Where Can an Elephant Hide?

Challenges to Ignite Learning in Key Stage 1

Will Hussey
Acknowledgements:

My thanks go to Ian Templeton for the cups of tea, and Ben Wilding for his warm words and the head-start.

For a Great Grandma.

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Foreword

Where can an elephant hide? A great question to consider; unlocking the answers provides a plethora of avenues to explore. I thought I knew… but now I am not so sure.

I have known ‘Will’ or Mr Hussey over the past twenty years. Initially, as a fellow student where we studied for our BEd Honours degrees in Bangor, then as NQTs in the same market town as we embarked on teaching careers in primary education, and more latterly as a class teacher in the primary school where my three daughters have attended.

Whilst our career paths have led us on interesting and different routes, it is clear to me that Will still retains his passion for teaching and learning and unlocking the creative ‘what if’s’ that I first witnessed as fresh faced teachers-to-be in 1991. Collectively, we educators find ourselves in an unprecedented world of change and opportunity, and some may say with no better chance to shape an interesting curriculum that inspires children to think, imagine, question and explore. These are the skills that underpin and nurture creativity and great learning. The context of learning is so individual and subject to a myriad of influences; not merely those that shape one day to another but also those that creep up on us as each year passes. We are all subject to being influenced by the perceived educational wisdom of the day, institutional routines and ‘this-is-the-way-we-do-it-here’ habitual practices which perhaps at worst suppress the urge to let children's imagination run free.

Where Can An Elephant Hide? is the second book in Will’s collection, and provides busy teachers with opportunities that encourage thinking outside the box, and develop linguistic and social skills which creatively engage young children and put some ‘wow’ back into learning for both pupil and teacher. The world is at our younger learner’s fingertips. Their thinking should not, dare I say must not, be constrained or confined to fit in with current or approved philosophy.

The five elements offer open-ended challenges which expertly work together promoting opportunities for young children to think, process, organize and make sense of their ideas.

The activities are engaging and interesting which create a wonderful atmosphere for learning where everyone’s viewpoint is valid, allowing ‘magic moments’ to thrive. Children will enjoy the freedom to think,
wonder and look forward to such activities as a regular feature of every
day. The interaction and relationship dynamics that prosper when no one
can be right or wrong provide a positive grounding from which to launch
future learning.

If this is something you desire for your learners, then go ahead – let the
elephant loose in your classroom.

Ben Wilding Bed (Hons) NPQH LLE
Headteacher
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Note: The page numbers in this Contents list refer to the printed book only. To find an activity on the CD-ROM, please use the activity numbers and the hyperlinks on the CD-ROM contents page.

Any photocopiable resource sheets/templates required for use alongside activities can be found on the CD-ROM.
Introduction

A large African elephant can grow to almost four metres tall and seven and a half metres long. It would stand head and shoulders above a football crossbar and be able to touch both the posts; the ultimate goalkeeper. Weighing up to 7 000 kilograms, approximately the same as a Tyrannosaurus Rex, it can take some persuading!

A six year old primary school pupil is approximately one and a quarter metres tall. He would struggle to reach the crossbar. At around thirty centimetres broad, over two teams would be required to create a sufficient ‘wall,’ to cover the goal’s width. Weighing approximately twenty-three kilograms, equivalent to the size of a small tusk, they are considerably more diminutive in stature. Nevertheless, they too can take some persuading.

Elephant trainers/keepers are known as Mahouts, they use their feet to steer/command these gigantic creatures. By applying pressure using their feet pressed against the soft backs of the elephants ears (also known as knuckles). In times gone by, class teachers have tried similar techniques to control their pupils. But nowadays, the class Mahout must find alternative ways to encourage their children to perform. That’s where this book comes in handy!

If only children were always hungry to learn. Regardless of the delicious offerings prepared by class teachers, appetites can vary considerably between pupils and from one day to the next. Where Can an Elephant Hide? provides a tempting taster; a starter to give pupils a flavour of what’s to follow. By putting children in the mood for learning, they stand to receive maximum nutritional value from the lesson.

Too often the curriculum is delivered with somewhat disappointing results; often an indication of a child’s limited receptivity rather than just inappropriately judged content. This is by no means intended as a scathing attack on the moral fibre of today’s learners, just recognition of the realities of day-to-day teaching. Sometimes a pupil is simply not in the right frame of mind. Maybe they got out of bed on the wrong side that morning. Whatever the reason, the old adage about taking a horse to water holds true. And children often need a little help in cultivating their thirst for learning.
Learning can be thought of as the acquisition of knowledge or skill. More often than not, a particular concept is sufficiently unusual or complex to have eluded comprehension merely by natural osmosis. In curricular terms, learning requires a conscious endeavour to further understanding, and the stamina to persist until sufficient clarity is obtained; a willingness to engage in the process. *Where Can An Elephant Hide?* provides the spark to ignite such pro-activity, inspiring pupils to take an interest in their studies.

Of course desire alone is not sufficient. An athlete who wishes to set a personal best must be suitably prepared. If they are not thoroughly limbered-up, it’s unlikely they will be able to perform to their potential. In order to better their best, they must be fully operational. The same applies in the classroom. Pupils must be sufficiently warmed-up to further their understanding, drawing upon their existing capabilities to narrow the gap between what they know and what they’re trying to learn. *Where Can An Elephant Hide?* activates minds and bodies, priming pupils to access all (curriculum) areas.

An elephant’s hide may be thick, but *Where Can An Elephant Hide?* isn’t. It helps both teachers and pupils to enjoy optimal learning. Because learning is as much about how you feel, as how you think.

“Words are cheap. The biggest thing you can say is ‘elephant’.” Charlie Chaplin.
Quick start guide

Some children just don’t know any better. This can be a distinct advantage. The older we get, it seems, the more pre-occupied we are with ‘doing the right thing.’ Although adhering to social convention is by no means ‘wrong,’ it can inadvertently stifle creativity in the classroom. Fortunately younger children appear less inhibited by conformity, and usually respond to situations with refreshing originality; a trait promoted and celebrated by Where Can An Elephant Hide?

To get started, simply choose an activity and display it in a prominent position. This can be done by photocopying the relevant page, copying it on to a board/OHP or utilising the CD Rom with a ‘smartboard,’ facility. Each consists of the challenge itself, a supporting illustration and examples where appropriate. Easily-identifiable symbols instruct the children on what resources are required. Also included are some helpful ‘tips-for-teachers,’ which can be enlightening. Once the routine has been established, participation is straightforward, fun and eagerly anticipated. Use the material as you please, although daily fifteen minute doses seem to work well, often as an appetiser at the beginning of the day. It has been known for challenges to evolve over several sessions or even weeks; the ideal format is the one that works.

Where Can An Elephant Hide? is comprised of five different flavours, each designed to ignite thinking and learning in the classroom. Select according to the mood of the class, subsequent learning and any particular personal preferences:

- **Chicken & Egg** – encourages thinking outside the box
- **Quick Draw** – develops the ability to perceive and portray concepts in pictures
- **Movers & Shakers** – necessitates collaboration and cooperation
**Create & Make** – Transforms ideas into three dimensions

**Brain Gain** – Engages the learner in deeper thought and reflection.

Some activities require various resources, the majority of which are to be found in a typical classroom – perhaps with a few ‘added extras.’ Perhaps the most important piece of equipment is an individual pupil workbook for recording ideas, suggestions and responses.

Remember that participation should be fun. It’s not really what the children do, but more the way that they do it. By encouraging independence, creativity, cooperation and innovation, pupils can lead the curriculum rather than just follow it. Whilst some children may not necessarily know any better, they can all learn to think a little ‘differently.’

And it can be a distinct advantage. Prepare to enjoy.
# Resource symbols used

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