

UKLA Fact Cards on Teaching Writing

1. Lessons from effective schools

Studies of the most effective schools have shown us that the most effective teachers of writing:

- **balance** the technical and compositional aspects of learning to write;
- **integrate** these complementary aspects of learning to write;
- **emphasise** attention, engagement, challenge and metalinguistics (talk about language features);
- **prioritise** a richly conceived literacy, helping children to take pleasure in written language.

Sources: Knapp et al. (1995); Medwell et al., (1998); Pressley et al. (1996); Block and Pressley (2000); Wilkinson and Townsend (2000); Louden et al. (2005); Parr and Limbrick (2010)

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The most effective teachers of writing present it as a purposeful, coherent and engaging activity, where mastery of technique makes a difference to what you say.

2. Teachers as writers

Teachers are drawn to teach English by a love of reading not writing and lack assurance as writers. But teachers who write teach writing better. Classroom research indicates that:

- when teachers demonstrate writerly behaviour and share their compositional challenges, younger writers benefit;
- when teachers write, their relationships with their unfolding writing, their emotional engagement with each composition, and the degree of authenticity they experience, impacts constructively on their roles as teachers and writers in the classroom;
- teachers' childhood experiences of writing in school have an impact upon their identities as writers and teachers of writing.

Sources: Pritchard (1987); Gannon and Davies (2007); McKinney and Giorgis (2009); Cremin and Baker (2010)

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Teachers need to be encouraged to write and to share their experiences of writing.

3. Drama and writing

Drama has an important role to play in literacy education. Primary phase research indicates that:

- drama has a positive effect on learners' achievements in writing and other core subjects;
- writing composed in drama has more depth and detail;
- when teachers 'seize the moment' for children to write during drama, the tense scenarios of the imagined experience offer a supportive scaffold that fosters thoughtful, imaginative and effective writing .

Sources: Crumpler and Schneider (2002); Fleming et al. (2004); Cremin et al. (2006)

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Drama has a key role to play in helping children become powerful writers.

4. Choice and independence in writing

Research into connections between home and school indicates that:

- fostering choice and enabling connections to be made between writing at home and at school can increase motivation, commitment and quality;
- the topics and the materials young children choose to engage with emerge from their social and cultural experiences and practices of their homes and communities;
- independent writing is influenced by the social practices of writing in each classroom and flourishes when it is interactive and collaborative.

Sources: Davidson (2007); Walsh (2007); Rowe and Neitzel (2010)

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Every classroom needs a writing culture that values children's out-of-school concerns and fosters choice, interaction and collaboration.

5. Readers into writers

When published authors give advice about becoming writers they invariably tell their audience to read as much as possible. In 2011, Ofsted recognised that visits to libraries, plentiful reading aloud by teachers and the provision of good-quality up-to-date texts stimulated pupils to read more and inspired them with ideas for their own writing.

Since the 1980s, research evidence has shown that reading and being read to help children to:

- develop models for writing;
- generate ideas from the stories they read;
- use what they have learned about language structure and style.

Sources: Smith (1982); Fox (1993); Barrs and Cork (2001); Frater (2001); Pantaleo (2007); Ofsted (2011)

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For children to write well, their writing must be fed by copious and rich experiences of reading, and the study of whole texts.

6. Language play in school

Research into children's language play indicates that:

- children's delight in playing with rhyme, rhythm and tune contributes to their learning of the sounds, structures and meanings of language and to its symbolic use;
- teachers can draw on children's enthusiasm for playing with language, their spontaneous use of rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and assonance to enrich their writing of poetry;
- children's poetical experiences may best be nurtured by building bridges between their existing knowledge of language play and the new knowledge of poetry encountered in the classroom.

Sources: Bryant et al. (1989); Opie (1993); Goswami (1999); Grugeon (1999); Cummings (2007) Coyne et al. (2012)

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Play with language should be welcomed in the primary classroom.

7. Talk and Writing

Research in primary phase classrooms indicates that focused talk can:

- enable children to use language to think and learn together, to organize ideas and to solve problems;
- be an invaluable tool for reflecting on writing and being a writer: in particular, working with response partners helps young writers become readers of their own texts and helps develop the inner voice of a critically reflective writer.

In addition, the creative experience of oral storytelling of old and new tales can make a rich contribution to children's narrative writing and to their creative capacity to transform texts.

Sources: Mercer and Littleton (2007); Cremin (2009); Feigenbaum (2010)

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A silent classroom is not the best place to learn to write.

8. 21st Century writing

Recent research shows that:

- in so-called 'developed' contemporary societies, school-aged children use both paper-based and digital technologies for writing;
- outside school, children are increasingly turning to digital formats to produce a variety of digital texts as they conduct their social lives;
- young people write for pleasure, if the definition of writing includes 'electronic' texts;
- for young writers, the power-relations involved in communication have changed, affecting concepts of learning, knowledge and the formation of subjectivity and identity.

Sources: Lenhart et al (2008); Carrington and Robinson (2009); Clark and Dugdale (2009); Ofcom (2011); Kress (2012); Ofsted (2012) p.6.

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Digital texts have a key role to play in school writing.

9. Writing needs to be meaningful

Key literature on writing informs us that:

- when children learn to write they are 'learning to represent aspects of their world' and therefore, in order to shape their texts, they need to draw on their personal interpretations of the world and the events they experience in it;
- children are active participants in their own learning and that they attempt to make meaning from school-based writing practices.

Sources: Christie, (2003)p. 208; Cremin and Myhill (2012)

Writing is fundamentally about making sense of the world and our lives in it.

10. Children's spelling strategies

Research shows that children use a variety of useful spelling strategies from the early stages - phonetic, visual and known words.

Children in primary school need to acquire a wide range of spelling knowledge:

- phonological awareness (syllabification, onset and rime, phonemic knowledge),
- letter names and alphabetic knowledge,
- a growing lexicon of known words,
- visual awareness of the likely patterns that occur in English spelling,
- awareness of common strings and patterns
- a growing knowledge of word structures and meanings (prefixes, suffixes, compound words, word roots and families, word origins).

Sources: Treiman (1994); Gordon et al. (1994)

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Children need both formal and informal opportunities to develop these different areas of spelling knowledge, through shared writing, editing, spelling logs, games and other activities.

11. Teaching and learning spelling

Research into children's spelling shows that:

- children learn to spell through writing and should be encouraged to monitor their own spellings from early on, with support from teacher and peers;
- it's useful to work on misspellings and to collect similarly spelled words;
- knowing word meanings supports learning how to spell words;
- effective teaching operates through:
 - 'mini lessons',
 - classroom word collections,
 - displays and print hunts focused on different aspects of spelling, through content or 'topic words', words with common meanings, similar letter strings and patterns, words with the same prefix, suffix etc.

Sources: Treiman (1994); Gordon et al. (1994); Dix (2006); O'Sullivan (2007); Hilte and Reitsma (2011)

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An active interest in words and their meanings in all curriculum areas promotes better spelling.

12. Handwriting and keyboard skills

In our electronic world, children need to learn to use a keyboard, but a fluent handwriting style is still important. Recent studies have shown that:

- children who write more easily tend to write better texts;
- handwriting not a simply motor act: it is "language by hand" in which orthographic and memory processes make a bigger contribution than motor skills;
- explicit keyboarding instruction (touch-typing) is necessary if the full potential of the word processor is to be unlocked for children's writing.

Sources: Berninger and Graham (1998); Berninger and Amtmann (2004); Medwell and Wray (2007); Connelly et al. (2010).

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Children need instruction in handwriting and keyboard skills, but this needs to be combined with attention to meaning

13. Punctuation

Learning to punctuate is an essential part of learning to write. Research into the learning of punctuation has found that skill in using punctuation is supported by:

- a classroom atmosphere in which writing is purposeful and attention is focused on its effect on the reader;
- children's experience of a range of text forms;
- a classroom ethos in which talk about learning is ongoing and interest in punctuation marks is encouraged;
- consistent explanations by the teacher, focusing on semantics – what the mark would make the words mean.

Sources: Calkins (1980); Hall (2001)

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Punctuation is not learned best through rules and drills. Instead, children need to see how punctuation marks affect the meaning of writing that matters to them.

14. Grammar

Politicians and others outside the teaching profession often see grammar teaching as the key to improve children's writing. However, research shows a more complex picture:

- no connection has been found between improved writing and the separate teaching of grammar;
- introducing key terms such as 'synonym', 'verb', 'noun', 'sentence' and 'noun phrase' to children aged 6 to 10 in the context of shared writing helped them consider alternative wordings and make appropriate choices;
- explicit attention to relevant grammatical constructions within the context of writing produced significant improvements in the writing of secondary students.

Sources: Hillocks (1986); Andrews et al. (2006); Hunt (2001); Myhill et al. (2011)

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Any teaching of grammar needs to be carried out in the context of purposeful writing.

15. Responding to Children's Writing

How a teacher responds to a child's writing can have a major impact on attainment and the child's attitude to writing. Studies have shown that:

- of all the things teachers do in the classroom, feedback to learners has the greatest impact on progress, attitude to learning and self-esteem;
- children need to be actively involved in assessing their own writing;
- the best teachers respond to the content and purpose of the writing (as readers), to its technical features (as teachers) and during composition, not just to the end product;
- if marking is to impact on attainment, children need time to act on it.

Sources: Earl et al 2001; Grainger, Gooch and Lambirth 2002; Assessment Reform Group 2002; Hattie 2003; Ofsted 2008; Andrews 2008.

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Response should focus first on writing as communication, then on how the technical aspects affect this.