a one day workshop (led by *Writing the Game* tutor Musa Okwonga) at the club, and the club has hosted Arvon's national Write to Unite competition awards. Arvon has worked

with Leyton Orient Football Club in the development of a 2016-18 bid to Comic Relief (£65,648, decision July 2015). If successful this funding will support a 10 week *Supporter to Reporter* programme at LOFC embedding and developing learning from *Writing the Game*.

### 3.3      Pupil assessment: key learning areas

Questionnaires were used to ask pupils to assess the impact of the programme on their learning in seven key areas: use of English and grammar; vocabulary; reading; creativity and imagination; confidence; teamwork; and enjoyment of learning.

**Pupil assessment of Writing the Game impacts 2013-2015**
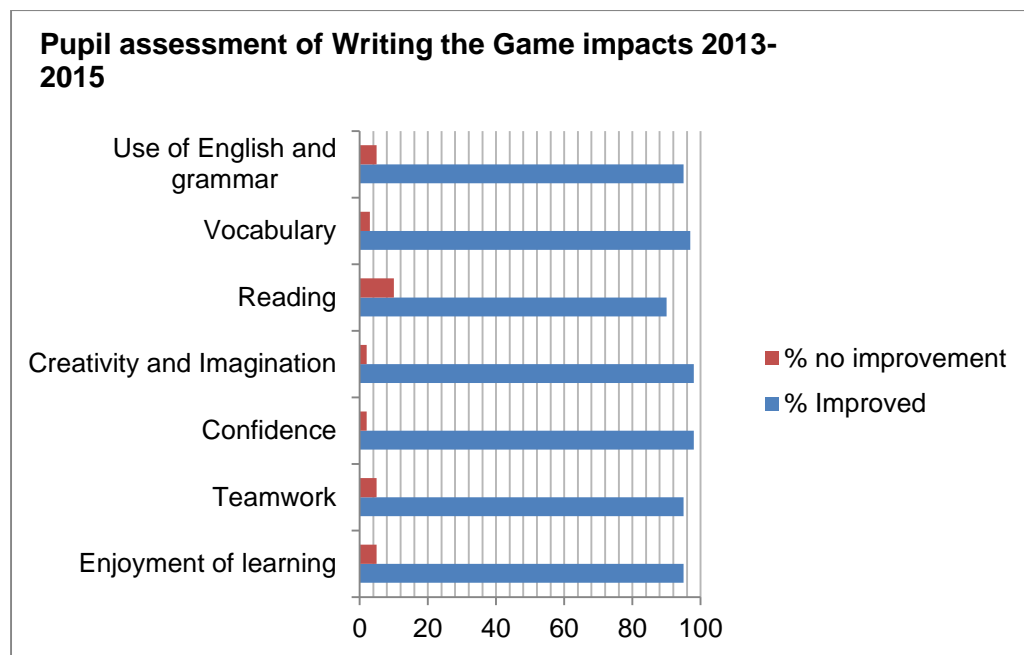


Pupil assessment reveals a perception that *Writing the Game* has had an overwhelmingly positive impact across all seven key areas of learning, ranging from perceived improvement at a low of 90% of pupils perceiving improvements in reading, to a high of 98% (creativity and confidence).

The table below clarifies improvements across each of the seven areas:

| Area of Learning | % Improved | % No Improvement |
|---|---|---|
| Use of English and grammar | 95 | 5 |
| Vocabulary | 97 | 3 |
| Reading | 90 | 10 |
| Creativity and Imagination | 98 | 2 |
| Confidence | 98 | 2 |
| Teamwork | 95 | 5 |
| Enjoyment of learning | 95 | 5 |

Pupil self-assessment is recognised as critical to raising attainment and achievement, since it encourages learners to *'take responsibility for their learning... It follows that the more learners know about, and participate in, decisions about the goals of their own learning, about where they have reached in relation to those goals and what further needs to be done to pursue them, the more they can direct their own learning efforts effectively'* (IoE, 2005).

Pupil comments on questionnaires revealed that at the root of the improvements that they identified was a changed attitude to writing: this is explored in depth in 3.2 below, and the following comments are typical of pupils' recognition that their relationship with creative writing had changed as a result of engagement in *Writing the Game*:

> *Arvon has changed the way I see writing as before it seemed it was all for school and now it's no longer about school. It's all about writing for yourself. (Pupil)*

> *Because it has got me more interested as before I didn't care about it [writing]. (Pupil)*

> *It's made me realise that writing is a way to solve problems. I never used to like writing and now I love it. (Pupil)*

### 3.4 Impact on teachers' creative writing

Teachers also responded to the residential questionnaires in relation to their own learning in creative writing: this is a critical element of the pedagogical impact of the programme which is explored in detail in 3.6 below. Teachers were asked to assess whether their own learning had improved in

relation to the same key areas as their pupils. All teachers (100%) reported improvements in their own learning against each of the six key areas. Teachers' comments focus on the opportunity to engage in creative activity, and the extent to which participation in creative writing may influence pedagogical approaches

> *I have experienced a total life change and understanding of writing poetry and other styles of writing. (Teacher)*

> *I learned to teach creative writing in a more effective way. Less formulaic and picky about the mechanics of writing than I tend to need to be as a teacher. (Teacher)*

> *This is my second year of attending the course. I have definitely developed my creativity of writing, through poetry and personal pieces I have done. Arvon truly opens your mind to wonderful things. (Teacher)*

> *I felt inspired to write whilst here on the course and wrote and read a poem out at the final reading. (Teacher)*

## 3.5    Programme Outcomes: Promoting Pupil Well-being and Achievement

As outlined above, qualitative data collected through focus groups and interviews has been explored in order to identify three strands of impact on participants. This section of the report analyses this data, foregrounding participant voice and individual experience in order to provide insight into how *Writing the Game* has impacted on pupil well-being and achievement.

### 3.5.1    Increased enjoyment, engagement and achievement in creative writing

*Writing the Game* participants consistently reported that they usually found writing challenging, that they were aware of their lack of achievement, and that they had little faith in their potential to make progress in writing.  Many pupils talked about writing as a chore, and there was little sense that they related to writing as a creative act, or as a means of self-expression. Pupils most frequently focused on technical aspects of writing in their self-assessment, citing poor spelling and grammar as the key obstacles they faced in making progress. When asked how they normally felt about writing, none of the pupils interviewed offered any positive comments. Some pupils revealed the strategies that they employed in order to cope with possible failure, and avoid making mistakes:

> *Sometimes the words are in my head that I want to use, and I know they're the right words that I need to say something, but if I don't know how to spell it or something I'll go for a lower level of word instead. (Pupil)*

*I'll sometimes change a whole sentence from the sentence in my head just so that I can put something easier down and get it right, even though I know what's in my head is better. (Pupil)*

*Because I haven't got much confidence in writing, I think I can't do it, so then I don't really try because I think I won't be able to do it. So then it gets my confidence even less. (Pupil)*

Pupils here identify that the key aim for them is to avoid technical errors in writing at all costs. In the examples above, achieving this aim inhibits them from extending their choice of vocabulary, and even from saying what they mean. Rather, they make safe choices that inevitably dampen any enthusiasm and that are likely to inhibit progress. For these pupils there seems to be a self-fulfilling prophecy at work, in which their conception of writing as boring and of themselves as poor writers is compounded by their adoption of coping strategies that lead to dull writing processes and little opportunity to make progress. In trying to avoid failure, they risk failing to make progress.

*Writing the Game* offered young people new approaches to creating written texts, and pupils responded with high levels of enthusiasm and engagement, in contrast to their usual attitudes to writing. Many pupils surprised themselves by how much they enjoyed writing, and were able to identify that this was unusual, and that they were conscious of a shift within their attitude:

*It has been really fun writing. I never thought I'd say that! (Pupil)*

*When I was writing about the interview I noticed a difference in myself. I started to think, this is good. I was enjoying it, and I think what I was writing was good. I never feel that normally. (Pupil)*

Pupils also identified that heightened engagement and enjoyment had enabled them to make progress in their writing. Pupils' self-assessment and peer assessment often focussed on the progress that they had observed and experienced in their own and each other's writing:

*I've surprised myself because I've written more than I thought I would, and my writing is more clear and to the point, I've been able to express myself more. I've surprised myself because the tutors said it was really good and that I should read it out. (Pupil)*

*I didn't know that I could write so good, I didn't know I could read this well, I didn't know that I could make poems, I didn't know that I could make good stories, that I could make people laugh. (Pupil)*

*To be honest, I've come here for a week off school. My mum's sick of me being on report so she wanted me to come. But I've done more writing today than I've done in weeks at school. In school I might have written one paragraph, but I've written seven paragraphs today. And it's been hard, but it's weird because I've enjoyed it, and I've been relaxed and more chilled. (Pupil)*

*I've heard a lot of good things about my writing that I've never heard before. I've been able to write a lot more than I usually do, and I feel like it's improving, and I'm reading more, reading different stuff. (Pupil)*

Teachers noted that young people's enthusiasm was maintained for some time after the residential. One teacher identified that not only were young people *'buzzing'* when they returned to school, but that they were keen to carry out follow on work, and that several months later they were *'still more switched on…their teachers can see the difference in their attitude and in the writing they produce, and so can they, and actually that's the more important thing, that they can see the difference for themselves' (Teacher).*

Participants identified that the feedback that they received from tutors was highly significant in developing their enjoyment of creative writing, and impacting on higher achievement. Writers delivering the *Writing the Game* programme created frequent opportunities for sharing feedback with participants. For young people, this feedback had high value because they respected the role of tutors as professional writers, and because tutors were able to gain the trust of participants. Young people were influenced by tutors' conviction that their writing was interesting, authentic and had intrinsic value; and by the sense that the writers were genuinely concerned that participants achieved their potential.

*When the tutors give you feedback it's dead personal. They don't just say well done, they say something different to every single person, it's proper genuine. It's like they're really interested. (Pupil)*

*You feel like they've got know you, that they're interested in you. They want you to do well, and you want to show that you can do it. (Pupil)*

Interactions with tutors were framed within a context that positioned the participants as fellow writers: they were 'commissioned' to develop specific pieces of writing, rather than tasked to deliver outputs;

they were encouraged to develop and edit their work so that it expressed what they wanted to say in the best way they could say it, rather than asked to redraft to hit criteria for attainment levels:

> *It's like they're pushing you but not pushing you, it's more like they're wanting you to see what you can really achieve. (Pupil)*

> *It's not so much how much you write, you can write a line or you can write a million lines, as long as it's about something that you like and that you want to write. (Pupil)*

The importance of young people having an opportunity to write about what matters was also recognised by teachers, who observed high levels of engagement from usually reluctant writers, and identified that this was because they were *'writing from the heart' (Teacher).* In *Writing the Game*, 'commissions' are conceptualised as opportunities for young people to respond to a writing brief that contains a number of options (form, content) for a creative response. Teachers noted that this had an impact on pupils' motivation, and that personalised 'commissions' to develop text engaged pupils in ways that hadn't been observed in traditional writing tasks, where they would be '*much more hesitant'* to start writing *(Teacher).*

Tutors' willingness to share their own writing practice – not just through readings, but by discussing the processes that they engage in as they develop their work – was integral to the writer-to-writer framework of delivery. Through these discussions, tutors shared the challenges that they face in trying to express meaning; the common challenge that all writers face in trying to *'find the words that will unlock the doors of all those many mansions in the head and express something'* (Hughes, 1967). By placing meaning-making at the centre of the writing process, tutors handed responsibility over to pupils: the key concern became 'what do you want to say and what is the best way that you can say it?. Participants responded to this by taking greater ownership of their work, recognizing the intrinsic value of crafting meaning through writing and working with tutors to hone writing so that it reflected their intended meaning. The tutoring process was individualized; participants responded positively to the foregrounding of guidance and advice rather than instruction:

> *Coming here has helped me, the thing I find hard is that it's all there in my mind but I don't know how to get it on the page, so it's helped with that, because [the tutors] have been helping me, they explain how you can do it in detail. (Pupil)*

> *They explain how to do it really well. It's hard to put into words. They don't exactly say how you have to do it, but they give you ideas, they make you want to actually do it well, it's like*

*they know how to give you guidance but then you know how to work it out for yourself. You feel more that it's yours, it's up to you. (Pupil)*

*They're always challenging us to come to them for more feedback, then they can give us advice about what to write next. (Pupil)*

Participants' enjoyment of creative writing was further raised by the opportunity for young people to explore subject matter and form for themselves, rather than responding to prescribed topics and genre. For obvious reasons the starting point for generating ideas was often connected to football, which stimulated engagement for those pupils with a passion for the sport. However, as outlined at 4.2.1 below, not all participants were football fans. But the focus on football for generating ideas didn't alienate non-fans; sufficient freedom was given to deviate from these starting points so that all participants were able to find their own meaningful responses. Beyond this, pupils also valued the freedom to choose when to write, where to write, and how to schedule their own writing activities. Freedom of choice in all aspects of writing activity was extremely significant for participants:

*We could make the thing you're writing about our own, it's not just what everyone else expects you to do, it's got your own influences, you've got to make it your own. You don't get much chance to do that normally, that's what I enjoy. (Pupil)*

*Having a cup of tea when you wanted. That's what helped me. (Pupil)*

*The tutors have given me advice. It wasn't like 'this is good but you have to improve this', it felt more like my writing, and they trust me to get it really good. When you're given that trust you feel privileged. (Pupil*

Participants engaged in a process of feedback and critique that stimulated their desire to improve their writing, breaking away from coping strategies that avoid risk for fear of making errors, and focusing instead on the potential to create engaging, meaningful texts. Pupils were able to see ways in which the learning developed through *Writing the Game* could help them to raise attainment back in the classroom:

*I'm learning new words. They told us if you hear a new word, write it down, and they point it out if someone uses an interesting word, so it's making me take more notice of the words you choose. I'll keep doing that, it's improving my writing, and it's making me more motivated to improve because I can see what to do. (Pupil)*

*At home I've been keeping getting levels 6s, but here they've said if I carry on with this piece it will get to a level 7. I want to get to a higher level, here it's offered me an opportunity to do that because…I  know now what I want to do to make it better. (Pupil)*

**3.5.2   Increased self-confidence and strengthened learning capacity**

Many of the young people involved in *Writing the Game* identified that they had low self-confidence as learners generally, and in writing specifically. Their sense that they were not achieving well, and that they doubted their ability to improve their writing, clearly impacted on their confidence. For some participants, this was exacerbated by their peers' perceptions of them.

> *Some people said it was a duggy trip, just for duggies, it doesn't make you feel very nice. (Pupil)*

The slang term 'duggy' was used by several young people from South Yorkshire to describe themselves, and when asked about it, the meaning was clear: *'it means you're thick' 'I get called a duggy all the time because I'm not smart'.* Pupils' perception of their own ability was identified by teachers as a key issue in tackling the challenge of raising attainment; teachers frequently expressed that pupils were performing below their true ability, and that this was in part attributable to their belief that they were not capable of improving.

The starting point for most participants involved in the programme was low self-confidence, often arising from lack of achievement and a belief that they had little capacity to improve, compounded by the perception of others. Their experience during *Writing the Game* was transformative, rejecting the conception that they were not capable of achievement and progress:

> *When we all read out our work, I thought it was really good, everyone's was good. I thought, people might think we're duggies but they're wrong, everything people read out was really good. (Pupil)*

Teachers also observed transformation in pupils' learning behaviours: one teacher described the residential week as like a *'reset button…They learn in patterns in schools – they start thinking and acting anew [here], writing about things and in a way that they've never written before.'*

Young people identified that their increased enjoyment in creative writing was strongly connected to increased self-confidence. Once again the positive feedback and support from the writers was identified as highly significant in raising self-confidence; along with the development of skills and knowledge about creative writing that enabled them to approach tasks with greater assurance:

*I think it's helping to build my confidence, and when I talked to[the tutor] he told me he thought I was smart, and I'm bottom set for some things, but he thought from talking to me and what I did in my work he thought I was a smart girl, so that made me feel more confident. I'm not used to people thinking I'm smart. (Pupil)*

*One on ones, hearing that I've done well in my writing, progressing in it…that's what's built my confidence. My first hai ku was ok, my third one was perfect, because I've listened to what the tutors have said and the students have said. (Pupil)*

*One of the tutors said to me 'I'd never have thought of that, I'd never have said it like that' and it makes you think, well they're a proper writer and they think it's got something about it, so it must be alright. (Pupil)*

Young people were astute in their understanding that without greater self-confidence, they were unlikely to make progress. They understood that confidence is connected not only with attainment and achievement, but with a deeply held sense of self. They connected the potential to develop their writing with the potential to develop their sense of self, and their broader potential:

*You can't build a skyscraper without foundations. Hope is like the foundations for us, so it's building up that hope in us that everyone can improve. It's not just about getting a level. It's about you. (Pupil)*

The experience of the writing workshop contained many of the elements that young people with low self-confidence might fear: they were asked to read, to write, to talk to each other, to speak up in front of the rest of the group, to read their own work out, to respond to the works of others. For young people lacking in self-confidence, situations such as these can make them fearful, anxious, disengaged or disruptive. However, the focus was consistently on valuing individuals' ideas, opinions and contributions, and participants quickly responded to a positive, collaborative atmosphere that created the conditions for developing their self-confidence:

*I don't have any confidence in myself. I don't like reading. I don't like writing. I don't like talking in front of people, I keep myself to myself. And this has just given me the boost of confidence that I needed about reading, writing, speaking to people. If I hadn't come, I wouldn't be able to speak like this now. (Pupil)*

*I'm usually too embarrassed and nervous about reading out, people might laugh, but I've been able to do that here. (Pupil)*

*It's scary when you have to read out, but when I'd done it, it made me feel more confident. He's in set 1 and I'm in set 3 and he said my work was just as good as his. I'd never know I*

*could be that good if we hadn't done this, because we'd never hear each other's stuff. So it's made me feel more confident, that I can be as good as other people if I try. (Pupil)*

Teachers recognised that the development of a writing community in which tutors, teachers and professional writers share their work contributed to young peoples' growing self-confidence: *'hopefully it helps them to see that some of their concern is based merely on their own opinion of their own writing, so when they've had the opportunity to read each other's, and listen to experienced writers and see the similarities between their work and experienced writers' work, hopefully it makes them feel a bit more confident' (Teacher).*

Participants reflected on the ways in which their developing self-confidence was significant to their sense of themselves as learners, and recognised that the confidence and progress that they were developing in writing indicated their potential learning capacity in other areas. Some young people felt that the impact of the project extended beyond creative writing, supporting them to *'think more deeply'* and to consider their strengths and weaknesses as learners in a more broad way. Pupils felt that *Writing the Game* encouraged them to reflect on and support their approach to learning, and to discover new things about themselves as learners:

> *I've learned that I'm a questioner. I question myself a lot. (Pupil)*
>
> *This week has made me get my weaknesses out, and that's made me stronger, I've been able to see my strengths and weaknesses and build up my strengths. (Pupil)*
>
> *I didn't know that I could think so well. I've struggled usually with thinking about things to put on paper but in the past few days people have pushed me to think more deeply about what I write. I didn't know I could think more deeply. (Pupil)*

Teachers reflected that the confidence gained through self-assessment and peer critique was deeply felt, and had fundamentally shifted students' expectation of their own achievement:

> *They can look at their own work and say 'this is better than this one', and they've drafted and redrafted until they've got to a point when they've said no, that's it, they're assessing their own capabilities rather than levels. So I think when we go back the kids will know that's better than this, I don't think they'll tolerate 'that'll do' now, they'll always want to keep pushing…(Teacher)*

### 3.5.3 The development of independence and social bonds

As outlined in 3.5.1 above, pupils recognised that ownership and self-expression were at the heart of many of the creative writing activities that they engaged in during the residential week, and independent choice of content and form were valued by participants as vital to making progress in writing. Beyond this, the residential environment contributed both to greater independence and the development of strong social bonds between participants. Young people felt that this enabled them to support each other's development, recognising the value that each brought to the group. Young people felt valued by their peers, and confident that they would be accepted by the group. This contributed to emerging self-confidence as participants felt able to express themselves more freely, and to offer and receive support and encouragement:

> *Sometimes I've said something in class in school, and everyone laughs, and it puts my confidence down. Here, you know you can have kind jokes with each other, but not take the mickey out of each other to be mean. In school you make one little slip and people pick up on it and take the mick out of you, and it doesn't go away for weeks and weeks. Here people are more friends and look out for each other. (Pupil)*

> *I'm not that comfortable speaking out in front of people, but I've done that here, I've had some encouragement from [the tutors] and I have said my ideas in front of people. It helps because it's a smaller group. (Pupil)*

> *When we were reading out – I'm not good at reading out, I make mistakes, I'm slow. Nobody rushed me. It was like they wanted me to take my time because they wanted to hear my work. (Pupil)*

The transformation here – from being perceived by peers as 'duggies' to being part of a group that not only accepts and supports everybody, but is genuinely interested in hearing each other's contributions – had a profound impact on young people's sense of self. The freedom that young people were given to explore the house and grounds, to use their time as they saw fit, also supported independence and self-efficacy:

> *I went for a little walk earlier and I was thinking, I'm not used to this freedom. I'm not used to choosing what to do, when to do it. It's almost a strange feeling, to choose what's important to you to write about. (Pupil)*

> *The freedom of what we do, how we do it, I think it puts more responsibility on us. (Pupil)*

*It's making you be more independent, at school you're getting told what to do, but here you're making more choices for yourself. (Pupil)*

The group dynamic of support and encouragement extended beyond the writing workshop and impacted on how participants lived together, sharing space, chores and social time. Undoubtedly part of the overwhelmingly positive response to living together as a group can be accounted for in the novelty of being away from home for a week at the age of 13 or 14. However, these were not friendship groups and there was clear potential for cliques to form. The fact that this didn't happen seems to owe something to an unwritten social contract that participants engaged in: to support each other's development and encourage active participation.

*We've come on this trip and there's people who don't know anybody, but we've all come together, we've helped each other out, told people what to do, how to do it. (Pupil)*

*In school I won't read out. It makes me nervous. I know people will take the mick if I get things wrong. Here you support each other cos you're all in the same boat. (Pupil)*

Participants frequently referenced the importance of cooking for each other and eating together. Even those young people who didn't really like the food options – usually because it wasn't what they were used to – appreciated the group effort that went into preparing food and cleaning up after each other. The social bonds that were established through this domestic caring for each other spilled over into the writing workshop, and contributed to a collaborative and supportive environment:

*When you cook and clean for the group, it feels like a privilege. Like you've done something for the team. (Pupil)*

*I feel like I'm being more independent. It's not just about writing and football, it's cooking, eating, cleaning up, listening to music. You're all together, but every person is being their own person, so you're more independent. It's the whole package, not just one bit or another. (Pupil)*

**3.6      Pedagogy and writing practice: understanding the pedagogical context**

This evaluation of *Writing the Game* proposes that the impact of the programme on participants is directly connected to a distinctive pedagogical stance that is alternate to conceptions of pedagogy that are dominant to those in educational policy. Through this alternate pedagogy, young people's perception of themselves as writers is altered, and their understanding of what creative writing *is* and what it *is for* is transformed.

Pedagogy is a complex concept, and '*the spectrum of available definitions ranges from the societally broad to the procedurally narrow'* (Alexander, 2004 ). In relation to schools, the term pedagogy is not only less widely used in England than in other parts of Europe and America, but is also perhaps subject to narrower definitions. It has been suggested that in England, understandings of pedagogy tend to focus almost exclusively on transactions between teacher and pupil, with an underlying assumption that pedagogy is predominantly concerned with teaching and learning activities in the classroom. This excludes the sense of '*how pedagogy connects with culture, social structure and human agency, and thus acquires educational meaning'* (Alexander, 2004).

In this evaluation, pedagogy is conceived as encompassing both *'the act and discourse of teaching'* (Alexander, 2004), where classroom practice does not exist in isolation, but  reflects the interaction of individuals with wider societal and cultural forces. From this perspective, the exploration of the pedagogy of creative writing includes the impact of educational policy; how writing is conceived and understood by participants; how individuals believe creative writing can be 'taught' and 'learned'; and questions of power and self-identity.  The pedagogy focus in this evaluation explores how pedagogy has been developed through these wider societal forces, and in particular how policy developed by educationalists has imposed writing pedagogy on teachers and schools through an accountability framework.

The evaluation draws on Jerome Bruner's four models of learners' minds and corresponding models of pedagogy (Bruner, 1996). I have identified this as useful because of its emphasis on 'folk pedagogies' that reflect implicit and explicit attitudes and beliefs about how learners learn. This theoretical framework acknowledges that pedagogy is present in all situations where learning is the aim; and that unconscious and unacknowledged pedagogy can be just as powerful as 'expert' pedagogy. Bruner asserts that 'everyday, intuitive theories' are highly relevant to what actually takes place in the classroom, and that pedagogy is highly determined by the model of the learner's mind (how they receive or build learning) that is present in any learning situation.

Bruner describes four conceptions of learners' minds that determine pedagogical approaches. These conceptions are helpful in coming to understand how pedagogy has influenced pupils' poor self-perception and underachievement and in understanding and describing an Arvon pedagogy. A brief overview of the four conceptions of the learners' mind and models of pedagogy is presented here for clarity, summarised from Bruner (1996: pp.53-65).

*Model 1 Imitative learners: the acquisition of 'know-how'.* This model assumes that the learner does not how to do *x*, and can learn how to do it through adult modelling. The act of modelling also assumes that the learner wants to learn how to do *x*. Motivation is present, knowledge is not, and knowledge is transferred from the knower to the learner by showing or demonstrating the knowledge.

*Model 2 Learning from didactic exposure: the acquisition of propositional knowledge.* This model assumes that the learner is 'ignorant of facts, rules or principles' and that this can be addressed by the learner being 'told'. This model assumes that the information that the learner needs to know is contained elsewhere – in the mind of the teacher, books, or other material; and that the mind of the learner is 'passive, a receptacle waiting to be filled'. This model is relevant to much of the pedagogy relating to technical writing that has been developed over the last 15 years.

*Model 3 Learners as thinkers: the development of intersubjective interchange.* Learners are perceived as constructing their own model of the world. In this model, learning is 'mutualist and dialectical' and teachers are focussed on fostering learners' understanding through 'discussion and collaboration'. This model implies that learning is built through dialogue; that learning works both ways; that critique, feedback and questioning build knowledge.

*Model 4 Learners as knowledgeable: the management of 'objective' knowledge.* Learners knowledge constitutes both personal knowledge and 'what is taken to be known' by the wider culture. In this model, teachers help learners to grasp the difference between the two, and to come to an understanding of how personal knowledge and ideas relate to 'what is known'. This enables learners to see their own learning in the context of what is known and accepted in the world around them – essentially, to make sense of themselves in the world.

Modern pedagogical developments tend to emphasize the need for learners to understand themselves as learners – stressing models 3 and 4 – although it is acknowledged that in some learning situations didactism and modelling are useful and effective. Bruner asserts that what is desirable is a congruence of pedagogies that respond to learners' needs and learning aspirations.

In order to understand how pedagogy has influenced *Writing the Game* participants' self-perceptions and conceptions of writing, it is necessary to explore how the pedagogical contexts have influenced young people's experience of creative writing in schools. Such reflection may help to shed light on why the young people who participate in *Writing the Game* have self-identified as being poor at writing, and lacking the potential to improve – even though their teachers have identified that their self-perception does not reflect their actual (higher) ability. The central questions in this pedagogical evaluation focus are therefore: *How has pedagogy influenced young people's lack of enjoyment, engagement and achievement? How has an Arvon pedagogy influenced increased enjoyment, engagement and achievement?*

For the young participants involved in *Writing the Game*, their experience and understanding of writing has been shaped by the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) -  first introduced in 1998, with revisions to the Framework at both primary and secondary level in 2001, 2003, 2006 and 2008, dominated classroom practice.  This time frame clearly maps against *Writing the Game* participants educational biographies, most of whom will have started their school lives in 2003: the strategies have followed then through their school lives, shaping their experience and understanding of writing.

The NLS and subsequent strategies have been the constructs within which literature and creative writing have been housed in schools, and although the government ended its contract with Capita (the company who delivered the NLS) in 2011, it has been argued that the influence of the strategies on pedagogy and conceptions of writing remain deeply rooted (Goodwyn and Fuller, 2012). The policy trajectory of English as a subject in the curriculum has great relevance for how Arvon can implement the aspirations of *Writing the Game*, and for the sustainable impacts that schools can build from their involvement in the programme.

The NLS was a response to perceived failures in the National Curriculum (NC) to tackle young people's attainment in reading and writing. Revisions to the NC formed the basis for the development of the NLS. It has been argued that these revisions, along with the publication of league tables based on a national testing framework, had an over-emphasis on *'tackling the basics' and had little to do with  'the formation of an English curriculum to meet the needs of…pupils'* (Bousted, 2000 ). In the revised curriculum, writing included the production of narrative, poems, script and non-fiction pieces, but without the conception of 'a writing classroom' that had been evident in the original NC (Davison and Dowson, 2009).  Rather, an emphasis was placed on vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and grammar which could be 'easily measured' by teachers (Davison and Dowson, 2009).

The NLS built on the new curriculum framework, setting out an approach to literacy teaching that attempted to make teaching both more accountable and more consistent. The key shift from NC to NLS was a move beyond content – what should be taught – towards a pedagogical directive relating to *how* writing should be taught. From a content perspective, much of the research that has taken place during the implementation of the strategy identifies a reductionist trend in the curriculum, in which the teaching of English has come to be concerned with *'basic reading and writing competence alone'* (Alexander, 2004).

Evidence also identifies that the prescription of pedagogy has all left little room for teachers to bring their own pedagogical knowledge into play: *'knowledge about teaching is, as it were, externalised: the strategies, frameworks, curricula…are designed to be, to a considerable extent, immune to teacher influence'* (Jones, 2006). It has been argued that this has developed a conception of the teachers' role that recasts them as 'technicians' (Alexander, 2004: p.11) and 'managerialist' (Wray and Medwell, 2006: p.204), delivering pedagogy that has been developed elsewhere, but not bringing into play any of their own pedagogical knowledge or judgement, and suppressing their role as 'transformative intellectuals' (Giroux, 1985) .

The NLS has been widely criticised not only for prescribing pedagogy, but for building pedagogy on a weak basis. Although the reforms claimed to be built on evidence from a variety of sources including inspection reports and research into school effectiveness and child development (Beard, 2003), it has been argued that there is a lack of *'empirical evidence related to language and literacy pedagogy'* (Wyse, 2003). The conception of writing has been seen as dominated by inappropriate grammar teaching objectives (Wyse, 2003), reinforced by the Grammar for Writing guidelines which formed part of the development of the strategy in 2000 (DfEE, 2000). Criticism of the pedagogical directives on writing seem to be borne out by the failure of NLS implementation to address continued concerns about young people's achievement in writing. In 2012, Ofsted identified that pupils' inability to achieve writing targets remained a *'persistent issue'* in both primary and secondary schools (Ofsted, 2012 ), linking this failure to *'weaknesses in the teaching of writing and gaps in [teachers'] subject knowledge'* .

Literacy, language and literature were perceived in the NLS as almost entirely separate realms, and the dominance of literacy has left little time for other aspects of English in the curriculum, particularly creative writing. The dominance of literacy objectives that focus on technical and functional accuracy had the effect of diminishing the role of literature and creative writing within the English curriculum; within this narrow conception of English, literature and creative writing became primarily devices for

demonstrating literacy skill. By 2005, Ofsted's chief inspector David Bell expressed concern that one impact of the strategy was that pupils were increasingly denied the experience of reading whole novels, indeed whole texts of any kind, in favour of extracts that served the purpose of addressing the range of 'text types' advocated in the strategy (Bell, 2005, cited in Marshall, 2006). It seemed that within seven years of implementing a national strategy that aimed to raise attainment in literacy, books had become incidental to the process of reading and writing.

### 3.6.1 The Arvon pedagogic model

It is within this context, then, that the participants involved in *Writing the Game* have developed conceptions of writing, and of themselves as learners. The focus on technical and functional aspects of writing has led to a prevalence of didactic and modelling informed pedagogy, but with little room or space for teachers to explore creative processes that lean more heavily towards Bruner's models of mind 3 and 4. The frameworks and strategies delivered to teachers have concentrated on creative writing product (story, poem, script) with little consideration for process. Whilst the new secondary curriculum (2014) provides teachers with a body of knowledge that is defined as essential in relation to grammar and technical use of language, there is no corresponding text exploring what needs to be known in the process of developing creative writing.

The Arvon pedagogy demonstrated in *Writing the Game* (and other programmes such as *(M)other Tongues)* reveals that it is possible to articulate those things that can be 'known', to build knowledge about effective processes in creative writing. Arvon's pedagogy foregrounds the learner as thinker, where learning is built through discussion and collaboration; and learners as knowledgeable, capable of understanding how their own knowledge connects to the world around them. This can be deduced from the responses of participants, and can be summarised as follows:

- The writing workshop during residentials acted as an environment in which knowledge was, quite literally, built through collaboration and discussion. Students entered the workshop with little anticipation of what to expect, and through the process of talking, thinking, listening and writing, each individual generated new text. The text itself exists as new knowledge; though it is evident that it is the *process* of building the text that was most highly valued by participants, many of whom usually struggle in the classroom. One teacher commented that they hadn't heard any pupil say 'I don't know what to write' during *Writing the Game,* a common cry in the classroom. This dialogic process gave pupils the power to 'know'; to discover and reveal what they already knew, but could not access.

- Through this process, pupils came to understand themselves better as learners. The workshops allowed emergent, hesitant, frail ideas to be explored, shared, developed, discarded. This enabled learners to see themselves as engaged in a learning process that moves away from the transactional – where the learner looks to the teacher for the knowledge to be 'told' or 'modelled' – to a process where the learner understands that they hold valuable knowledge, and are capable of using it effectively. This was reinforced through the discursive framework: when pupils read their work, critique focused on the particular choice of a word or phrase; the sound of a line; the surprise of an unexpected adjective and so on. The focus was always on how the student had achieved this (whether from tutor or peer).

- The one to one tutorials usually started with little focus on writing. Rather, tutors asked students what they were interested in, what they liked, what they disliked – their world view. Writing commissions were built individually from these sessions. This process is intuitively built on the premise that students are knowledgeable; that they bring to the learning situation their own world view that influences how they learn and what they learn. The tutors' pedagogical stance in this context is to understand that world view, and to collaborate with the learner in exploring it through creative writing.

- Tutors shared their own writing with students, both as an 'output' – finished texts shared through readings; and as a process, through discussion of their writing motivations, ambitions, challenges and frustrations. This enabled students to consider how their own creative writing knowledge exists in a context of other writers, other processes, other outcomes. Students responded to this by understanding that they used similar tools and processes to professional writers, that their writing could impress and inspire professional writers and their peers; building their self-esteem and their perception of their own ability to achieve.

- Both in and out of the workshop environment young people supported each other's writing through critique, sharing ideas, responding to what they read and heard of their peers' work. They developed a peer pedagogy that recognised each other as thinkers, and employed their own pedagogic model that intuitively understood that their own learning and the learning of their peers could be shaped by dialogue, collaboration and discussion.

### 3.6.2    Embedding and sustaining an Arvon pedagogy in schools

The residential week offers a unique environment that, on the face of it, has little in common with schools. Secondary schools are dynamic and complex environments, in which large numbers of young people and teachers negotiate physical space, curriculum objectives and social dynamics. There are multiple and overlapping webs of connections and interactions, competing priorities and allegiances, rich and deep data systems. Schools are undergoing major changes in the way they are organised, managed and structured. They are subject to the fluctuations of political will and whim, and the pressures of assessment and inspection. These are only the headlines, and do not include the granular detail of dealing with troubled students, anxious parents, and local communities; and of course ensuring that over a thousand young people are adequately fed and hydrated in a building that meets their hygiene needs. The complexity of the school environment contrasts starkly with the simplicity of an Arvon residential centre. It is of course, then, wholly unrealistic to expect that the Arvon environment can be replicated in schools.

However, schools and Arvon residentials share some clear ground: the mutual aspiration to improve young people's enjoyment, attainment and self-confidence. Teachers who have been engaged in *Writing the Game* have identified elements of the Arvon pedagogy that can be embedded and sustained in the complex environment of a secondary school.  The ideas expressed below relate to changes in classroom practice that teachers have identified through *Writing the Game*: in each case the pedagogical thread of models of the learners' mind as thinkers and knowledgeable is in evidence:

- Teachers observed that the writing workshops did not rely on the external scaffold and structure that is often evident in the classroom. (Typically, such scaffold might be a poem that is used as a model for students to build from). Rather, the scaffold for learning was the discussion in the workshop, and the mining of students' own ideas. One teacher reflected that in school a great deal of external scaffold and structure might be positioned in a one hour lesson, to sustain learning '*at every step*' yet on the residential students had shown that they could '*work for 3 or 4 hours, and achieve a great deal…It's had a huge impact on my own practice, not just teaching but how I approach the students. They've shown a lot of independence this week that perhaps I was reluctant to accept.*'

- Teachers recognised that the pedagogy dictated by strategies that focus on functional and technical writing have bypassed the essential purpose of creative (perhaps all) writing: meaning-making. In writing workshops students often surprised teachers by choosing to write about

complex ideas, and to use the writing process to shape and explore meaning in relation to their own experiences and ideas. This drives a different kind of pedagogical response: *'As a teacher I need to trust them a lot more, give them more freedom. To be able to talk about the feelings that are attached to the writing, not just the technical aspects of the piece' (Teacher).* The Arvon pedagogy foregrounds meaning-making, offering workshop and tutorial methodologies that support the development of creative texts.

- Teachers noticed that pupils who were often hesitant or found it difficult to make a start with writing in school were 'straight off the ground' in starting work in their commissions during the residential. The potential to build a 'commission' approach in the classroom gives greater credence to pupils as thinkers; pupils value and respond to the opportunity to make choices about what they can explore in their writing. The potential to create more individual writing was also seen as important for pupils, who recognised that within the constraints of the curriculum totally free choice might not be possible, but suggested *'if we got a choice of maybe 3 or 4 things and could choose what to do, like the commission, that would be miles better than all doing the same thing'.* This relatively simple step has significant pedagogical implications, and the potential to motivate pupils who may otherwise struggle to become engaged.

- The variety of opportunities for dialogue, debate and critique were valued by teachers as an important tool in developing pedagogy. One of the techniques for sharing work in the Arvon pedagogic model is placing value on fragments of emerging text; it was recognized that in school this rarely happens. There are pragmatic reasons that make this approach sustainable in schools: in a class of 30 or more it is simply not possible for most pupils to read out completed work and receive constructive feedback, but it is more realistic that most pupils can read out a few lines, or a favourite phrase. Pupils, although often nervous to begin with, quickly engaged fully in the process, since it became clear that sharing fragments or emergent texts was a useful way of finding out how to move on to generating more ideas about how to develop text. Tutors demonstrated critique in the workshops, and students quickly picked up on how critique worked and how to respond to it – *'They're so much more confident in sharing their work which makes them able to take on feedback'* (Teacher).

- The Arvon pedagogic model prompted teachers to reflect on the positioning of assessment levels in young people's learning. Clearly, schools are driven by assessment criteria, and teachers want their pupils to attain the highest level that they can. However, it was questioned whether the focus

on attainment levels might sometimes become an impediment to learning. One teacher reflected that pupils may have been more engaged and produced better work because there was no focus on levels in the learning activities. This may have been an unusual experience for pupils who are used to learning environments that explicitly state the criteria (features of writing) needed to attain specific levels:

> *Taking the levels away makes them a lot less anxious. I think that might be one of the things that might have disengaged the students because maybe they've put a lot of effort into a piece of work but maybe because it hasn't got all the technical accuracy it hasn't achieved the level they thought it would (Teacher)*

- Clearly schools have a duty to ensure that pupils understand the criteria that underpin the assessment levels that they are working towards. However, teachers here have begun to think that 'not everything has to be assessed on levels' and that peer critique can '*have a bigger impact than taking about levels – they can look at their own work and say 'this is better than this on', and they've drafted and redrafted until they've got to a point when they've said no, that's it, they're assessing their own capabilities rather than levels.'* This is a significant shift towards a pedagogic model that acknowledges that the learner is capable of thinking for themselves, building knowledge through dialogue, and bringing their own knowledge to bear on the learning process.

- Teachers wrote alongside pupils during writing workshops: *'As a teacher of English you don't often get chance to sit and write, that helped me with teaching…if I set a writing task and do it myself it gives me an insight, sometimes I can get detached from what they're doing'.* Building opportunities into classroom practice for teachers to write alongside pupils, share their work and take part in critique not only develops empathy, as noted by this teacher, but builds knowledge of creative writing processes. Writing is a practical subject: knowledge about writing is built through practice, and writing alongside students in a writing classroom contributes to a developing body of knowledge about writing that can be shared and explored.

- The one to one tutorials may seem to be the most difficult element of *Writing the Game* to replicate, but teachers were powerfully convinced of their value and keen to find ways to be more flexible in how they use time in schools (and perhaps how support staff can contribute) to ensure that some time for one to one tutorials became a feature of their work with pupils. Again, this is a radical shift in pedagogy. It is also noted that in some schools one to one time for pupils to review and set targets is regularly set aside, so the premise for tutorial exists, and could perhaps be opened up for discussion in the context of developing pedagogy.

# 4     *Writing the Game*: challenges 2013-2015

## 4.1     Barriers to School Engagement

Between the original implementation of *Writing the Game* in 2009 and delivery of the current programme, Arvon has faced increasing challenge in securing school commitment to participating in the programme. This is not unique to *Writing the Game*, and has been evidenced in other Arvon work with schools (Murphy, 2013). Key barriers to engagement that have emerged during the programme include:

- *Loss of a key driver:* Collaboration is often dependent on the energy, enthusiasm and commitment of a key teacher within a school. When individuals move on, or roles and responsibilities change, penetrating the school can become difficult, even where there is a history of successful partnership working.

- *Fractured education infrastructure:* In the past, local authority advisors have played a role in communicating with schools, and advocating for the value of engagement in programmes. As local authority provision has reduced, these relationships are not always in place, and individuals within LAs are under increasing pressure to deliver across a range of areas.

- *Curriculum timetable pressure:* It has become increasingly difficult for schools to find freedom within the timetable to prioritise cultural and creative activities. Writing forms part of the literacy across the curriculum agenda for schools, but the focus on creative writing (rather than technical and functional skills) makes it more difficult for schools to demonstrate a curriculum imperative in the current climate. This is explored in more depth in the discussion of pedagogy above.

- *Inspection and inspection outcomes:* Schools are reluctant to confirm engagement if they feel an Ofsted inspection may occur during a particular half term. A confirmed programme can be pulled at the last minute if an inspection is announced. A negative inspection outcome can influence a school to withdraw from a scheduled programme.

Arvon's response to the barriers outlined above has been to work as closely as possible with schools to accommodate individual circumstances. The flexibility of the organisation and the empathy shown by individual staff at Arvon, has successfully managed several unstable commitments and moved them forward to a place where schools have been able to commit to the programme. It is not always

possible for this to happen, and when several factors collide – loss of a key driver, combined with a negative inspection outcomes and reductions in budget, for example – it has proved beyond the considerable skill, sensitivity and determination of Arvon to retain the engagement of valued school partners.

## 4.2     Retaining and Developing the Vision

Arvon's original vision for *Writing the Game* was developed in collaboration with writers Anthony Clavane and Nick Stimson,  and teacher Krys Kotylo, as a way of working with young people who are failing at school, have negative attitudes to writing (and to learning more generally), but who are passionate about football. The aim of the programme was to harness this passion, using young people's knowledge and enthusiasm as a vehicle for inspiring their engagement in creative writing. The vision for the programme was underpinned by a belief that all young people have creative talents and abilities, and that unlocking their potential through the programme would also reveal to students their capacity to achieve in other areas.

The vision for the delivery of the programme built on Arvon's residency model, and added elements that would specifically appeal to the targeted students. These included the development of relationships with local football clubs, and the opportunity during the residential week to play football together. These activities were designed not only to stimulate engagement, but to build and reinforce a group dynamic based on a shared love of football. Central to delivering this work successfully was the concept that the residential week would take young people away from their usual environments, immersing them in an experience where their development was at the centre of all activity. The philosophy underpinning this was that young people would be in a creative environment with the freedom to engage in activities that they enjoyed and that inspired them. The young people, tutors and teachers would occupy this space as what has been described by Anthony Clavane as a 'bubble' – a protected territory where creative engagement built from passionate shared interest could place the development of the young people at the heart of the experience.

As the programme has developed, the central vision for *Writing the Game* has remained in place. Three factors have impact on how this vision is developed and delivered are considered below: targeting participants; protecting the focus of the residential experience; and engagement with football clubs.

### 4.2.1    Targeting participants

The original vision for participants – 'failing' students who love football – has been modified and adjusted through the engagement of partner schools. Schools have identified that the programme is likely to create more impact and be of more benefit to pupils who are under-achieving rather than pupils who are at a more critical point of disengagement. Schools have targeted students whose *perception* of their own ability (rather than actual ability), confidence and motivation to succeed is an impediment to their progress. It has been identified by schools that *Writing the Game* could create real change for these pupils, transforming their understanding of their own ability, boosting their self-confidence, and demonstrating to them that they have the potential to be successful students. Teachers have also identified that this group of pupils often lack dedicated support, while pupils closer to the margins of failure *'already have a lot of support and resource around them, there's a lot in place for those pupils, whereas these kids can fall through the net'* (Teacher).

Support for pupils who are achieving below their potential in Year 9 can be seen as particularly important, since pupils who continue to underachieve at GCSE run the risk of not gaining a C grade in English, even when it is within their grasp to do so. This can severely limit young people's life chances. Positive intervention for pupils who lack self-confidence and whose aspiration is based on inaccurate perception of their own ability has the potential to transform Year 9 students' ability to achieve their potential at GCSE.

For these reasons, schools have focussed on under-achieving pupils with low self-confidence, and not always prioritised a love of football. There is a risk that if schools prioritised only pupils who love football, the programmes would become heavily male dominated.

### 4.2.2    Protecting the focus of the residential experience

As the programme has developed, some of the writers who deliver *Writing the Game* have become concerned that the focus that is created during the residential week can become blurred by external concerns that are not central to young peoples' development. In particular, this has included time dedicated to Arts Award activities. It has been felt that some Arts Award activities could pull attention away from the central concern with young people's development, and require young people to become involved in activities that *'feel like school'*.  However, it is recognised that as arts activities and arts subjects continue to come under increasing pressure at all stages of young people's education, arts organisations need to work closely with schools, artists and young people to gather evidence of

the value of the arts. Arts Award is an Arts Council England (ACE) initiative that supports young people to deepen their engagement with the arts, and provides evidence of this engagement. At a national level, this contributes to an evidence base that provides stakeholders including government with measurable outcomes that identify the volume and value of young people's active engagement in the arts. The most recent available figures show that over 60,000 young people have gained an Arts Award; however only 1% of the awards relate to literature (Arts Award Annual Review, 2011/12). Programmes such as *Writing the Game* provide a valuable opportunity to raise the profile of literature and creative writing in young people's engagement with the arts.

As referenced above, the NPC Well-Being Measure was also felt to be a distraction to core focus and activities during *Writing the Game*. In addition, pupils responded negatively to the questionnaires, and did not enjoy completing them, which worked against the aim of arising young people's enjoyment and engagement. It was therefore decided to withdraw the use of the measure during *Writing the Game*.

### 4.2.3    Engagement with football clubs

In the writers' ideal model of *Writing the Game*, a day was spent at the local football club. This offered an opportunity to tour the ground, meet players and staff, and play at the training ground. The trip provided inspiration for writing, but beyond this it was also felt to be important in fostering a sense of local pride and belonging which positively influenced self-esteem and therefore contributed to the programme's aims of developing young people's self-confidence. However, it has often been difficult on a pragmatic level to co-ordinate trips to the clubs with *Writing the Game* programme timetables.

While there is likely to be some element of programme development that moves away from original intention for pragmatic or strategic reasons, Arvon and the writers delivering the programme have ensured that the central mission of *Writing the Game* has remained intact. The impacts on participants explored above have been achieved through a clear focus on the needs, aspirations and ideas of young people; and a shared belief that all of the young people engaged in the programme are interesting, creative individuals with stories to tell and the potential to succeed. This belief and mission has informed an (unspoken) pedagogy that lies at the heart not only of *Writing the Game*, but of all of Arvon's work with young people.

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**Biography**

Dr Caroline Murphy's doctoral research explored practice, pedagogy and policy in creative writing, and her continued research interest is in the ways in which creative writing is conceived and taught in workshop and classroom settings; and how writer identity emerges, develops and is sustained through creative practice. Caroline has worked with Arvon to explore multi-lingual creative writing practice, and has collaborated extensively with New Writing North projects that explore writing practice and pedagogy. Caroline works at Northumbria University, developing collaborations between academic research and cultural and creative practice with a range of arts organisations.