

Teaching writing effectively: Reviewing practice

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Introduction

The role of the subject leader: Writing

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This book includes material to help teachers and subject leaders engage in thoughtful review of current provision for teaching writing. The process of evaluation is greatly supported by the English subject leader, whose role is to monitor the working of the national curriculum – in this case, in writing - and to offer professional development and support to enhance planning, teaching and assessment.

The self-review material in this book will help to develop consistent approaches to teaching writing and identify areas needing more support and professional development. Each of the areas outlined below is covered by the different chapters, and key questions are provided to guide evaluation of planning, teaching and assessing writing.

Teaching approaches, including:

- planning which integrates transcription, grammar teaching, spelling and composition within extended teaching sequences based on high quality, engaging texts, including multimodal texts
- incorporating talk throughout teaching
- teacher perceptions about writing and teaching writing
- pupil perceptions about writing
- establishing supportive and challenging environments for writing
- consistency of writing teaching across the school and across the curriculum
- developing independence and voice in young writers
- identifying areas of strength and how these might be shared with colleagues
- identifying areas which need professional development or support.

Evaluating attainment and progress:

- reviewing pupil achievement in relation to national standards
- identifying any differences in pupil progress across the school or across groups (for example, boys/bilingual learners/children with special educational needs and disabilities) and working with colleagues to regularise progress
- monitoring consistency of feedback and response to writing across the school
- ensuring that assessment and progress records are used to guide teaching.

Providing for professional development through identifying:

- specific areas to be addressed
- which classes/staff (including teaching assistants) will be involved
- action to be taken
- the time scale for any action
- the support/resources necessary
- examples of good practice already existing in the school and how these might be shared
- how success will be evaluated.

Another key element of the subject leader's responsibility is to act as a support, modelling teaching writing for colleagues who are seeking to improve their classroom approaches.

Planning for teaching writing

Planning will need to be:

- long term – what is covered over each term and each year
- medium term – what is covered each term/ half term
- short term – specific teaching sequences lasting about 3 weeks and ending with a written outcome.

The flexible planning and teaching format shown here (Figure 0.1) is, of course, not the only way to start planning a short term teaching sequence, but aligns with most integrated approaches to planning. It ensures that:

- reading and writing objectives are linked
- spoken language is planned into the teaching sequence at every stage

Chapter 2

Teachers as writers

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In the UK increased attention is being paid to teachers as writers and their role in both modelling writing and in providing a model of an adult writer in the classroom. It is argued that children benefit from being offered role models of authentically engaged writers in school as well as at home. To be an effective role model, in addition to sharing their own writing lives beyond the classroom, teachers often take a range of roles that help children develop confidence and competence as young writers. They may be involved as:

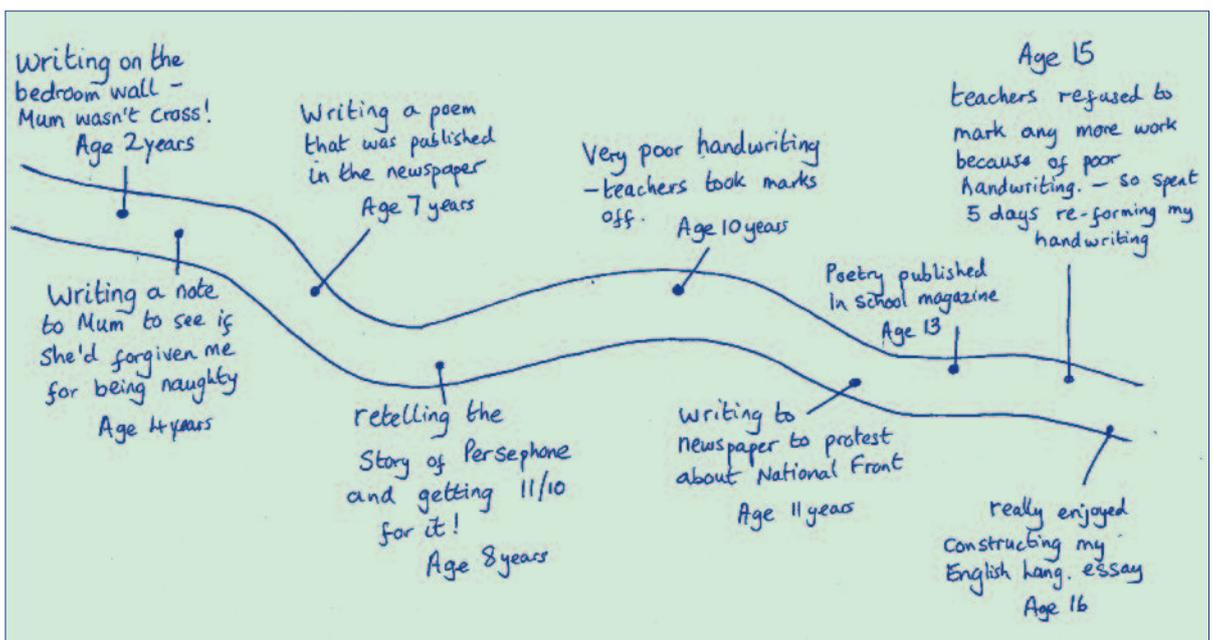
- authentic demonstrators in front of the whole class
- scribes for whole class joint compositions
- writers alongside the children in small group contexts
- response partners
- editors and advisers
- publishers.

This chapter explores some of the ways in which teachers can take part as writers in the classroom, in particular highlighting the value of teachers and teaching assistants writing alongside children as well as demonstrating the complexities of the compositional process in whole class contexts. When teachers consciously engage in the writing process and reflect on this and on themselves as writers, they often feel impelled to make changes to their pedagogy and practice and this has consequences for the children, their views of their teachers as writers and their growing competence and confidence as young writers themselves.

Teachers' writing histories

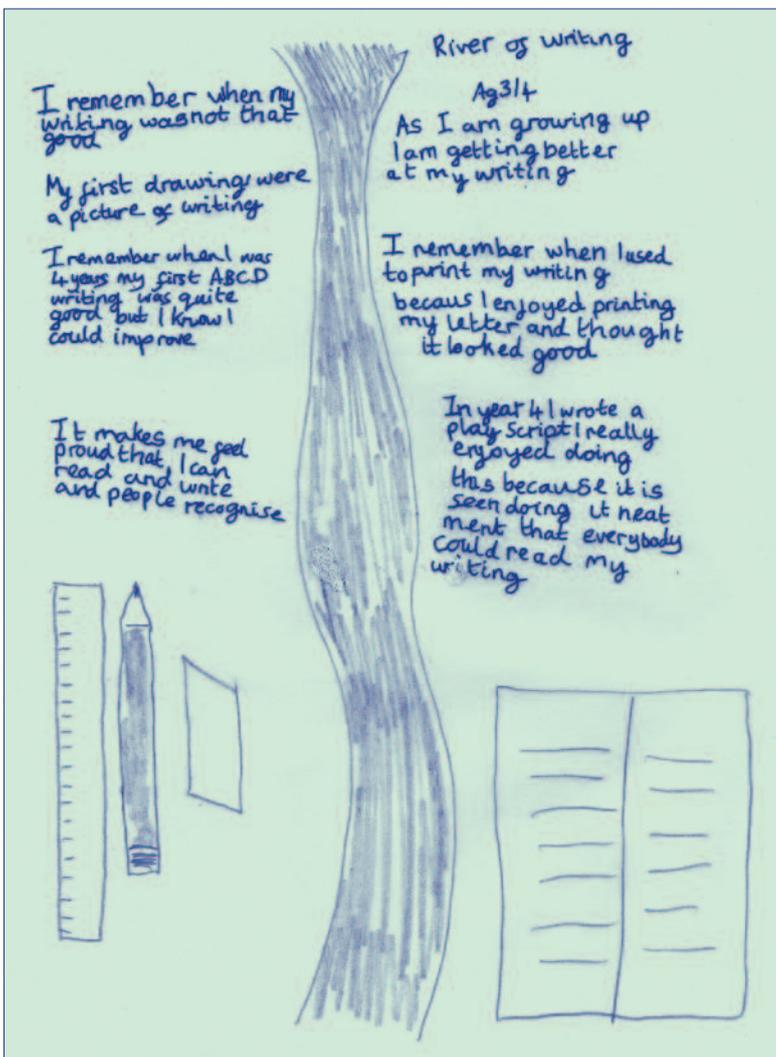
In considering their own experiences of writing, some groups of teachers have undertaken writing histories, reflecting on their early memories of learning to write and significant experiences both at home and at school that they think may have influenced their developing sense of themselves as writers. During a writing project in Newham, *Teachers as Writers: Writing alongside children* (2009-10), the practitioners shared their personal writing histories through creating 'writing rivers' (collages which highlight significant writing memories). In reflecting on these, one teacher, Anne, spoke about being afraid to write because of her lack of confidence in spelling; others recalled writing 'endless Monday morning news' which they found boring and still others remembered struggling with writing for some years, even into secondary school. Some, however, recalled their early writing memories with more pleasure (Figure 2.1).

Below: Figure 2.1 Stevie's writing river



The group were surprised to find they could each remember specific individual pieces of writing which they recalled with pleasure and pride. Interestingly, each had in some way been 'made public', read aloud in class, published in a school magazine or community newsletter, been sent home with a letter of praise, won a competition, been quoted by a university tutor and so on. These positive memories seemed to highlight the power of feedback and the importance of other people's responses to writing. Additionally, a couple of the teachers had kept diaries as children, albeit for short periods of time, and recalled with pleasure the personal satisfaction and commitment they had felt when recording their thoughts and feelings in these precious books. The multitude of other memories prompted considerable discussion and several of the teachers went on to share their 'writing rivers' with their classes as a precursor to the children creating their own writing histories about their early memories of writing (Figure 2.2).

Below: Figure 2.2 Zvipo's writing river



Teachers' contemporary writing

It is also fascinating to consider writing today: the uses, forms and audiences as well as the various different media employed to write in the 21st century. Over the course of a weekend, for example, teachers could track their involvement as writers and share these with the children to highlight their reasons for writing and the diverse everyday practices in which they engage. One teacher, Susanne from Medway, who did just this, created the following list over one autumn Saturday and Sunday:

Chapter 2

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Form of text	Audience	Purpose	Medium
text messages	her children	to confirm times and arrangements	mobile phone texts with emoticons
emails	friends	to stay in touch	mobile phone
emails	family	to reply to an invitation	computer
emails	work colleagues	to send and request information	computer
list	herself and her husband	to remember all the shopping	scrap paper and biro
note and signature	a friend	to offer birthday greetings	pen and card
note	herself	to record website details from a newspaper	sticky note and biro
list of jobs for the weekend	herself	to be an aide memoire	notebook and pen
doodling	herself	as form of relaxation/ thinking during a phone call	pen and back of envelope
parental permission record	secondary school	to record her approval for a school trip	pen and school form
postcodes	Multimap	to search for directions	word processing
formal letter	local council offices	to complain and request a refund	computer and hand-written signature
noting phone numbers off the answer phone	her family	to create a record	pen and scrap paper
school planning document	literacy co-ordinator and self	to record literacy plans	computer
comments and marks	children in her class	to assess work and offer feedback	pen on children's work and stickers

As Susanne's list indicates, like most other adults, she uses writing for a rich variety of reasons in her daily life, yet she did not consider herself a 'real writer' because, in her words, 'I don't write like long stories or keep a journal or anything, so my writing's just short and functional'. It could be argued, however, that all writing is functional and the length of any written communication does not relate to its value or use in the given context, for example her own quick doodle whilst on the phone to a friend may well have helped her concentrate and her text messages to her teenagers were probably crucial! There is no doubt Susanne is a writer, an adult who uses writing for multiple purposes in her daily life. She may not, however, recently have written any particularly extended text, nor perhaps have engaged in writing narrative or poetry, although she had written a persuasive/discursive text to the local council and may have written recounts in her emails to friends. Perhaps too, she had not paused recently to consider the process of writing - the diversity, challenges and dilemmas involved.

In developing her own assurance and understanding of herself as a writer, through reflecting on her everyday writing practices and through writing book reviews, short stories, news articles and poems with