

Birmingham: Current and recent development activity relating to reading and writing

- **Book gifts to stimulate reading/ love of books**
 - book gifts/motivational material at 9-12 months (Bookstart) issued to parents via library/health visitors (around 100,000 sets of books/materials distributed over past several years); now to be supplemented with further books/ materials at around 18 months and at 3-4 years old
 - annual selection of free books, over 5 years to 2003, focused on 7 year olds (to counter the dip in reading at that age), with selection from a range of titles recommended by librarians. The book choice/ book issue can be linked to visits to the local library or to a city-centre bookshop or be the focus of a family event at the child's school. More than 50,000 books have been distributed, via this 'Let's Get Reading' activity, linked to school/ library activity
 - issuing of book tokens & visits to bookshops is built in as a common activity in many family literacy programmes and local voluntary activity, via schools.
- **Young people engaging with writing (other than through school activity)**
 - young people provided with facility to review books and communicate with others via website; Stories from the Web, run on a club model with links to wider library service opportunities; supporting librarian visits to schools, reading groups etc
 - young people create own portfolio of creative writing, book reviews etc and contribute to an on-line gallery which currently holds 32,000 pieces of work. This has now spread to other local authority areas from its beginnings in Birmingham
 - staff working with early years groups are able to access Early Years sections of Stories from the Web
- **Outreach with young people/on outer estates**
 - Use of a mix of youth work/library skills work out from the central library, focused on groups of young people who are not traditional library users
 - work via community groups and activities on outer estates linking libraries and community activity
- **Homework support facilities in libraries**
 - resources available at end of school day in almost every library, with staff support
 - linked to school curriculum; set books/texts (with some training of librarians by education advisers etc
 - linked into wider library services

- Focus on specific groups of children/ young people
 - particular work with children in care/in hostels/at risk. This has involved putting more reading and writing stock into hostels/care homes; work with foster carers; links to authors/ writer in residence
 - with a focus on books generally and, more specifically, ones relating to these children's own situation; production of booklets of own writing; targeted inclusion in wider city programmes; use of volunteers to support reading skills.
 - specific activities with new arrivals/ unaccompanied asylum seeking children working with authors/ readers to explore books that connect with their context

- Young Readers Festival
 - series of more than 150 events, over 2 weeks, very high numbers involved
 - covers both primary and secondary school age; some focus on specific groups within a broad popular appeal; events linked to school curriculum ... can be supported by pre-Festival activities in schools, with book loans of authors' works, links to writers' websites etc.
 - readings/ performance events, extended by 'meet the authors'; discussions/ questions; how books get written/ how writers make choices etc

- Support for reading development in specific locations
 - poetry slams in secondary schools; storytelling and community groups in nominated inner-city areas. (Words Aloud)
 - work with under 5s, and their parents, to create interest in books; development of language; in areas of low achievement/poor health etc (Sure Start/Flying Start)

- Extending the range of reading in school settings
 - one option in the Schools Library Service menu of support to schools is to supply boxes of around 100 high quality books (general, or selected to match a theme or a target group, or to encourage use of a particular kind of text) which can be left with classes for an extended period of time for the pupils/ teachers to engage with how they choose ('Bookflood'). Currently running at about 5000 books per year.
 - all libraries within secondary schools reviewed fairly recently, by a combination of education advisers and schools library service staff, with support to bring each library up to a reasonably good level.
 - hundreds of pupils at Key Stage 3 (11-14 year old) read through a set of 14 books sent out to schools and are able to post their comments onto a website. Each week from January books are voted for, with two books being eliminated regularly until the most popular book is announced in March.

- Reading volunteers
 - trained adults into schools to listen to children read
 - covers primary and secondary school
 - links to business social responsibility agenda through established programme of using business volunteers from companies

- Developing literacy skills using ICT
 - pupils using various types of small/ handheld computers to support reading/ writing (supported e.g. via National Literacy Association, Birmingham City Council)
 - range of ICT software put into under 5s settings, libraries, schools, adult literacy settings (includes use of electronic whiteboards; interactive CDs; scanners; presentation materials etc)
 - growing expectation that even quite young children will be able to go through decision-making processes associated with doing presentations to a group

- Reader development through libraries
 - identification of socially excluded groups; focusing on their specific needs (in terms of stock held in libraries etc)
 - improve stock/train library service staff
 - work with young people via teenage reading groups; involvement in stock selection/purchasing policy
 - annual summer holiday reading programme, usually based on a theme, for young people
 - teenage and adult reading groups (more than 30 across the city)
 - activities linked e.g. to Black History Month and other specific events
 - under 5s/ family storytimes; access to interactive stories on CDROM (with additional links to SureStart areas)

- Promotion of poetry
 - city has had several years of poet laureates; now also has young poet laureate
 - increased volume and range of poetry performance events; Poetry slams and readings; workshops etc
 - networked groups of poets – regularly used at events – creating a momentum for poetry
 - increased exposure of young people to poetry

- Spoken word
 - increased volume of storytelling/ poetry reading events (via increased range of organisations)
 - whole city approach to speaking/listening developments; common messages captured in a series of leaflets that were distributed out via range of services – more than 60,000 leaflets issued to parents - being revisited in 2005-2007 to see what more can be done

- Links to theatre/performance
 - some script writing workshops for young people ... links to performances
 - work with schools, via Creative Partnerships, to link school work with experiences of business companies; work with secondary schools to link young people's experience of drama to their understanding of set texts
 - some developing opportunities via 'Rep's Children' – targeting the cohort of people born in October 2004 to take up participation in theatre-based activities/ events/ performances.
 - growth in number of youth theatre groups (to around 10 groups), alongside more established adult theatre groups/ city theatres.

- Family learning/family literacy
 - innovative 'Inspire' programme to engage large numbers of parents in interactions with their children and the child's teacher – with a focus on language/literacy. Schools reporting that nothing else has worked like this does – more than 70,000 parents involved. Spreading to other towns and cities.
 - largest structured family language, literacy and Numeracy programme in Europe and (of its kind) the largest city-based programme in the world
 - delivered via schools/ early years settings; strongly linked to children's ongoing activities; the activity furthers the achievement of both parent and child; with spin offs in terms of increased home reading/ writing activities
 - the activity is extending in planned ways (as part of the city's Family Learning Strategy); work via community groups, Youth Offending Service etc; programme is based on a 'known- to- work' set of models plus some looser development work.

- Adult literacy developments
 - Sets of quick read/easy read adult books integrated into library stock across the city
 - librarians; benefit office and jobcentre office staff; under fives workers; housing staff; probation service staff; members of faith groups/churches; workers in voluntary organisations etc, all trained in basic skills awareness and the ability to give 'front-line' advice and signposting to other sources of support.
 - city organisations have been involved in trialling all new aspects of the government's Skills for Life (adult literacy, language and numeracy) strategy
 - volume of adult literacy and language activity has multiplied fourfold over four years; much more of it leading to recognised qualifications (assisting employability as well as increasing uptake of social opportunities)
 - basic skills now built into the offer of skills training support available to employers; taken up by a large number of employees across a range of types of work; trade union 'learning champions' encourage workmates to take up basic skills opportunities in the workplace.

Test-your-own-skills materials (CDs/scratchcards/quizzes/mobile phone questions etc) developed for different sectors including retail, construction, and manufacturing, and distributed into companies across the city

- there has been a range of development activity focusing on literacy and language needs of offenders; refugees/asylum seekers; young people in hostels/foyers; members of community organisations; etc.
- Developing potential future writers
 - writer development programmes (Interaction/Transmissions etc), usually targeting specific groups; with mentoring and business development support for aspiring writers (in order to enter marketplace)
 - 'writing squads'/apprenticeships – potential to support work with 20 young people with potential as writers to move from 'doing writing' to 'being writers'
 - some activity in Birmingham through the National Academy of Writing e.g. specific 'masterclasses'; alongside a range of other workshops on aspects of writing
 - these developments have worked well when linked to venues and structures (e.g. theatre, youth theatres etc)
- Young people engaging with writers, via schools
 - more than 200 schools and 10,000 young people engaging with writers (mainly via 'Write On' programmes)
 - teachers supported as writers; gaining confidence to develop young people as writers
 - support/guidance developed for writers working with schools
 - development of recognised managed/brokered services for linking writers with a range of organisations
- Books and community development (Books for Change)
 - developing reading motivators within communities
 - linking texts with community development; people's lives and social justice; use of books to change communities ways of seeing their environments
 - book recycling into communities; book gifts
 - voluntary sector motivated; voluntary sector writer in residence to stimulate 'writing for change'
 - internet based downloadable resources; voluntary sector writer motivation
 - public access to information on books/reading in voluntary/community sector 'shop front'
- Orange Book festival
 - changing from a 1-2 week format of visiting speakers to a model that has a wider variety of events. Currently featuring around 50 events and activities; 11 workshops/surgeries; 3 book launches
 - well established; attracts writers who are well-known alongside others who are less familiar

- Support for creative writing activities
 - website support for writing e.g. Birmingham Words (online virtual writers'/readers' community) online magazine, link to local events.
 - more than 10 creative writing groups active across the city (with varying links to workshops, magazines, etc)
 - creative writing courses via adult education/ colleges. Likely enrolment is around 300 adults annually.
 - Regional magazines (e.g. 'Raw Edge') distributed across the city

- 'Birmingham Reads'
 - a reading strategy for the city (mainly City Council) 1998-2004
 - built on the City Council's Year of Reading
 - currently being reviewed, with a view to 2005-2009 statements being drafted

- Ongoing public & private services to support reading/ develop reading

All of the above developments (and aren't there a lot of them!) can only build on the substantial base of things that exist already to support reading and writing:

 - the city has a large number of public libraries which creates access to huge stock/resources ... mobile facility to take children's books to other venues (Words on Wheels) Home library services ... specific groups catered for ... books in a variety of languages... usage levels show some changes in uptake by age/ethnicity ... linking to adult literacy strategy....special reference collections relating to writers ... literature on videos for loan/ self study etc
 - city has 76 secondary schools (more than 70,000 pupils, 311 primary schools (more than 94,000 pupils), 27 nursery schools, 23 community day nurseries (and a large number of private preschool groups), 31 special education schools and units...Since 1995 there has been improved levels of achievement in literacy at all ages, supported by a concerted drive over 10 years to focus on word, sentence, text-level understanding of how language works Schools offer the potential for extension of those with a particular interest/ talent for writing, plus 'catch-up' support for those at risk of being left behind in their reading developments...Developments have been linked strongly, more recently, to speaking and listening/ creativity and enjoyment i.e. there is a constant revisiting of strategy to unlock further improvements.
 - adult literacy support is delivered through the adult education service, through 10 colleges and through a range of training providers...There has been a huge growth in provision for those wanting to brush up their skills (up to GCSE level) ... There is still too much variability across geographical areas, which is being worked on, but large numbers of adults are now achieving qualifications to add to their employability CVparticular work is being done with those for whom English is not a first language ...In terms of adult achievement rates, Birmingham has already reached

its 2007 target, by September 2005 ...the long term intention is to halve the number of adults with literacy difficulties by 2010

- the number of bookshop is relatively OK for the size of the city, ... There are now more books, of different kinds, available in a bigger variety of retail outlets, with more promotions offering multiple purchases etc. Reading books and magazines is still a very popular activity. A survey of reading in public places (in 2003/4) - including on a variety of bus routes - showed it to also be a very visible activity.
- Birmingham has been well served by newspapers ... longstanding ones, some local versions, recently supplemented by freely available daily Metro - changing profile of venues re where newspapers are read (it appears to be becoming a more public activity?)

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