

# Response to the National Literacy Trust's survey of children's writing under lockdown

*The survey is of importance to the UKLA's [Teaching Writing SIG](#) not only because it provides a record of how children are writing in response to the current situation, but also because of the implications for future classroom practice. If you find the questions we raise thought-provoking, why not join the SIG and be part of the conversation?*

It makes interesting reading that, as the [National Literacy Trust's recent survey](#) shows, during lockdown children are writing of their own volition and experiencing at first hand its therapeutic power to help cope with and make sense of difficult and painful thoughts and feelings, expressing and communicating them imaginatively in different ways - through fiction and poetry, in letters, diaries and journals. And it is cheering to hear from the children themselves that doing it can make them feel better.

There are many reasons why children (and all of us) are often moved to write. Clearly, at the moment, the need to respond to an unprecedented situation is the strongest motivational factor. But what is telling in the findings of the survey is the attention it draws to the conditions for writing created by the lockdown: time, space and freedom. Time and space to think and write at your own pace and in your own way. Freedom to generate your own idea, to express it in whatever form you like, to write according to your own desires and wishes. This is exactly the position taken up by the UKLA's [Viewpoint on Writing](#): *to develop as writers, children need to see writing as an act of social meaning making, a creative and communicative act of personal agency, and an extension of their identities.*

What the survey has been telling us begs a serious question. As schools slowly return to some kind of normality, what will happen to the way writing is taught and undertaken? Will that same freedom, time and space to write from their own lives and experiences still be available for our children? Surely we need to take lessons from lockdown and teach writing rigorously and in a way which, as Jonathan Douglas, chief executive of the Trust, has commented 'unlocks' not only creativity and aspirations but also (importantly) academic potential. It is perfectly possible to achieve these ambitions in the context of the classroom without establishing limited sessions of the Free Writing Friday kind. When children are given effective instruction coupled with agency over subject, purpose and form, and allowed to write in their own way and at their own pace, the results are striking: *'they are likely to remain focused on a task, have self-determination, maintain a strong personal commitment to their writing, and so produce something significant for themselves and in keeping with teacher expectations* (Young and Ferguson 2020 p.18). The alternative, of course, is to go back to the old way of locking children down, applying again the practices of hitherto current pedagogies which do not enable children to achieve well, often do not validate their personal experiences as valuable subjects for writing, and do not see the sense of self and feelings of wellbeing as important considerations (Young & Ferguson *in press*).

## References:

- Clark, C., Picton, I., Lant, F., (2020) *"More time on my hands": Children and young people's writing during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020* London: National Literacy Trust
- Young, R., Ferguson, F., (2019) *UKLA Viewpoints: Writing* Leicester: UKLA
- Young, R., Ferguson, F., (2020) *Real-World Writers* London: Routledge
- Young, R., Ferguson, F., (in press) *Writing For Pleasure: theory, research and practice* London: Routledge