

W R I T
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Action research
on the teaching
of writing in
primary schools

Writing is Primary

Action research on the teaching of writing in primary schools

Richard Ings

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Preface

This report from the Writing is Primary project is timely. It comes at a critical point when there is a common agreement developing between many academics and agencies about what is needed to improve writing attainment and teacher confidence in the teaching of writing and, critically, what is needed to enhance children's enjoyment and engagement in developing their writing.

Over the past two years, the National Strategies have worked collaboratively with academics and literacy agencies to develop continuing professional development (CPD) models that emphasise the importance of developing teacher confidence in the teaching of writing. These models also ensure a focus on collaborative, classroom-based CPD, where teachers in the same school engage in ongoing dialogue and reflection on improving teaching through a lesson study model.

All primary schools in England have received funding and opportunities for CPD for head teachers and teachers to develop this approach. Understanding of the role of the leading teacher has increased; there is now significant evidence of the impact of this form of support from a leading teacher national pilot where teacher confidence has grown, the quality of teaching has improved and writing attainment has consequently increased by four times the national rate. The Every Child a Writer programme is being implemented in 69 local authority areas, with growing evidence of the benefit of leading teachers supporting both their own schools and others.

Priority has been given to Assessment for Learning (AfL) nationally with the introduction of Assessing Pupil Progress materials. These support teachers in their understanding of progression in writing and how to identify the next steps. The joint work of academics and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is beginning to produce results, including *Getting Going: generating, shaping and developing ideas in writing* by Richard Andrews, the Teachers as Writers work developed at Winchester University, and the UK Literacy Association (UKLA) research project, Teachers as Readers.

In terms of CPD materials from the DCSF, teachers have universally welcomed Talk for Writing as an engaging and creative way to develop the teaching of writing. Teachers' confidence in planning for creativity within the teaching of writing is growing.

This year has seen the publication of two significant reports: *English at the crossroads: an evaluation of English in primary and secondary school* published by Ofsted and the final report of the independent review of the primary curriculum, led by Sir Jim Rose. In both cases, the recommendations from these major reviews are closely aligned to the findings of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation action research project, Writing is Primary. It is a synergy to be celebrated as we move forward over the next five years.

There is convergence, too, in thinking about what steps to take next. Broadly these are:

- the need to support teacher confidence in the teaching of writing
- the need to support teachers' awareness and knowledge of quality texts
- the role of collaborative, classroom CPD and lesson study, particularly to develop practice
- head teachers leading learning, with a commitment to school-based CPD
- the development of lead teachers for writing, supported by significant government funding.

I welcome this report and hope it will be shared widely with all primary schools, with teachers and head teachers as part of the national CPD programme, as well as with Primary School Improvement Partners. The crucial audience, however, will be those teachers who work directly with children in classrooms and it is they who will most enjoy reading this report and learning from other colleagues who have shown their commitment to:

- developing their own expertise and confidence as teachers of writing
- ensuring the best possible experience for children of learning to write
- supporting children to become enthusiastic and effective writers who will retain a lifelong enjoyment of writing.

I believe passionately that this commitment could be the legacy of all of us who are working to improve writing in primary schools. It is one that all of us working together in primary literacy should be seeking to achieve. There are exciting opportunities ahead in developing the primary curriculum and this report supports the continued debate about the development of the teaching of writing.

Sally Rundell Former Senior Director Literacy, National Strategies Primary and member of the Writing is Primary steering group

Introduction

Developing a new attitude to writing (and to teaching it)

Whether or not a teacher sees themselves as a writer, their pupils will see them as a model of one – though not, of course, always an inspiring or creative one. As one child, commenting on her class teacher for a Writing is Primary audit, said:

I don't think she minds writing but she'd like to do less of it, I'm sure. We all would.

A pithier analysis of how children pick up on a teacher's attitude and often adopt it as their own would be hard to find.

In its recent report, *English at the crossroads: an evaluation of English in primary and secondary school 2005/08* (June 2009), Ofsted points out a problem and one potential way of solving it:

In the primary schools visited, standards in writing were considerably lower than in reading. Teachers who were confident as writers themselves, and who could demonstrate how writing is composed, taught it effectively. (p.5)

In *Getting going: generating, shaping and developing ideas in writing* (DCSF, April 2008), Professor Richard Andrews writes:

From a pedagogical point of view, techniques for improving writing will include practice in writing by the very teachers who are teaching it. In other words, teachers will need to be *accomplished writers* in themselves, not only of literary and fictional genres but in informational and argumentative genres too. They will not only be able to produce final products in this range of genres ("Here's one I made earlier...") but also to reflect on and model the processes of writing in the classroom. (p.14)

This sounds right but it also sounds fairly daunting, especially if you are a primary school teacher expected to cover a wide number of subject areas. Assuming you accept the argument, how do you set about becoming an 'accomplished writer'? And if you don't accept the argument, are there other ways to model writing effectively in the classroom?

What seems to be missing here is any notion of what practical strategies a teacher can take if she or he wants to improve their performance as a teacher of writing.

An action research project

What exactly is 'good writing'? How do we define improvement? How can we recognise it? Measure it? What part does a teacher's own confidence and skill in writing play in that improvement? What range of strategies is available? These were some of the questions that Writing is Primary set out to explore.

Writing is Primary was a 15-month long action research programme, instigated and funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and run in groups of schools in Bury, Kent/Medway, and Worcester over the school year 2007/08. The programme was set up to support teachers of writing, working with pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2. The aim was to try to find ways of helping teachers to become more confident and skilled at inspiring their pupils to write, whether in a literacy or history class, whether descriptive writing or critical, imaginative or journalistic. To achieve this, teachers, too, would need to be inspired so that they could begin to develop leadership in writing.

The Foundation's hope in setting up Writing is Primary was simply that, given the freedom and permission to work differently with children, teachers might discover new and effective teaching and learning strategies to benefit pupils' learning and achievement and go on to develop their own ideas for professional development as a result. We wanted to focus on helping individual teachers through collaborative and peer-supported approaches.

Our vision and that of the schools that participated in Writing is Primary was one of achieving pleasure and confidence as well as quality in writing and, for teachers, in the teaching of writing. We wanted to strike a better balance between standards and enjoyment, between writing as a set of principles and rules and writing as a life activity. We believe that writing has a genuine purpose and is not simply a mechanical process, and that what we or our children might write has at least a potential audience of voluntary readers, not just an examiner.

The year was an undoubted success, with teachers becoming not just more reflective about their practice, but keen to devise their own informed approaches to modelling and promoting writing. They felt more confident, having expanded their strategies, approaches and methods to developing good writing. By providing a secure environment in which to take risks, teachers became more open to innovative practice and more resilient.

Everything that happened and that was tried during Writing is Primary related in some way to this goal: giving teachers the skills and the confidence to take a lead in writing. In the primary phase, it is generally acknowledged that the interests and skills of the head teacher are crucial in shaping that culture but each member of staff also contributes in some way and at some level to it. Stronger leadership from teachers and head teachers would mean improved learning experiences for pupils and a sustainable writing improvement strategy for the schools themselves.

What was learned

Writing is Primary had numerous outcomes; each school involved, perhaps even each teacher involved, was changed in some way. So it would be difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle all the threads woven over the year. If we take a step back, however, the threads resolve themselves into a kind of tapestry in which we can discern the larger drama, with clearer meanings that others can share and benefit from.

We discovered that schools need to focus hard on three areas, as part of whole-school policy and practice:

- teaching and learning strategies, i.e. improving learning, teaching, and assessment
- leadership in writing, i.e. creating the structures and supports in schools that enable all students to learn at high levels
- continuing professional development, i.e. engaging all staff in learning and purposeful collaboration (to create a community of learners)

These three areas are used as a framework for this report, which tracks the journey of Writing is Primary from setting aims to evaluating outcomes.

Section 1 examines the rationale for the research programme, looking first at ‘the real object of the lesson’, which is improving pupil learning and achievement in writing and, then, at the bigger picture of subject leadership in a wider context.

Section 2 briefly reviews the activities undertaken and how they developed over a school year.

Section 3 presents a summary of the project focusing on overall findings from the action research and identifying the broad areas of learning that we think will be useful to the primary school sector, particularly but not exclusively for the attention of head teachers and lead literacy teachers (or their equivalent),

who were the key players in this action research and who, working together with their peers, are in the best position to effect whole-school change.

This report has been written for schools like those that took part in Writing is Primary, with head teachers concerned enough to take action to improve the teaching of writing across their school, with lead teachers eager to develop their subject knowledge, and with teaching staff who would like to see their pupils leave primary school with a deeper understanding and enjoyment of what writing can be for them and what it can actually do in the world beyond the classroom, as well as in it.

In the audit of children’s views on how writing was taught in their school, taken at the end of the Writing is Primary programme, the following comment was made:

My teacher likes writing and doesn't get embarrassed about it. She shares her ideas with us and feels free to let everybody hear her ideas.

This might be called: *making good progress*.

Richard Ings Researcher/Evaluator

Summary

What Writing is Primary was about

Writing is Primary was a 15-month long action research programme, instigated and funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and run in clusters of schools in Bury, Kent/Medway, and Worcester over the school year 2007/08. The programme was set up to support teachers of writing, working with pupils at Key Stages (KS) 1 and 2. The aim was to try to find ways of helping teachers to become more confident and skilled at inspiring their pupils to write well.

The research focused on three areas of whole-school policy and practice:

- improving learning, teaching, and assessment, i.e. teaching and learning strategies
- creating the structures and supports in schools that enable all students to learn at high levels, i.e. leadership in writing
- engaging all staff in learning and purposeful collaboration, i.e. continuing professional development

Two action research projects were commissioned. Project 1 was a professional development programme for a group of 18 lead literacy teachers in the county of Kent and the unitary authority of Medway. This enabled them to develop effective methods of supporting primary colleagues in the teaching of writing at KS1 and 2. They tested these methods in school and then refined the CPD model.

Project 2 involved head teachers of two clusters of primary schools in Bury and Worcester developing whole-school approaches to achieving better teaching and learning of writing. Having identified potential, whole-school approaches to improvement, the head teachers took part in a small-scale professional development programme, coordinated by facilitators appointed by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

What Writing is Primary achieved

For teachers: more imaginative and effective approaches to teaching writing

Encouraged to experiment, most teachers developed a more questioning and

creative approach to received ideas about the teaching of writing; in the best cases, this challenged their own pedagogy. Findings showed teachers:

- developing a deeper understanding of the writing process through their own practice and seeing the importance of this for application in the classroom
- appreciating the benefits of a structured, whole-school approach
- creating a critical and personalised approach to teaching and learning strategies
- being flexible in selecting the right strategies for the teaching situation and being innovative.

For pupils: a marked impact on pupil learning and achievement

Writing is Primary seems to have created not just more sustained and confident writing but also:

- greater enjoyment
- improved understanding
- greater engagement
- enhanced skills
- higher standards
- clearer purpose.

In terms of subject leadership, Writing is Primary demonstrated the importance of:

- leadership in improving the teaching of writing, whether giving a lead to pupils in the classroom or in effecting whole-school strategies for improvement
- the full engagement of head teachers in the process of research and practice improvement
- sharing leadership and networking.

In terms of continuing professional development, Writing is Primary demonstrated that:

- CPD is vital in facilitating attitudinal change in teachers, building capacity and strengthening subject leadership in writing
- peer-led, tailored programmes and participation in joint CPD sessions are both effective approaches
- teachers need a first-hand understanding of the writing process in order to be more confident teachers of writing; by developing their skills in writing, they can improve their leadership in writing
- the writing workshops and the other forms of CPD provided through this programme had a positive impact on classroom practice.

Conclusions

The three main issues

Writing is Primary highlighted the following key factors for improving the learning and teaching of writing:

- building teachers' confidence
- creating and sharing a teaching repertoire across the whole school
- developing teachers' own practice as writers.

Essentials for sustaining improvement in writing

- Make a wholehearted and public commitment to a whole-school approach (especially from the head teacher).
- Enshrine the importance of writing in formal school policy and planning as a priority, ensuring that the work is carried forward and refined year on year.
- Dedicate time, resources and, occasionally, money to action research.
- Recruit at least one member of the teaching staff to the role of 'writing champion'.
- Provide CPD for all staff, particularly peer-led CPD.
- Support teachers to develop a principled and personal response to national requirements.
- Tailor programmes for change to suit a school's particular strengths and weaknesses, and its unique culture.
- Enable collaborative working and peer networking with neighbouring or partner schools, sharing commitment, ideas and practices as well as teaching staff.
- Raise whole-school awareness of the importance and pleasure of writing, extending this to the community beyond the school gates.
- Make significant changes in practice *slowly*, over a long period of time.

Recommendation

There should be a peer-based approach to disseminating good practice, where lead teachers try out ideas that have emerged from Writing is Primary across groups of schools that have strong working relationships with each other.

Glossary

Programme

The whole action research programme, Writing is Primary.

Project

One of the two project approaches taken within Writing is Primary:

- Project 1 was based on developing and trialling a CPD programme for lead teachers to disseminate in their own schools (Kent/Medway).
- Project 2 was based on developing and trialling a whole-school approach to improving the teaching of writing (Bury, Worcester).

Research cluster

The local group or cluster of schools and its facilitator/CPD providers in each geographical area that took part in Writing is Primary:

- The Kent/Medway research cluster comprised nine primary schools and a research team from Canterbury Christ Church University: Teresa Cremin, Kathy Gouch and Andrew Lambirth
- The Bury research cluster comprised six primary schools and a facilitator, Sally Manser.
- The Worcester research cluster comprised four primary schools, a facilitator, Sue Harries, and a CPD provider, Nikki Siegen-Smith.

Teaching strategy

How teaching staff impart information and skills to pupils, plan and implement educational activity, and assess and control the process and its results.

Subject leadership

The provision of professional leadership and management to achieve high quality teaching, effective use of resources and improved standards for pupil learning and achievement.

CPD

Continuing professional development, aimed at improving an individual's knowledge, understanding and skill through reflective activity. It can be provided within school, across a number of schools (or cluster) or from an external source of expertise. Effective CPD offers teachers opportunities to share ideas and gain hands-on experience and should be both relevant to their needs and well structured and focused.

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Chapter 1

The rationale for Writing is Primary

The real object of the lesson

Targeting pupil learning and achievement in writing

'As far as the teaching of English is concerned, I like the insistence upon the inadequacy of the methods employed in the teaching of "composition." There is insufficient oral discussion as preparation for what is, after all, a literary exercise. With the meagre results of this perfunctory method we are familiar. The one or two "bright" children in the class produce "essays" that are at any rate fluent and pleasing summaries of their naïve ideas upon the subject set. The others produce a few lines, perhaps, of bald and crude statement, and sit inactive for most of the time, unable, because they have never been given any hints as to the assembling and development of ideas, to comment upon the few simple relevant thoughts that are common to most children of their age. And it so happens that the children who most of all need help reap practically no benefit from these attempts at "composition." Their papers are, no doubt, corrected for errors in grammar or spelling, but they make no advance in what should be the real object of the lesson, namely, the expression of the faculty of consciously directed thought and its expression in simple and direct language.'

Comments on a Departmental Committee report on English in *On Leaving School and the Choice of a Career* by Sir Charles Cheers Wakefield, Bart. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1927)

These observations, made over 80 years ago, have a familiar ring today. They remind us that writing has always presented challenges to most children required to produce 'composition' in class. In criticising teaching methods, Sir Charles Cheers Wakefield seems to suggest that the effective teaching of writing has always been a challenge for most teachers too. He suspects that, while the average teacher (or examiner) will be happy to put them right on 'errors in grammar or spelling', pupils will get little help with composition itself.

Children struggling to write, in his view, need help with 'the assembling and development of ideas'. He thinks purposeful pupil talk would help. He doesn't seem to think that children have vast amounts of fresh knowledge or subject matter to pour out on to the page, but he does believe that, in order to articulate those 'naïve ideas' common to their age group, children need to

understand how to communicate them through writing. This is *the real object of the lesson*: 'the expression of the faculty of consciously directed thought and its expression in simple and direct language'.

Underlying this argument is a definite sense that composition is hard, otherwise why, in his view, would so few pupils be good at it and so few teachers up to teaching it? There is also an assumption that pedagogy is the problem, particularly when it favours the 'secretarial' aspects of writing over its expression of thought, its content and style.

Unwittingly, then, Sir Charles, erstwhile Mayor of the City of London, has provided a very good introduction to some of the important themes explored in this account of Writing is Primary, an action research project instigated by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to address contemporary concerns with standards and achievements in writing in primary schools.

The need for improvement in writing at Key Stages 1 and 2

Since 1927, there have been many more 'Departmental Committees' and reports of one kind or another to comment on, particularly since the introduction of the National Curriculum for schools in England and Wales, by the Education Reform Act 1988. In terms of influencing the way that writing has been taught for the past decade, the most significant event was the launch of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998. Whatever criticisms have been made of its most well known innovation – the 'literacy hour', which is now more or less defunct – there is little doubt in most people's minds that the strategy did lead to a significant rise in standards of literacy. However, that rise peaked some while ago and, when the original research was undertaken for the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation into the teaching of writing in primary school, in 2004/05, there were growing concerns at this 'levelling off' of progress.

Five years later and there is still, Ofsted reports, 'a high level of public concern... about standards of writing, especially in the light of poor results in the national tests, at the end of Key Stage 2'.

In 2008, around 70% of Foundation Stage pupils achieved the expected standards in aspects of reading, but only 61% did so in writing – the lowest in all the assessment areas. Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have not improved, with a slight decline in reading and writing. It seems that schools find improving reading standards significantly easier to achieve than standards in writing: while 86% of eleven year olds in 2008 now achieve Level 4, the expected national level in reading, only 67% reached this level in writing. Coupled to this is a continuing concern that boys underperform compared to girls at every stage.

Most of these statistics come from *English at the crossroads: an evaluation of English in primary and secondary school*, a report published in June 2009 by Ofsted that draws on evidence from inspections made between April 2005 and March 2008 in 122 primary schools and 120 secondary schools. The main purpose of the report is not, however, to focus on the numbers but to examine the underlying issues, to highlight the main strengths and weaknesses in the teaching and learning of English and to suggest how they might be addressed.

Its observations and conclusions are not a million miles from Sir Charles' in 1927, nor are they substantially different either from the conclusions of the preliminary research undertaken for Writing is Primary or from observations by teachers and pupils at the beginning of this action research programme in autumn 2007. In what they suggest about pedagogy – the 'science of teaching' – they are also close to Richard Andrews' analysis in *Getting going: generating, shaping and developing ideas in writing* (published by the DCSF in April 2008 to help teachers 'develop practical classroom strategies').

The common themes of all these reports are: what makes a lesson focused on writing 'outstanding' rather than merely 'satisfactory'? What is the proper balance between teaching the technical structures of writing and teaching 'the assembly and development of ideas' or, as Ofsted puts it, between imparting knowledge about writing and developing skills in writing? What skills, knowledge and attributes do teachers need to develop in order to teach writing well? What do pupils need in order to engage fully and enthusiastically with the challenge of writing? Looking beyond the lesson itself, how can subject leadership in the school be improved to make good teaching of writing more widespread and consistent – not just in literacy but across the primary curriculum too? Looking further afield, what do schools need to help them identify, sustain and disseminate good practice in the teaching of writing?

These questions are being asked at every level: at the DCSF, the Qualifications and Curriculum Agency (QCA) and Ofsted; by national and regional organisations promoting literacy and by writers-in-schools agencies; in university education departments and in school staff rooms. Writing is Primary was just one of several independent initiatives researching possible answers to these questions. Others have included Everybody Writes, managed by Booktrust with the support of the QCA, and the Writers in Schools Research Programme, run by the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) with the support of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Before finding out how Writing is Primary looked for its own answers, we need first to look again, in a little more detail, at the questions and their implications.

Moving beyond 'satisfactory' levels of teaching writing

Being an inspection agency, Ofsted focuses mainly on evidence gathered from watching and evaluating actual classroom practice. Its primary concern is to find out whether young people are being well served by schools. Classroom practice and pupil learning and enjoyment were also the bottom line for Writing is Primary: what, we asked, could help improve pupil learning and achievement in writing?

English at the crossroads includes the following description of a typical 'satisfactory' lesson:

Superficially, everything went well. The pupils were well-behaved, keen to do their best and most concentrated throughout the lesson. However, their writing was at times disappointing and their progress was not as good as it should have been, largely because the teacher was not clear about what she wanted. ...In order to improve the writing, the teacher needed to demonstrate what she wanted by writing with or for the pupils. (p.18)

A very similar generic description is given by the Writing is Primary research team at Canterbury Christ Church University, drawing on its initial audit of children's experiences of being taught writing:

A third of the children perceived that their teachers disliked writing and were anxious about writing in front of them. It was evident that the practice of teachers sitting alongside learners composing their own pieces of work was extremely rare. Some children empathetically noted their teacher's lack of confidence: 'She's a bit sad as often she doesn't know where to start.'

The audits carried out across the Writing is Primary programme bear out observations made by Ofsted and many other agencies that one of the real obstacles to improved standards and achievements is the failure to find ways of engaging pupils with writing as an *authentic* act. If they are given writing tasks that have no real purpose to them and no real audience beyond the classroom, all but the most committed pupils (those 'one or two "bright" children in the class') are likely to switch off. Most young people need to see some link between what they are doing in class and what goes on in their lives beyond the school gates.

Andrews argues that, to address the challenge of a writing curriculum between now and 2015 (the date set by the QCA's *English 21* project in 2005 for a full-scale review of the English curriculum), educationalists will need to 're-engage and *motivate* disaffected or unengaged young people by a) bringing the genres of schooling closer to the genres of the wider social

world and b) giving writing a range of real purposes'. Otherwise, writing will end up simply serving 'assessment requirements' and the education system. Pupils will produce 'school writing' rather than a form of communication that can make a difference in the world.

To ensure that this does not happen, Ofsted, amongst many others, calls for a 'reinvigoration' of the teaching of writing. Improvement of pupils' writing hinges on the way that they are taught. The individual teacher is where the buck stops.

Leading on writing in the classroom

Whatever their role or status outside the classroom, when someone comes in to teach writing to a group of pupils, they are for that period effectively the 'subject leader'. What they bring with them in terms of subject knowledge, skills and attitude is critical, if they are to provide a positive, creative and inspiring model for writing.

Teachers should realise by now that they need to be acting as exemplars, providing a real purpose and a real audience for children's writing. This has been reiterated for years; interviewed during the initial research for Writing is Primary, the English specialist at Ofsted commented that 'there is a much stronger need for teachers to do their own writing'. Indeed, this message has long been embedded in the government's own guidance to teachers, including those teaching reception classes, who should be 'role models who use writing explicitly in the classroom... and demonstrate to children what they are doing' (*National Literacy Strategy: Developing Early Writing 2001*).

The problem identified then as now is that, for a whole variety of reasons, too few teachers seem confident when it comes to teaching writing. One reason for this may be the introduction of a prescriptive literacy curriculum a decade ago and the feeling this may have engendered – especially amongst those entering the profession – that there were certain rules and regulations that you disobeyed at your peril. Teachers usually flourish best when prescription from above is tempered with freedom to adapt and personalise this well-intended guidance in the classroom. Things have moved on a long way since then (including the introduction of the more flexible Primary Framework in 2007), but the habits acquired in the past and the problem itself have not gone away.

One head teacher involved in Writing is Primary noted, at the beginning of the programme, that one of the 'barriers to progress' in developing writing in her school was the National Literacy Strategy, because of its 'use of unit plans, i.e. too prescriptive, too many text types, not enough time spent on each genre, not enough time spent on extended writing'. According to another

head, the time constraints engendered by the Strategy had resulted in ‘an approach where extended writing rarely happens’:

The feeling about our writing was that teachers generally approach the teaching of writing in a fairly rigid and functional way – this generally produces good results in terms of writing levels *but...*

Several heads agreed that most writing opportunities remained ‘prescriptive’ and linked to planned work, with few opportunities to explore style and approach more freely. One other unintended consequence of the Strategy, according to Andrews, was that it placed ‘an undue emphasis on form’:

...the emphasis needs to move from a focus on the end-products – the frames (pedagogic ‘scaffolds’, genres, text types, forms) and shapes that language uses and that need to be learnt – to the act of framing and shaping that is at the heart of composition (literally, ‘putting things together’). (p.12)

This is reminiscent of what many have observed about what less confident teachers tend to teach when they teach writing. It is easier and certainly safer to try to teach pupils correct spelling and grammar than to risk launching them into the complexities of extended composition. One of the common weaknesses identified by Ofsted and others is an over-emphasis on technical matters, such as punctuation or complex sentences, at the expense of helping pupils to develop and structure their ideas.

If writing is understood by a teacher as a largely mechanical process – getting spelling and punctuation right, ensuring that so many ‘time words’ are used, explaining ellipsis and so on – then pupils will understand that this is what writing is and no more. It was found, through talking to pupils from Kent/Medway involved in Writing is Primary, that the purposes of writing being implicitly modelled by teachers related mainly to the assessment of pupils’ work, instructional text and behaviour management. This tendency is borne out by parallel audits of teachers, which showed that a) many lacked confidence in teaching writing and b) many existing strategies for improving writing were based on focused marking and associated teacher feedback, on (as one head teacher commented) ‘checklist criteria rather than purpose, creativity and enjoyment’. That this affects pupils’ own definition of what writing is about is made all too clear in these same audits (mirrored by those carried out in Bury and Worcester):

The themes the children focus on when offering advice to other writers demonstrate clearly what their own concerns are and what they perceive as salient to writing. The vast majority offered technical advice to other children, frequently recommending for example, that they make sure of ‘capital letters and full stops’, ‘write neatly’, ‘join up’, ‘sound out,’ ‘use

correct grammar and spelling’, ‘use adjectives,’ ‘use complex sentences’, ‘use a sharp pencil’ or ‘hold the pencil properly’, and ‘use a thesaurus’. There were no examples of children referring to writing as a meaning-making or communicative activity or referring to purpose in any meaningful way. (Kent/Medway audit, January 2008)

How then does a teacher move beyond this limited vision of writing in order to help their pupils do the same? How does the teacher model ‘putting things together’?

Demonstrating what a writer is and what a writer does

The notion of ‘modelling’ writing needs clarification. Is it simply about ‘facilitating’ pupil writing? If it is, then all that teachers might have to do is to provide the right kind of cues for writing and supply the right sort of support materials to keep it on track. Their pupils will then, presumably, have the necessary tools to develop their own writing skills, while the teacher is free to intervene, to help and advise, refining the application of those skills.

There is another way of thinking about modelling that puts the teacher centre stage, not simply as a facilitator but as a writer, too. This kind of teacher models writing by doing it themselves. When that happens, good teaching seems to happen, as Ofsted inspectors have discovered:

Teachers who were confident as writers themselves, and who could demonstrate how writing is composed, taught it effectively. (p.5)

Why should this be? One reason is that children may not, in the general run of things, have any idea of what writing is actually for or what you can do with it. They cannot be assumed to know what a writer is or what a writer does unless they get the chance to meet one and see what they do. Of course, reading will help pupils to see what writing can do but reading is a more receptive activity than writing. Writing requires a lot more energy, a lot more stamina and a lot more courage. It is about making meanings of your own; it is about claiming independence as much as communicating with others.

The scale of what he or she is expecting of pupils when setting them a writing task can only be fully appreciated if the teacher accepts the same challenge they face – perhaps to write something on the spot over the final 20 minutes of the lesson that will be marked and even (if this were a test) used to grade their ability to write as a whole.

If pupils see that their teacher is willing to do what they are being asked to do, it will surely seem a lot more reasonable to them to make the same effort

themselves. If the teacher is really good at the process, able to show the kind of decisions he or she is having to make on the hoof about content, pace, style, vocabulary and so on, then pupils will begin to develop an insight into that process and to understand that writing rarely appears fully formed but needs teasing out, editing and redrafting. The teacher will be learning, too, of course, adding to her or his subject knowledge through actual practice.

English at the crossroads concludes:

One of the most positive developments over recent years has been the increasing tendency for teachers to demonstrate writing for their pupils. At its best, this involves teachers in writing with pupils, explaining their choices of words and phrases, and amending their work as they produce it. Evidence from the USA, where there is a long-established National Writing Project for teachers, suggests that pupils' work improves when their teachers regard themselves as writers. However, many of the teachers in the survey... lacked the confidence to do this. As a result, their pupils were not able to see how ideas and language are created, shaped, reviewed and revised. (p.48)

The other disadvantage of weak practice is that, even if pupils know the mechanics of writing, they may not realise *why* they should write or for whom or even how to start the process of gathering and discussing ideas that can lead to writing.

Acknowledging the challenges of writing

One of the barriers to successful writing is the lack of confidence among staff and pupils; there has been some progress in tackling this but more work is needed. The initial audits that head teachers carried out in Bury and Worcester and that the research team carried out in Kent/Medway, to get a snapshot of writing in their schools, provide overwhelming evidence that teacher confidence – or rather the lack of it – is one of the main barriers to progress. Their findings can be summarised as follows:

- modelling is more often undertaken through use of a text that has been prepared ahead of the lesson. Children do not often see adults writing in school; adults do not write at the same time as children.
- pupils do witness teachers writing but not in a creative context; it will be either a teacher completing a task at their desk or within the classroom alongside the pupils working on their own task, which may be different.
- teacher confidence should lead to pupil confidence in writing [but there is] little evidence that teachers see themselves as writers – writing tends only to be for professional purposes.

In one Worcester school, the head noted four reasons his teachers gave for not writing for pleasure: not enough time; a preference for reading; other interests to spend their leisure time on; and not having 'a purpose for writing'. By the end of the year of Writing is Primary, this school had established, with the head's enthusiastic encouragement and personal participation, a staff writing workshop that met most Fridays after lessons. Somehow, during that year a purpose had been found for teachers writing themselves – not just for the pleasure of it but, as their classroom practice revealed, for the impact it was having on their teaching of writing.

This was a particularly successful outcome from a relatively short intervention – a year is not a long time in the life of a school – and not all schools in the programme necessarily bought into the notion of 'teachers as writers'. Some found other ways to address improving the teaching of writing, ways that respected the lack of confidence many teachers feel at the thought of writing in front of their classes, of being writers themselves.

After all, writing is not easy to do, never mind to teach. Andrews states that writing is the most difficult, if not the most complex, of the four language skills. It requires 'solitary, creative, thoughtful, accurate and focussed compositional energy, plus a higher degree of reflective thinking and (usually) personal engagement'. If that is the real object of the lesson, we need to find whatever ways we can to deliver it.

We need, individually and as a sector, to look at our current teaching and learning strategies critically to make sure that they are delivering the best possible results for pupil learning, achievement and enjoyment in writing. If they are not, we need to look for alternatives. That was the core research aim of Writing is Primary.

The bigger picture

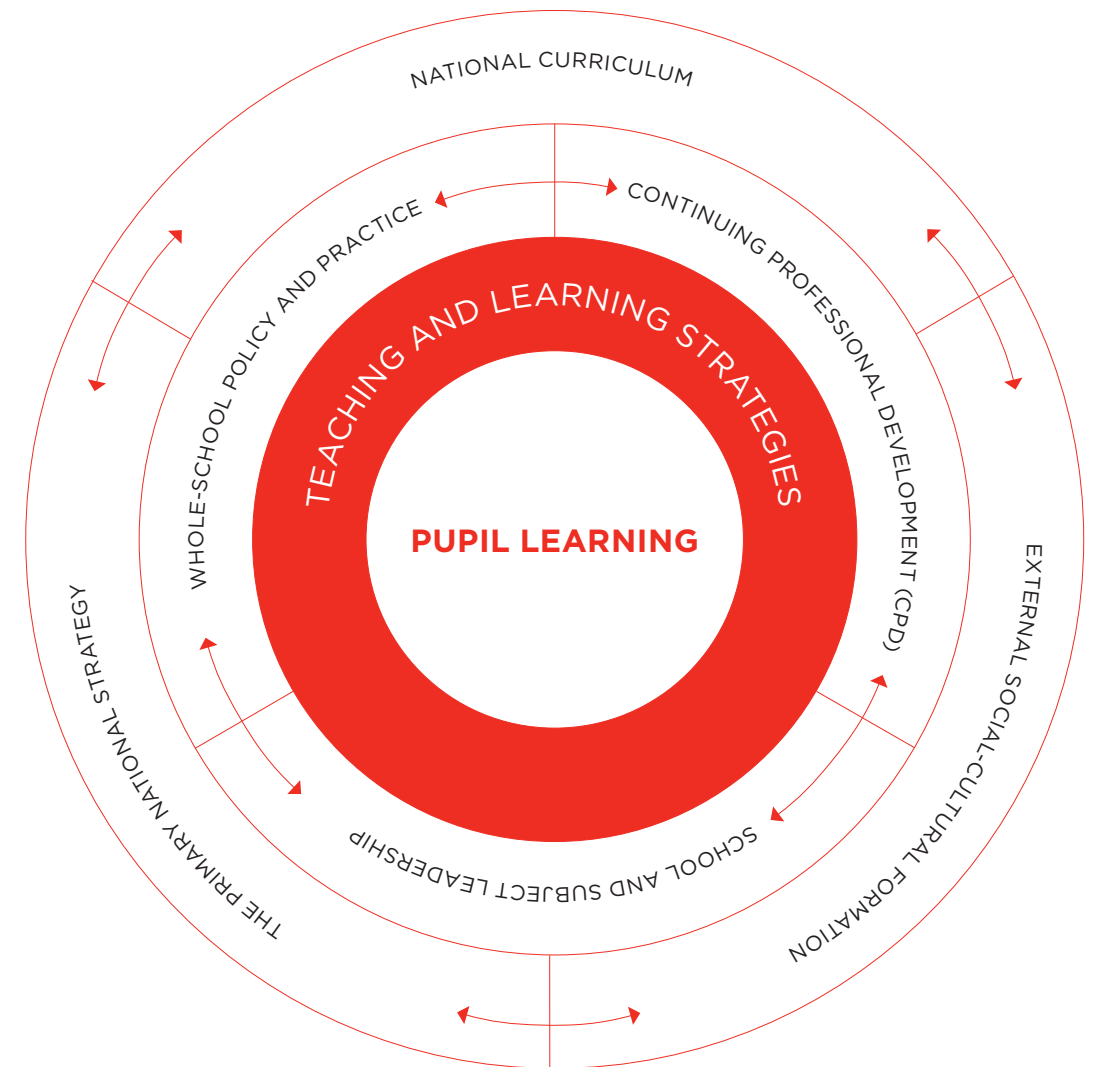
Teaching strategies in context

Looking at teaching and learning strategies to see what changes might be made to develop pupils' enthusiasm, skill and achievement in writing means looking, too, at the wider context for those strategies and how they are to be developed, supported, sustained and, if appropriate, disseminated. Any kind of teaching is a kind of strategy, even if only by default. For a strategy to be widely useful, however, there has to be a link between practice in the classroom and practice elsewhere. There are other factors at work beyond the individual teacher's work with his or her pupils.

The diagram opposite suggests that there are three overlapping and interacting factors that influence such strategies: school and subject leadership; whole-school policy and practice; and continuing professional development (CPD). Each of these areas needs to be thought about in planning any kind of strategic innovation in teaching or learning – whether that is the notion of teachers developing their own writing skills, or the idea of introducing philosophy to develop thinking and talking skills that can then generate purposeful writing.

The outermost ring of the diagram is a reminder of the wider context for the immediate eco-system of the school, provided by the standard-setting framework of the National Curriculum; the Primary National Strategy, which influences and disseminates good practice in schools; and the 'external social-cultural formation', also known as 'the real world'. Hopefully, the education system shifts in response to what happens in the world outside its borders; indeed, those borders should be porous in all directions. One of the key issues raised in the previous section of this report was the need for pupils to see a link between the classroom and the world outside.

In an ideal system, an innovation developed in a single literacy class could percolate through the rings and their segments – perhaps giving a boost initially to subject leadership, then spreading across the whole staff and forming part of the school plan for the improvement of writing, consolidated by CPD developed by that innovative teacher. This high quality training and development package would then be picked up and more widely disseminated by those directing the Primary National Strategy. When the curriculum is next reviewed, it might shift in response to the pedagogic implications of this example of innovative classroom practice. Meanwhile, the pupils from that initial trial would be out in the world, equipped with the skills and confidence it had given them to put their ideas into writing.



This scenario might be fanciful but planning for Writing is Primary had to take into account some of this wider context if the intervention in teaching and learning strategies in writing was going to have any lasting impact. Leaving the possibility of any influence on the outer ring for history to sort out, we focus in this section on the relationship between the research programme and whole-school policy, subject leadership and CPD, arguing first that improving school and subject leadership is essential to whole-school change around the teaching of writing.

The importance of leadership

In considering what kind of intervention would be most effective and appropriate, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation was well aware that improving the teaching of writing in primary schools could not be achieved at a stroke. The discovery of simple formulae that could be universally applied was unlikely. A scoping study had recommended that the core aim of an action research programme should be to support teachers to experiment with ways of teaching writing they had not tried before – and perhaps, in the process, to raise their game. If genuinely sustainable, teacher-led approaches to improvement in the teaching and learning of writing could be found and popularised, subject leadership would be greatly enhanced.

In *English at the crossroads*, Ofsted notes that, where provision was weaker, subject leaders ‘did not have a clear understanding of where improvements were needed or how they might be achieved’. Writing is Primary could potentially make a real difference here, perhaps helping to shift the role of subject leader from that of ‘resource manager’ to something more dynamic – and riskier.

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education has identified the broader responsibilities for monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching as particular weaknesses in subject leadership. Primary teachers, usually trained to be generalists, face a real challenge in being required to be subject experts.

Most, if not all, primary school teachers will have had some formal training in the teaching of writing. They may have had some further professional development, arranged by the local education authority or their school, perhaps linked to the dissemination of a new strategy for literacy. Others may have been on a professional development course run by an independent educational or literacy consultancy. Teachers bring with them a personal history of reading and writing – just how rich a history will also have a bearing on how effectively and easily they can lead on writing (or, indeed, model it in the classroom).

The best subject leaders are reflective, analytical and self-critical – qualities exemplified by good practice in their own teaching. Skilled subject leaders are also enthusiastic, personable and skilful enough to provide a strong lead and support across the school. They can also help to build a community of learners, where teachers can learn from or with each other and develop professional conversations about their practice. The Foundation decided that an intervention in subject leadership would be worth exploring and set up what became Writing is Primary: Project 1. The idea was to prime a group of literacy lead teachers to return to their schools armed with greater subject knowledge and greater confidence to lead on writing across the staff team, modelling new approaches, leading conversations about change and spreading the word.

This description of a subject leader applies equally well to a head teacher. Ofsted has highlighted how important it is for head teachers to value writing:

In both the primary and secondary schools visited, outstanding leadership and management of English resulted from highly effective head teachers who understood the subject’s importance and placed it at the centre of their drive for improvement. They did not completely delegate responsibility for the curriculum to other senior leaders but took a constant interest in its development, closely monitoring the impact of teaching. They provided good support for subject leaders, without interfering... (p.33)

This tribute retrospectively validates the Foundation’s decision to offer head teachers the opportunity for experimentation in and reflection on the teaching of writing as part of Writing is Primary – this was to become a distinguishing feature of Project 2. The administrative workload of running a primary school is considerable. In primary schools particularly, it is the head who sets the pace and the tone; in Writing is Primary, the head was able to intervene in classroom practice. As a research leader, she or he could spend time thinking about and trialling new ideas about teaching and the curriculum, in collaboration with her or his lead literacy teachers and with each other.

Through a focus on either subject leaders or head teachers, Writing is Primary assumed the importance of taking a whole-school approach, to give coherence to emerging plans, values and priorities. Both projects had their own strengths. Where the head was at the helm, resources could be targeted more effectively. Where the lead teacher/subject leader was influential was in embodying how professional development could be redefined as an ongoing, rather than an episodic, process. In either case, teachers would be helped to develop skills and confidence and encouraged to reflect more deeply (and collaboratively) on strategies for teaching and learning, thus moving from a situation where isolated practitioners create their own piecemeal individual approaches to a new, whole-school, reflective model.

The importance of networks

That sense of making connections between teachers ploughing their lonely furrows through strong subject leadership within a school could be expanded to the level of schools themselves. In *Whole school change: A review of the literature*, a report for Creative Partnerships (Arts Council England, 2007) Pat Thomson explains how:

One answer to the conundrum of 'islands of innovation', and the obdurate difficulties of scaling up educational reforms effected in one school, is to find ways in which leading schools can work with others without decimating their own capacities. This might be a network. (p. 48)

This was the final element in the Writing is Primary matrix: supporting networks to support school change. More than simple fora to share information, the networks that emerged in Bury, Worcester and Kent/Medway became active in developing the research programme in a way that a single school could not achieve by itself.

“I have realised there are other approaches to writing ‘out there’ that can be beneficial if we have the time and inclination to explore them.”

T **H** **E**

P **R** **O**

G **R** **A**

M *M* **E**

Chapter 2

The Writing is Primary programme

Programme development

Timeline

The following summarises the common path that the research clusters took towards the overall aims of Writing is Primary, from shaping the bid to completing the final report.

Spring term 2007

- Invited to apply for Writing is Primary

Summer term 2007

- Reviewed current school policy and practice and set aims and objectives
- Wrote project proposal identifying desired outcomes

Autumn term 2007

- After grant awarded, carried out audit of teacher and pupil attitudes to (teaching of) writing
- Writing is Primary action plan, setting targets based partly on audit
- Delivered, monitored and adapted programme

Spring term 2008

- Delivered, monitored and adapted programme

End March 2008

- Attended conference in Coventry, with other Writing is Primary research clusters to share practice

Summer term 2008

- Delivered, monitored and adapted programme

Autumn term 2008

- Submitted final report, evaluating outcomes
-

The set-up

Project 1

Two 15-month action research projects were commissioned. Project 1 was to provide a professional development programme for a group of 18 lead literacy teachers, currently working in nine primary schools in Kent/Medway. The focus on lead literacy teachers was due to their expertise in, and responsibility for, influencing practice in schools (advanced skills teachers and literacy coordinators with a similar remit could also participate). They would take part in a professional development programme, designed by Canterbury Christ Church University, which would enable them to develop effective methods of supporting primary colleagues in the teaching of writing at Key Stages 1 and 2. They would test these methods in school and then come back together, with CCCU, to refine the model.

Project 2

Project 2 was to involve the head teachers of two clusters of primary schools in developing whole-school approaches to achieving better teaching and learning of writing. Supported by a facilitator with a background in education and writing, the head teachers would each complete an audit of current practice in the teaching and learning of writing in their schools and identify whole-school approaches that might be taken to improve that practice. While these approaches were being tested in their schools, the head teachers would take part in a small-scale professional development programme, led by the facilitator and involving colleagues from the cluster.

Preparing the ground

Audits

Audits helped schools to set realistic goals for the year ahead.

Although some information was already available, e.g. statistics compiled from SATs and other formal assessments, all schools carried out a comprehensive investigation of attitudes to writing. This included a written questionnaire for pupils, often supplemented by interviews with a representative sample. Audits run in Kent/Medway also asked for pupils' perceptions about their teachers' own attitudes to writing – a crucial issue given the importance of teachers as potential modellers of writing.

Overall, the results provided a useful insight into the strengths and weaknesses of current teaching practice and helped schools to set a baseline for hoped-for improvements: they drew a clear 'before' picture that could be referred to, once the programme had formally ended. Schools were able to develop an informed and strategic response to the underlying issues that had emerged rather than rush for immediate 'solutions' to apparent 'problems'.

Action plans

Action plans provided schools with a framework that would guide activity and set targets, whilst allowing opportunities to review and amend their programmes.

Although each cluster took its own route towards fulfilling the action research brief, the underlying aim was the same – attitudinal change. One project steering group meeting envisioned 'a healthy culture for writing within classrooms, schools and the network as a whole', where pupils would 'demonstrate raised interest levels, confidence and engagement with writing; have all the tools they need to become good writers; refine their writing skills and accelerate their rate of progress; understand the purpose of writing and choose to write autonomously; and achieve higher standards'.

Taking stock

Formative evaluation

Formative evaluation and teacher reflection were required throughout the year to ensure that the programme continued to meet individual school needs whilst making progress towards the overall action research aims.

Meetings within schools and clusters (with or without the facilitator) gauged improvement in, for example, teachers' confidence in teaching writing and in their effectiveness as 'change agents'. In Kent/Medway this was done methodically through formal interviews, focus group reflections and comments from a sample group of pupils; in Bury and Worcester, it was done more informally.

Each school collected relevant hard data and recorded testimony over the year, including evidence of children's engagement in and attitude to writing over the year, teachers' reflections, CPD evaluations, presentations and informal feedback. Several schools made a concerted effort to collect data in different formats so that they could evaluate impact. Chapelfield Primary in Bury, for example, drew on pupils' work, teachers' views, lesson observations, observations of pupils (including photographs), pupil views, thinking journals (for *Philosophy for Children*) and assessments. Other schools conducted end-of-year audits with pupils and, occasionally, teachers.

The Coventry conference

The Coventry conference was the first opportunity for a programme-wide review. It was attended by all the participating schools in Bury, Worcester, Kent/Medway and their facilitators as well as Foundation staff and members of the Writing is Primary steering group.

Held over two days, roughly two terms into the project, the conference allowed heads and teachers from each of the clusters to meet each other informally and air tentative findings as well as take part in an exchange of practical workshops and contribute to plenary discussions. New approaches and ideas emerged, rejuvenating participants as they approached the final term.

The activities

Although a modest programme in some ways – only 19 schools involved over a single year – Writing is Primary was decidedly ambitious. The action research was focused on three main areas within a whole-school approach: teaching and learning strategies, school and subject leadership and CPD. The table below offers a few examples of the activity generated by Writing is Primary under each of these headings: in schools, in clusters of schools and in the wider education sector.

SCHOOL	CLUSTER	EDUCATION SECTOR
Teaching strategies		
Teachers applying their own learning about writing; use of multi-modal and multi-sensual approaches	Developing creative learning environments; establishing writing walls	Contributing to professional exchange on good practice
Leadership		
Subject leaders identifying priorities; demonstration lessons	Head teachers forming action research team	Dissemination of good practice via publication; identifying school support needs
Continuing professional development		
Facilitator support; peer observation; review of CPD needs	Collaborative CPD; teacher exchange	Literacy CPD provided by local authority; trialling off-the peg training packages

The ambition of Writing is Primary – and its non-prescriptive framework – allowed for a variety of approaches, inputs and outputs, and outcomes.

Although taking different perspectives, both projects would be equally committed to the central task of creating teaching and learning strategies to help improve pupil learning and achievement in writing.

Project 1 activities

Kent/Medway Cluster

What they did

Professional development programme comprising four strands: teachers as writers, as pedagogues, as action researchers, and as change agents.

Termly group staff meetings in schools led by the project team and the teachers involved.

End of year conference, hosted by CCCU, to disseminate learning.

How they did it

Three professional development sessions each term, at CCCU, based around the four strands of the programme.

Each term, head teachers were invited to take part in one of the professional development sessions.

Also each term, CCCU visited every participating school, to meet the head and the teachers taking part in the project.

Two visiting professional writers contributed to the professional development sessions.

Each school agreed a Writing is Primary action plan, which was used by the two participating teachers to try to effect curriculum development.

Why they did it

To help teachers to develop their confidence and competence as writers; support them in developing children's confidence and competence as writers; encourage them to develop their ability to reflect critically on their own writing; and give them the means to develop children's ability to reflect critically on theirs.

To contribute to a sustainable, teacher-centred professional development programme that might be replicated elsewhere.

What happened as a result

The experience in Kent/Medway was that teachers who become more confident writers themselves are more likely to be able to inspire children with the desire to write and to create purposeful contexts for writing. The researchers found among teachers 'a powerful new picture of positive attitudes towards writing, the increase of choice, newly motivated writers, critical writers, constructive responses to writing together with a strong personal engagement in writing and publishing writing'.

Teachers gradually moved away from preparing 'demonstration writing' beforehand to demonstrating and modelling writing spontaneously and engaging in 'joint interactive composition' as a more effective pedagogical approach.

Rapid growth in teachers choosing to write alongside pupils - generating, drafting, editing and completing work they had set for the class. Only one teacher had tried this approach to any great extent before.

Schools

Benenden County Primary
Ditton Junior
Eastborough County Primary
Elaine County Primary
Kingfisher County Primary
Minterne Junior
Saxon Way County Primary
St Katherine's Knockholt County Primary School
St William of Perth RCP

The core members of the team running the Kent/Medway research cluster were Kathy Gooch, Senior Lecturer, Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU), Andrew Lambirth, Principal Lecturer (CCCU) and Teresa Cremin, Professor of Education (Literacy), The Open University. They had already worked closely together for over ten years on a range of professional development programmes for primary teachers in Kent/Medway. In addition, individually and jointly, they had undertaken a considerable amount of literacy consultancy, nationally and internationally; Teresa Cremin had been involved in the Primary National Strategy/UKLA Raising Boys' Achievements in Writing Project (2004/5).

The team worked in collaboration with nine primary schools and two local authority literacy consultants. A Project Focus Group was established, including two teachers from each school. An end-of-year conference was held to disseminate the good practice and the findings from the year's research to other primary teaching staff from Kent/Medway, including head teachers.

Project 2 activities

Bury Cluster

What they did

Created an ‘action research community’, composed of head teachers and their lead literary teachers (or ‘writing champions’). Head teachers took a hands-on lead as researchers collecting data and analysing and disseminating findings.

How they did it

Although few of the six participating schools had formally worked together before, a collegiate approach developed, from their joint bid to take part in Writing is Primary to regular review and planning meetings.

Why they did it

To develop head teachers’ own leadership in this area of the curriculum, both individually and across the cluster.

What happened as a result

Head teachers gained a greater understanding of the impact of a whole-school approach and its potential to change classroom practice for staff and pupils. As one head teacher put it: ‘Sharing good practice, learning from one another (and together) has been a real strength which I feel will carry us through in years to come.’

Organised joint CPD sessions alongside schools’ own tailored programmes

A good example of Bury’s approach was the ‘speed dating’ event when all six schools pitched to each other the approaches they would be focusing on. Later in the term, teachers signed up for workshops that they felt would be most useful in improving their teaching. The cluster also organised a moderate level of inter-school observation.

To build teacher confidence and develop subject leadership.

Bringing schools and lead teachers together in collaborative and peer-to-peer research led to new approaches to developing subject leadership in writing and literacy. Teacher and school networking grew as the year progressed.

Participated in a three-strand programme trialling or refining existing literacy learning ‘packages’ with the option of adding a fourth strand: a school’s own devised solutions.

The head teacher of Greenhill Primary, who co-ordinated the group of six head teachers and their lead teachers, stated that a ‘holistic view of the development of writing’ would have a greater impact than developing approaches piecemeal.

Teachers incorporated new approaches into their classroom practice, supported by head and lead teachers.

Reviewed progress regularly and adapted approaches to suit the context; work scrutiny, lesson observation and peer mentoring.

To help teachers to improve pedagogy and to develop leadership in writing, as part of a whole-school approach to improvement.

The main conclusion was that teachers need concrete strategies to improve writing and that ‘packages’ like *Big Writing* can provide practical support. One head teacher from Bury noted that: ‘Pupils are generally better equipped to write with a greater array of tools, both technical and imaginative; they have developed the approaches they need to be good writers. They are able to refine the use of writing skills to match task, purpose and audience with some adult guidance. This has resulted in improved progress rates.’

Schools

Chapelfield Primary
Christ Church CE Primary
Greenhill Primary
St. Michael’s RC Primary
Unsworth Primary
Woodbank Primary

The Bury research cluster was facilitated by Sally Manser, a former teacher and LEA adviser and now freelance school improvement professional with extensive experience of supporting strategic partnerships between groups of schools.

Bury Cluster research strands

Each school chose at least three of the four research strands to pursue with one or more of their year groups.

The success of all research strands was judged by their impact on pupil and teacher attitudes and on pupil achievements, both qualitatively and in terms of accelerated progress through National Curriculum literacy sub-levels.

Teacher discrimination in where and how to use, combine and separate different approaches, was undoubtedly the most significant learning point. These approaches are only as good as the teacher makes them.

Strand	Action	Findings	Learning
Ros Wilson's <i>Big Writing</i>	Staff attended a training course (or visited schools where staff had been using the approach for some time) to learn more about how <i>Big Writing</i> might be applied in their classrooms. They then added aspects of it to their teaching repertoire.	All schools used this approach to some extent (two schools had begun using the approach before the project), with largely positive results. In one, roughly 90% of pupils said they had enjoyed <i>Big Writing</i> and 95% said that it had helped raise achievement in writing.	The main risk with <i>Big Writing</i> , as with any other prescribed approach to pedagogy, is treating it as a formula rather than as guidance or inspiration.
Multi-sensory approaches	<p>Picture the Music Most schools used <i>Picture the Music</i> to develop the 'mind's eye' and help pupils create description and narrative in context.</p> <p>Write Dance One school (Chapelfield) used <i>Write Dance</i> to help Early Years pupils to make marks, take control of the act of writing and write with more confidence and enthusiasm.</p> <p>Use of film One school (Unsworth) used film to stimulate children's imagination and help them to write narratives</p>	<p><i>Picture the Music</i> was helpful in stimulating writing. In one school, it had 'an immediate impact' upon pupils' motivation and the content of their written work, but was less effective if over used.</p> <p>Teachers at Chapelfield observed an increase in reluctant writers' spontaneous mark making during the self-directed activity in <i>Write Dance</i>.</p> <p>Unsworth found that using films was the most productive approach it tried. For example, it helped pupils to see the development between different parts of the story, rather than using the 'trick' of a connective.</p>	By stimulating emotions and imagination, these approaches gave pupils a reason to write, motivating them to plan, plot and sequence, work on and improve a piece of writing through several drafts.
Talk-led approaches	Schools took a variety of approaches to generating talk. Chapelfield used <i>Philosophy for Children</i> ; Greenhill employed drama techniques; Unsworth explored the impact of 'Learning Conversations' between adults and children on writing.	<p>Chapelfield reported that <i>Philosophy for Children</i> was the most popular of the four approaches it tried. Although the impact on SATs results was negligible, the head argued that, in the longer term, this approach would raise pupils' measurable achievement.</p> <p>At Unsworth, the research into learning conversations led to staff meetings on the topic and ongoing reflection amongst staff.</p> <p>Greenhill continues to ensure staff use drama in their repertoire of teaching strategies.</p>	These approaches showed the impact and importance of developing talk and thinking skills as preparation and material for improving meaningful and communicative writing.
Self-organised literacy development	This strand was for individual schools to shape, and mainly involved finding time out of class for a particularly proficient literacy specialist to work alongside colleagues, team teach and plan collaboratively.	Outcomes included the continuation of internal support roles, because of their impact on staff effectiveness as literacy teachers and the promotion of one of them to the role of deputy head.	Giving teachers the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues on new approaches demonstrated the value of freeing up effective teachers of writing to provide more peer-to-peer support.

Project 2 activities

Worcester Cluster

What they did

Facilitator set up a CPD programme modelled on the writing workshop to develop teachers as writers.

Two schools - Cherry Orchard and Nunnery Wood - made this approach central to their research and commissioned supplementary writing CPD sessions.

How they did it

Initial residential writing course for heads and lead literacy teachers at Lake Vyrnwy in Powys, followed by further professional development sessions, run during the year, for whole staff groups (in two cases including teaching assistants).

Sessions were often themed and occasionally resulted in illustrated publications of the teachers' own writing.

Why they did it

To identify how teachers' own potential as practitioners and modellers of writing could best be realised and developed.

To determine how and whether teachers developing greater skill as writers might improve classroom pedagogy.

What happened as a result

For the two schools which embraced this approach, it demonstrated that teaching staff who enjoy writing, who understand the skills of writing, who have confidence in their own abilities as writers and who can share all this with their pupils are able to teach writing more effectively.

By participating in this writing process, head teachers learned to spot qualitative aspects of good practice that would improve the teaching and learning of writing in their schools.

Developed practical strategies for whole-school approaches to writing.

One good example was the adoption of working or writing walls, initially at Nunnery Wood and then adopted by others in the cluster.

Another was the establishment of writing spaces in school grounds, in collaboration with visual artists.

Another was the publication of themed work by pupils and adults within the schools.

To provide learning environments to stimulate writing.

All the schools found ways to embed the understanding and process of writing in their own school culture.

Schools

Cherry Orchard Primary
Nunnery Wood Primary
Red Hill Primary
Warndon Primary

The Worcester research cluster was facilitated by Sue Harries, a former teacher, head of education at Welsh National Opera, director of education at the Arts Council of Great Britain and now freelance adviser and consultant. Literacy consultant, former head teacher and writer, Nikki Siegen-Smith provided a tailored CPD programme for head teachers and their staff.

Poetry, prose & playtime petitions

“The children were able see that the words don’t just come straight to me and that I have silent moments when I need to think. This really helped them to see me as a writer.”



Positive Feedback

Seeing you
Recently
Took me back
30 years
To when I sat
In your class
And first tussled
With
Ideas
Which led me
To a new world.
At first it was
Blurry and fogged
But slowly
Brought into focus
By words
Which I found
Hidden, waiting
Half formed, tentative
Inside myself,
Oozing from pen to paper.
I never knew their power
Until you showed me.
30 years on
I have learnt
More of the magic
And I am still in awe
Of those like you
Who unlocked its pleasures
And sent me
Into a future
Where anything became
Possible.

Hidden Man of the Forest

Laughing, singing, whistling,
Hidden amongst the leaves.
Protecting, saving, caring,
Blending into the bark.
Staring, beckoning, smiling,
Who is here and there?
Who is the laughter of the leaves?
Who is casting a spell on winter?
It is the king of the forest,
It's the green man.

Planet Earth has got the Flu

Planet Earth has got the flu
Is there a doctor who knows what to do?
It's sneezing water upon the land
Crushing buildings into sand.
Its temperature is rising, it's burning up
And no ice pack is cold enough.
How did it catch this viral infection?
It needs some pills or an injection
To restore its harmony and wealth
Of beauty, balance and natural health.

Snowdrops

The crystal clear snowdrops
Fall gently to the white snow carpet
From where the hope and happiness started

My Family

My sister is nearly one
She can sit up and crawl
She was born on April the first
But she is no one's fool!

My brother Al is ten years old
And as annoying as can be
He tells me awful jokes but I hate it most
When he practises Judo on me

My dad is not so bad
He works all day
And when he's done
He likes to play!
My mum is a hon
She always washes dishes
But I like it most of all
When she gives me lots of kisses!

Me, well I'm practically perfect in every way
I am three things in one
Perfect, pretty and a princess

Rhiwargor Haiku

**Grey wagtail's playground
Restful water below the turbulent falls;
My boots splinter his world**

**Under the sea you can see a black and white killer whale.
You can see a pink spotted jellyfish bump into a grey
dolphin. You can see a grey and black shark swimming
side to side and biting his teeth**

The Everlasting Wonder

There is said to be an island which holds the worlds sorrows. Amidst its steaming jungles and mysterious waters is a temple holding a great secret never to be found out. Its name, Pandora's Box. Many have tried to reach this wonderous item, but have failed miserably. But one day a little girl found herself about to change this.

The last thing Maria had remembered was climbing into bed and falling asleep clutching a beautiful necklace her grandmother had given her the day before she died. Little did Maria know what troubles and unwanted adventures this necklace would cause.

The first one had just begun. Maria woke up lying on a beach as rough as a rhino's toenail. As she got up she noticed her necklace. It had changed. Instead of just one little pink bead on its gossamer thread, there were two, one pink and one beautiful blue.

"How?" said Maria quietly, almost a whisper.

"I can answer," replied a voice as calm as the ocean on a sunny day. Bewildered Maria looked up. There was no-one there at a first glance, but as she looked harder a familiar face appeared.

"Grandmother!" said Maria excitedly, "Please help me!"

Her ghostly figure fluttered ever-so closer.

"You have been chosen to complete the quest of Pandora's Box, your job is to destroy the wretched thing by sun-down." She added, "The beads will protect you, you can't fail" and with that she disappeared.

So with that Maria set off unknowing what dangers awaited her...

The Red Tree

'Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone'. Where does this line from Ella Wheeler Wilcox's poem fit in with children's literature and how does one book crack open the seemingly shameful nut of depression in just a few pages? Shaun Tan has produced a book *The Red Tree* that bridges generations, class and cultural barriers alongside cultivating a beautiful, yet tenderly transparent picture book.

At the time of writing I have a twenty-year old son suffering from depression and the book reads both like a biography and a series of stills from a real-life movie. It is packed with imagery from the small red leaf that appears on every page to the fragmented words that are scattered like the 'still small voice crying in the wilderness'. C.S. Lewis, author of the Narnia Chronicles said that pain is 'God's megaphone' to the world and I was reminded of this quote in the opening page of this amazing book. I tentatively asked my son which images he identified with and he commented on the deep-sea diver and the fish that loomed like a sinister, black shadow over the small figure that walked the streets; head down, eyes virtually closed.

The Red Tree will appeal to all visual learners especially those who are suffering in silence; unable to speak, or hear or feel. From time to time words are inadequate and art illuminates corners of our minds that are otherwise misted up in greyness just like the inside pages of the book. Being cast adrift on that flimsy paper boat even for a short period of time can be a terrifying experience and even though the red leaf is floating right in front of you it is always at least one minute away from the timeless present tense that you are living in. Most of the time it is in danger of slipping down the gutter or getting confused in a series of disjointed images that are painfully two-dimensional, lacking in colour and invariably out of reach. Yet it is there nevertheless, caressing each page with a simple murmur of expectation.

Until you reach the last page where the small red leaf has changed into an amazing tree and has grown so much that it lifts your eyes upwards, dazzling you with its colour. The best thing about the book is the way that it claws its way from the darkness to light and from sadness to hope in a series of emotionally messed up images appealing to both children and adults alike.

Not only will I use it in my classroom but every now and again, when I find myself waist deep in fallen leaves, I will open its pages in my bedroom and reflect on its quiet message of hope.

Extracts from the Cherry Orchard 'Playtimes' letters project

Dear Mr Harwood,

We are writing to you to question the importance of playtimes with our school, in particular in year 6. Children at primary school do not need a playtime and, if anything, it is detrimental to children's education and safety...

We hope that in this letter we have made it perfectly clear why we believe that playtimes should be banned in school. The fact is that having happier children, happier teachers, and more lesson time can only have a positive impact on children, and these things put together can only enhance children's learning and as a result, our SATs results. We thank you in anticipation, for taking the time to read this letter, and look forward to hearing your response to these thoughts.

Yours sincerely,

Miss Williams, Mr Fenner & Mr McCarthy (Year 6 Teachers)

"If children don't learn to socialise, how will they cope at high school and in later life?"

"Do you care about pupil's health? Well if they didn't have playtimes the the children would become obese. A healthy body equals a healthy brain, and a healthy brain produces excellent work."

"Obesity rates will increase dramatically without a playtime, I assure you."

"I hope that in this letter I have made it perfectly clear why I believe playtimes should not be banned. If you recall last year's SATs results, ours were one of the best in the city - surely you don't want to jeopardise that?"

"I strongly believe that we must have playtime at least twice a day, because every child truly deserves a fun and healthy break for an excellent education."

"Socialising is as important as literacy and numeracy, it's a life skill."

"Children need to burn off some energy and without playtime they might overload with knowledge."

"Do you want your teachers to be grumpy everyday? Because if you steal the right for children to have playtimes, the pupils will be chatty and the teachers will be cross."

Dear Miss Williams, Mr Fenner & Mr McCarthy,

It would appear that Year 6 have put together some very persuasive arguments for retaining their break times. Although our intention was to maximize opportunities for pupil learning, the measure could have had quite the opposite effect and been quite detrimental...

One of the most interesting points of view, which came over strongly, was that break times are opportunities for children to internalise their learning. Many correspondents noted that there are limits to how much you can cram children with knowledge. Without well spaced breaks young minds become overloaded and learning gains are lost...

It is reassuring to me to discover that the eloquent and thoughtful pupils of our school value the same things as we do. The case for keeping break times is well made and I think that we need to rescind the decision to cancel them.

Yours sincerely

J. Harwood (Head Teacher)



“I used to feel nervous about sharing my written work with others – yet writing alongside the children I have had to gain in confidence to share. I now feel confident to discuss stages in the writing process with the children – especially the tricky bits.”



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Chapter 3

Impacts and implications

Feeling the effects

Summarising the outcomes

A recent initiative to include adults as writers alongside children has been particularly effective in raising achievement. (Ofsted report, Nunnery Wood Primary School, Worcester, November 2008)

The most encouraging outcome of Writing is Primary was that it produced measurable increases in how enthusiastically schools, teaching staff and pupils engaged with the whole creative business of writing. Although, in trying to meet similar aims, each research cluster followed its own path and activities varied from school to school and teacher to teacher, the value of teachers (including head teachers) developing their skills as writers, as action researchers and as leaders in writing was amply demonstrated.

Both projects investigated to some degree a range of strategies to encourage better writing by pupils, from guided writing to modelling writing, from providing a stimulating or relaxing alternative to the ordinary classroom to inventing mnemonic slogans. Much of this research was carried out in the classroom, in trying new things out with different age and ability groups. The inquiry also threw up unexpected practical solutions to problems around writing - the institution of writing (or working) walls to foreground the importance of drafting and redrafting writing, for example, or designating a new writing space in the school grounds to inspire pupils.

This section draws together a broad summary of outcomes in terms of pupil learning and achievement, teaching and learning strategies, leadership in writing and professional development.

The impact on pupil learning and achievement

Improved understanding

Many schools had identified a lacklustre response towards writing but found by the end of the year that pupils' enjoyment and motivation had grown, whatever routes had been taken to improving teaching and learning strategies. Simply making writing a school priority released energy and resources and focused everyone - pupils as well as teachers - on making a real difference over the year of action research. According to end-of-year audits and schools' final reports, pupils had developed a clear understanding that 'improvement in writing' meant rather more than better handwriting, as many had believed at the beginning of the year. Writing now seemed more purposeful and enjoyable.

Greater engagement

Schools observed considerable improvements in pupil engagement in writing. A few tried to quantify this from responses given in pupil audits and interviews before and after the programme. One school that had focused on developing teachers' own writing skills identified increased numbers of children who now perceived themselves as 'being good at writing' (up by more than ten per cent); of children who claimed to 'write for pleasure outside school' (up by 24 per cent, a statistic 'backed up by comments from parents'); and of children who 'say that they enjoy writing' (up by 22 per cent), especially when they are given an element of choice in either what they write about, or which genre they can write in.

Pupils had more opportunity to think and talk, more access to 'real world' experiences and more time to write, all of which increased their engagement.

Enhanced skills

A head teacher from Bury was not alone in noting the improvement in pupils' writing skills as a result of the year's work:

Pupils are generally better equipped to write with a greater array of tools, both technical and imaginative; they have developed the approaches they need to be good writers. They are able to refine the use of writing skills to match task, purpose and audience with some adult guidance. This has resulted in improved progress rates. (School's final evaluation report, April 2009)

Higher standards

Although Writing is Primary was not aimed at improving test results and although none of the schools judged the success of their activities on that basis, it seemed to many, by the end of the programme, that its encouragement

of a more creative approach to teaching writing had contributed to raised standards of attainment and achievement. As a result of its focus on improving teaching strategies through nurturing teachers' own writing skills, the research team at CCCU concluded that:

The improved experiences the children have, the increase in constructive criticism of their work, higher levels of motivation towards writing, the evidence that the more involved they are in the content and the readership of their writing, the more they want to attend to technical aspects of writing - all contribute to the increased likelihood of improved test results.

Clearer purpose

Teaching and learning strategies were also used to show pupils that writing could have an impact on an audience. The example of a school in Bury using film as a way into writing had very encouraging results, particularly in the way that viewing stimulated children's imagination and emotions and helped them in writing narratives; it made descriptions, settings, characterisation and story structure easier to teach. It helped them to see the development between different parts of the story, rather than using the 'trick' of a connective. Above all, perhaps, it gave pupils a reason to write, motivating them to plan, plot and sequence, work on and improve a piece of writing through several drafts. For this reason, it proved the most supportive and influential intervention in that particular school during the year of Writing is Primary.

More enjoyment

From writing letters of complaint to a head teacher threatening to curtail playtime, to the novelty value (and calming effect) of candles and Mozart in the classroom, from slogans and 'WOW' words (vivid vocabulary) to setting up a writers' blogsite, the approaches taken during Writing is Primary seem to have created not just more sustained and confident writing but greater enjoyment, too. Such strategies as opening up multi-sensory experiences or giving a greater purpose to writing than fulfilling a rote task or engaging with a real audience were successful in, as one teacher put it, 'freeing up the children to let their ideas flow, without worrying about everything being correct'.

Observing one approach in action, with a group of Year 3 and 4 pupils with the lowest attainment in literacy, one head teacher saw 'a profound change in the children':

They are now fully engaged with learning, concentrate for an extended period and clearly enjoy the experience of writing and find it to be rewarding - a distinct contrast to the beginning of the academic year.

New teaching and learning strategies

A striking feature of Writing is Primary was the variety of approaches taken, sometimes in the same school, to developing more effective teaching and learning strategies. All of these entailed risk, particularly where pupils were already achieving high standards in tests and assessment (if it wasn't broken, why fix it?) and where teachers felt that they already had a repertoire of teaching methods that worked well. Encouraged to experiment, however, most teachers learned over the year to enjoy the sense of risk and – risk being a vital element in developing creativity generally – to develop a more questioning and creative approach to received ideas about the teaching of writing and, in the best cases, to challenge their own pedagogy. In this, they were supported by the action research programme, with its emphasis on whole-school approaches, subject leadership and CPD and the opportunity to reflect on what impact this risk-taking had had on their attitudes to teaching writing, as well as on their pupils' learning and enjoyment of writing.

The benefits of a structured, whole-school approach

However creative, teachers need support and frameworks in and out of the classroom where new teaching and learning strategies can be developed. Less confident teachers need more support, particularly in terms of developing an effective pedagogy of their own. A whole-school approach allows the less confident and the more experienced to pursue these goals, perhaps – as constantly occurred over the year – through trialling a particular strategy together. Delivering and reflecting on that practical, collaborative task forged a common language in which teachers could share experiences, exchange opinions, create more consistent approaches to assessment of quality, progress and achievement in pupils' writing – and to go back to their classes with a sense of equal participation in a school-wide effort to improve writing.

This was as true of teachers trying to apply what they had learned from writing workshop sessions as of those working to adapt training packages (like Ros Wilson's *Big Writing*) to their pupils' needs as writers.

A personalised approach

Whatever the chosen teaching strategy, it is vital that teachers are supported to personalise it – to make it their own. Any guidance – whether from a workshop tutor or a package on using music to trigger writing – can be turned into a mechanical process and a formula, if it is followed slavishly. There has been such a pressure on teachers to produce good results quickly – and so little time for reflection and professional conversation – that they are too often tempted to take the shortcut and follow the prescribed lesson plans. Writing is Primary took some of that pressure off at least some teachers (including heads) and the result was a more critical approach to all such external input.

Whatever the particular local successes of implementing different strategies, the most significant factor was not the strategy itself but the way in which the individual teacher used his or her judgement to decide where and how to use that strategy. Such material is only as good as the teacher makes (and adapts) it – a point reiterated throughout the self-evaluations of teachers involved in Writing is Primary.

In the case of a school using film to stimulate writing, for example, 'discerning selection' of which material to use was 'critical' and how it was used and the purpose for using it needed 'careful thought', according to the head teacher. These approaches are, arguably, training wheels, to be removed when teachers can cycle unaided. That some could already pedal independently is indicated by a striking example of a teacher who helped children from Years 5 and 6 to 'use *Picture the Music* but *without* the picture and *without* the music'. By personalising a teaching strategy and adapting to pupils' needs, pupils benefited in terms of enjoyment and achievement (children are often good at telling when a teacher is simply going through the motions, particularly somebody else's).

Whatever works

With teachers and whole schools at different stages of confidence and skill in writing, Writing is Primary had to be a 'big church', welcoming all. Eclecticism was a given: part of the whole point of this 'action research' was to try all kinds of things, and to see if one or maybe two actually worked (or at the very least showed hopeful signs of working).

The Bury research cluster was perhaps the most adventurous in trying almost anything going. Its conclusions about what can be done with a 'package' like *Big Writing* or *Write Dance* bear out the earlier point about 'making it your own' but they also reflect just how supportive this material can be at an early stage in trying to improve the teaching of writing. This head listened above all to his own staff before making a judgement:

The staff who have used this approach the longest (those who went on the training courses first) are still firmly of the opinion that we are developing improved skills and tools for children. [Those features] which I have heard described as 'devices' or 'writing by numbers', are not considered by our staff as restrictive but empowering; the structure allows and encourages a more exciting writing which, staff believe, has engaged a number of our writers. (School's final evaluation report, April 2009)

Conventional ideas, such as pinning up good and neatly written work by pupils, were also overhauled in the search for effective strategies. Working (or writing) walls showcased unfinished work by pupils, work in progress.

Not all the approaches that schools tried had originated elsewhere. For example, one significant aspect of the ‘conditions of writing’ that was addressed in different ways across the programme was the environment in which pupils are expected to write. In most cases, this was a matter of softening the ‘disciplinary’ space of the classroom in some way. One Bury school went an extra mile on this by totally reorganising the Early Years and Reception area to allow for more attractive writing and reading spaces. The Worcester cluster came up with the idea of writing spaces in school grounds, chosen or created for their sense of intimacy in the midst of a space where pupils would normally play. As well as experimentation and reflection, Writing is Primary encouraged innovation – in this case, a genuinely out-of-the-box idea.

Teachers writing

The most exciting outcome of Writing is Primary for many teachers was that developing a deeper understanding of the writing process through their own practice as writers led ultimately to a change in the way they taught writing. They recognised – or came to recognise – the importance of this kind of subject knowledge to their classroom practice.

In learning more about the process of writing, teachers began to move away from a utilitarian view of the writing process shaped by formal curriculum objectives, assessment criteria and time considerations to a recognition of the complexity of writing and how much work it involves to compose in written form. How do ideas emerge? How do they take shape? In what kind of style or form should they be expressed? How can the reader’s attention be caught and held? How important is the redrafting process? How much can writing benefit from a ‘critical dialogue’ with others – and at what stage in the process? The simplest way to find answers to these questions seemed to lie in actually engaging in the *experience* of writing.

One of the common discoveries shared by those who enjoyed the writing workshop experience and those who did not was the fear factor involved in writing ‘publicly’, given that writing for most people (other than schoolchildren, ironically) is a private activity. Teachers learned that the writing process includes both solitary moments – needed, for example, to focus on producing a first draft – and moments when the writer can benefit from going public, perhaps before that first draft, to generate and discuss ideas, or at the editing stage when another eye can be useful. This notion of the potentially productive relationship between the writer and their reader/critical friend was developed most fully by the research team at CCCU with its EASE approach (*engagement – appreciation – suggestion – extension*) although similar results emerged from the writing workshops run in Worcester.

These insights, born out of experiencing, at first hand, the challenge of writing, led to greater understanding on the part of teachers about the various ways in which they might intervene to help pupils with their writing, from ‘writing alongside’ to ‘modelling writing’. Ultimately, by becoming a writer amongst other writers, a sense of a learning community emerged – a community of writers, sharing the same challenge.

The payoff for teachers confident enough to risk writing in public amongst their peers and even in their classes was not just professional but personal, too. Once they were fully engaged in their own writing, teachers discovered the resilience and confidence to bring their personal experiences to bear on what they write and to share that writing with colleagues and with children, as this teacher from the Kent/Medway cluster remarked:

Through the project meetings and discussing with other teachers and trying things out I have become more confident in other styles of writing. Having shared this writing with other adults and children in school I have found things people like about it but have also learnt to take positive feedback and also consider suggestions to improve, whereas before I would have been too nervous to share what I had written.
(From CCCU’s final evaluation report, 2009)

School and subject leadership

Writing is Primary saw the quality of leadership as the key to improving teaching, the quality of which would in turn enhance pupil learning. While a writers-in-schools intervention might enhance pupil learning and a tailored professional development course might benefit individual teachers, Writing is Primary sought to affect and influence school and subject leadership.

Leadership is vital in improving the teaching of writing, whether giving a lead to pupils in the classroom or in effecting whole-school strategies for improvement. For any progress to be made, a school needs both clear leadership, usually in the shape of the head teacher or senior management team and the lead literacy teacher, and the backing of all the teaching staff. A whole-school approach provides a structure that benefits not only confident and skilful teachers, who may over time see ways to refine the approach, but also those who are not as confident in teaching writing and who will benefit from a proven structure, with its inherent common language and opportunities for shared discussion.

What Writing is Primary made possible, through the funding of professional development and through the provision of external facilitation, was a space

and time for subject leadership to breathe and expand. Although some chose to focus on making new resources available to staff, subject leaders and their head teachers emphasised even in this case the importance of a critical and reflective approach to the teaching of writing.

Leadership in Writing is Primary emerged in a number of ways, from peer-to-peer collaboration among lead teachers to 'distributed leadership', where head teachers worked and learned alongside their staff and where schools worked and learned together.

Although head teachers were closely involved, the Kent/Medway cluster focused on subject leadership amongst lead teachers. The project aim was to inspire and support classroom teachers as writing activists or champions, who could then begin, using their specific knowledge of their own school's 'chemistry', to work towards whole-school change.

To develop collaborative leadership, the Kent/Medway project involved two teachers from each school – a literacy coordinator from one Key Stage and a teacher from the other. Explicit support for their role as change agents and leaders was offered – for example, when all the project teachers collaborated to run a staff meeting with other schools. When the head teacher, the literacy coordinator and another colleague all took part in one school's project focus group sessions, the research team reported a 'marked impact' on whole-school pedagogy and practice.

Distributed leadership

Writing is Primary can be seen as an example of a structural solution to some of the issues around initiating and sustaining whole-school change, particularly in the case of Project 2. Here, leadership of the project was 'distributed' between the head teacher and (in most cases) a lead literacy teacher.

It was acknowledged by all three research clusters that strategies to improve classroom practice – and to sustain improvement – ultimately depend on the full engagement of head teachers in the process. Even though the Kent/Medway project was primarily focused on engaging with lead teachers, the research team made sure that senior management was involved right from the start, in the hope that teachers would then find the support that they needed within the school to promote new teaching strategies. CCCU's final report noted that schools whose head teachers were most closely involved were able to demonstrate the most effective pedagogical shifts and greater impact on more teachers and children as writers. 'This level of institutional leadership,' it concluded, 'appears crucial to development.'

The role of head teachers in the Worcester and Bury clusters was greater. In the 'whole-school' approach, head teachers were, along with whomever they nominated as the lead teacher on the project, the primary agents of change and the lead learners. They put their authority at risk in embarking on a process of relatively open-ended research with their staff; this research resulted in genuine whole-school change in some cases and, in all cases, the sense that such change was possible.

As the lead researchers (and lead learners), heads were the ones who had to analyse the evidence and gather the data. This is not general practice these days and it disturbs the expected order of things. Head teachers were certainly challenged over the year, but this was what they signed up for. In the end, it produced some impressive results in all the schools involved. Rather than being threatened by the head taking an interest in their subject area, indeed leading on it, most lead teachers welcomed the opportunity to collaborate, not least because it put their subject centre-stage. One Bury teacher admitted at a final evaluation meeting that she had felt relieved when the head had taken on a research role in her subject area: it meant that she could share the responsibility for developing literacy policy in the school.

As Project 2 focused on using and adapting a wide variety of approaches to improving pupil writing, the heads had to encourage teachers to have a go at using one or more of these methods. Several used the opportunity as a form of professional development to nurture high fliers and reluctant teachers of writing alike. Those head teachers who took the plunge in developing their own writing were well equipped to identify good practice in the classroom. They then observed how a particular approach went down in class and encouraged reflection and feedback from teachers. This talk about writing developed exponentially in many cases, sometimes transforming the usual staff room chat about behavioural issues into impromptu seminars on pedagogy around writing, as teachers discussed and compared their experiences. In this way, the underlying issue of leadership emerged as fundamental to creating a model for collaborative leadership and professional development.

A leadership network, a research community

The head teachers in Bury had, by the beginning of the second term, come up with a specific leadership agenda for their schools that they intended to meet and evaluate collectively. As time went on, the group came to enjoy the rigour of the action research process and the chance to reflect on how things were going and to 'self evaluate'. They devised their own tables to capture baseline information and report on progress across the cluster.

Regular meetings between the head teachers reinforced the sense that this research was a collective effort. This meant that heads were not only put on their mettle, with benign peer pressure keeping the momentum going across the group, but that new ideas for collaboration kept emerging – the CPD dating programme was one (see details below) – as well as impetus and encouragement for individual school initiatives, such as the development of a strategy for writing in the early years.

Observing the way in which they functioned as a group over the year, with and without lead teachers present, it was strange to recall that, before this, the head teachers in Bury had not worked together much, if at all, and certainly never on such a focused project. In fact, not knowing each other well to start with seemed to have made the crucial difference, as most enjoyed the unpredictability of their discussions together, hearing new ideas and having assumptions gently questioned. They had become each other's critical friends.

The Bury group was hugely confident, in the way that heads in particular managed to be so open and vulnerable amongst their peers and their staff, taking risks and sharing practice (and even teachers) with other schools. With minimal direction from a facilitator who chose to take a supportive and well-informed back seat, the group managed to create a professional development team that is likely to continue the process that the action research programme set in motion.

Continuing professional development

Professional development was a central element in both projects, for the same reasons: to facilitate teacher change, build capacity and strengthen subject leadership in writing. In this light, of course, Writing is Primary itself could be seen as a major contribution to professional development, offering head teachers and their staff the chance to reflect on practice and offering a range of expertise to draw on. It was also an example of a professional development programme that was truly 'continuing'. It had its own built-in 'cascade', too, as a whole-school approach was taken across the programme and all staff were kept abreast of pedagogic developments.

The schools also organised their own peer-led, tailored programmes and participated in joint CPD sessions with other schools. One high point of this development was the 'speed dating' event in Bury, where six schools pitched to each other the areas of writing they were focusing on in their own classrooms. Staff then signed up to attend the workshops that were of interest to them; teachers were able to choose events that were relevant to them and that they knew would have an impact on their teaching. This and other CPD

events provided a space for teachers to reflect on the use of shared writing (modelling, scribing and supported composition) and of guided writing, as well as on their own practice as modellers of writing in the classroom.

Professional development opportunities were increasingly shared across the teaching staff as the project went on, encouraging greater collaborative learning and greater 'ownership' of the new approaches to the teaching of writing. That, too, alleviated the pressure on the teacher designated as subject leader and helped her or him to carry out their motivational 'duties' more effectively.

The writing workshop

Part of the Writing is Primary offer was to support head teachers and lead teachers in developing their writing skills, with the option of then bringing in other staff, including teaching assistants, so that the school might, in theory, become a writing community. Although one school came close to this, running a regular staff writing workshop and producing at least one anthology of adult and pupil writing each term, for most the opportunity was limited to particular individuals.

The offer was more of a condition in Project 1 in Kent/Medway, of course. The CCCU research team supported the idea of staff developing 'a more confident, reflective and open approach to both the act of writing and the teaching of writing', so it was critical that they should have an understanding of the writing process first hand.

The approach taken in Worcester was predicated on the notion that, by developing their own personal skills, confidence and fluency in writing, teachers would be better able to improve their leadership in writing. By putting themselves in the position of writers – the place that they regularly expected their pupils to occupy – they would be able to model the process of writing to much greater effect. Judging from the responses of participants from two of the four schools in Worcester, their specific aims were met, i.e. to give teachers an enjoyable experience of being a writer; to develop their self-confidence as writers 'able to inspire others and to reflect on the writing process'; and to develop their understanding of the strategies which support writing.

The most ardent advocate of English teachers practising as writers themselves would have to admit that writing can be a very scary and exposing business. Even in Kent/Medway, where the premise was that this approach was the main route to better teaching of writing, CCCU produced an anthology early on in the year that in its title – *Feel the Fear...but write it anyway* – acknowledged what many teachers feel when they are asked to do what they would normally only require their pupils to do.

Almost all those who attended writing sessions during Writing is Primary began in trepidation, fearing exposure. In some cases, there was a little scepticism about the relevance of such activities to the realities of the chalk face, but most went on to gain greater confidence (some were almost immediately released into a burst of creative activity), ultimately enjoying the process in a way that seemed to go beyond mere professional pride to encompass the whole person.

Other experiences were not so happy. The project champion at one Worcester school – the lead literacy teacher – was happy to promote and demonstrate all kinds of creative approaches to teaching writing amongst the staff but she never managed to overcome her own perception of herself as ‘not a writer’. She simply did not enjoy participating in the writing workshops, especially not when it was her turn to show or read out what she had written. The ambivalence of some teachers towards professional development based on doing their own writing is well expressed in this observation from her final evaluation:

Staff feed back was varied. Teachers who already enjoy writing loved the opportunity to have time to sit down and write. Teachers who would not naturally write for themselves felt nervous and threatened. They did however, state that it was a good reminder for them to experience the sheer horror of a blank page as well as having to stand up and share their writing with others who might criticise their work. It made them more understanding of how children might feel if put in the same situation.

Impact on classroom practice

Both the writing workshops and the other forms of CPD provided through Writing is Primary had an impact on classroom practice, sometimes visibly. The innovation of writing walls, showcasing pupils’ work in progress, can be traced back to sessions about the importance of drafting and experimentation and the notion of writing as communication with a potential reader.

Two schools in Worcester adopted the writing workshop as the keystone to researching and developing new pedagogy; their enthusiasm for ‘teachers-as-writers’ grew over the year and looked set to continue and deepen in future. For one, it led to new ideas in the classroom, from hanging pupils’ work in picture frames around the school to the creation of a school slogan:

Good writers choose words so that the reader has a clear picture in their head.

The same school reports that teachers modelling writing with their classes had been well established throughout the school and from the following

September teaching assistants would also write alongside children in their lessons ‘modelling and reinforcing the process for children across the age and ability range, without interrupting the flow of children’s thinking or writing’. The impact is, however, wider than this, as the report concludes:

Opportunities for cross-curricular links have been extended and are becoming more effectively used across the school. This has been developed alongside the use of APP (Assessing Pupil Progress) materials to guide progression and accurate formative assessment of children’s writing skills. We have focused upon developing children’s understanding of the importance of clarity in writing, across the breadth of the curriculum. Writing opportunities are a major feature of reception classes’ role-play areas. Older children have been given greater choice when writing, either in terms of the subject about which they write or the genre they use to write in about a given topic.

Having successfully modelled a CPD programme based on immersing teachers in the process of writing, the research team at CCCU should perhaps have the last word here – describing the impact on their ‘students’ returning to teach their own classes:

The first is the impact of teachers as writers in the classroom on the children and on the teachers themselves. Writing alongside the children and modelling writing and reflection on writing for children has helped teachers to develop a sense of community in their classrooms, has created an atmosphere of sharing ideas and pleasure in writing and has ‘spurred them on’, inspiring and motivating children to write and teachers to continue to write with and for them. The teachers report a new understanding of the tasks they set for children – with some teachers reporting that they were astonished to feel for themselves how hard these tasks sometimes were! Gaining a ‘child’s eye view’ of writing in school has helped teachers to realise and re-view through a new lens the level of difficulty and therefore support that children require. Some teachers reported delight at opportunities to model writing, to share ideas and to read out their own writing – to really experience the process of writing for themselves along with the children. (CCCU final evaluation report, 2009)

DISPATCHES

Making a start

The following account by a literacy lead teacher in Bury (now an assistant head teacher) gives a vivid idea of where schools were starting from and what kinds of concerns informed their research for Writing is Primary.

We entered the Writing is Primary project with 'outstanding' status in an Ofsted inspection. However, there was much room for improvement in terms of developing writing in school. I had done a detailed book scrutiny of literacy books and had been dismayed by the lack of variety of genres of writing in some year groups.

Certain members of staff were staying in their comfort zone, either by providing a lot of grammar and punctuation exercises, or by sticking to genres of writing they felt comfortable with, such as poetry. As the project got underway and Sally [Manser]

facilitated some teacher interviews about writing, it became evident that some members of staff lacked confidence, not just as teachers of writing but as writers themselves.

A series of lesson observations to see how writing was being taught in the school showed that, although the teaching of writing seemed to be satisfactory, both teachers and pupils did not have a 'buzz' about them. It almost felt like they were going through the motions of writing, rather than enjoying and taking pride in it.

Finally, statistics showed that writing was an area that needed to be developed in the school. Although end of key stage results showed that our pupils were meeting expectations, it was patently obvious that the pupils' skills in writing were lagging well behind their skills in reading. What was more worrying was the lack of progress being made in writing in lower juniors.

Pupil responses to stimuli

Big Writing

I like having the lights off and the nice music.

Collecting words and phrases helps me with my ideas.

I can now use connectives to start sentences and use level 5 punctuation.

Picture the Music

The music tells you what kind of mood it is.

Philosophy for Children

You don't have to agree with your friends - you can think for yourself.

I like listening to each other because we all have different ideas.

Write Dance

It makes me dance in the classroom. It makes my writing get better.

Talk for writing

In the case of *Philosophy for Children (P4C)*, the hope was that pupils would feel that their opinions were valued and that teachers were listening more acutely. At best, pupils might show increasing insight into issues of all kinds and become more confident about posing searching questions.

The conclusions drawn from the experiences of Chapelfield Primary School, which used this approach over the whole year, were very positive. Having chosen to pursue this because it was a good fit with a school ethos based on 'children developing opinions and being able to express them confidently', the head and his team found that the benefits for pupil writing were noticeable. Their expressive vocabulary had increased 'significantly', especially in terms of articulating ideas and opinions. More ambitious language was matched by a greater variety of sentence structures in their writing, examples of which had become more sustained and longer than before. The head commented:

Philosophy for Children has given the children a greater variety of options in their writing which, when it is continued throughout the school for these children, will undoubtedly result in their increased ability to tackle, for example, inferential questions and persuasive writing tasks; and the clarity of thought to plan their writing and connect their learning will impact positively in all areas of the curriculum.

Although a weekly, timed writing task regime may have produced 'higher' levels of writing achievement in the 2008 SATs, such a regime would, in the head's view, have sacrificed many of the wider learning skills that have been, and are being, acquired in *P4C* - skills which the school's ethos and aims are designed to address and skills which are immediately evident in the observation of Year 2 at work.

A web presence

The blog-site at Christ Church Primary School in Bury has been a great success, according to the lead literacy teacher. With over 23,000 visitors in less than a year, the site has helped to develop home/school partnerships

Children love to write on it and many relatives have visited and enjoyed reading their work. The children get very excited when people leave comments on their writing.

Finding a readership

Cherry Orchard Primary School produced several collections of writing by pupils and, on one occasion, by adults including teachers and parents - the latter overseen by an editorial team comprising three Year 6 children and the head teacher. As well as publications based on themes of hope and childhood, other mini-publications appeared at regular intervals throughout the school covering a wide variety of topics, from environmental concerns (with staff interviews, polls and carefully researched data) to 'A Guide to Greek Gods' and 'How to Make Your Own Model Home'. Produced in class but distributed throughout school or displayed in shared areas, they all helped raise the profile of writing.

A kinetic approach

Chapelfield Primary School in Bury used *Write Dance* with its Early Years pupils, to help them in making marks and in writing with more confidence and enthusiasm. As this was a dance-based approach, it was hoped that children of lower academic ability and boys in general would benefit in terms of developing coordination skills. Having recently established an outdoor play area, the head also wanted to encourage teachers to use this facility to help them 'tackle writing in a focused and sustained way'. His final report states:

The results were impressive, with a unanimously favourable response from pupils and a 'significant improvement' in the

quality of their letter formation, especially marked in children with SEN, coordination difficulties, and boys. Teachers felt that every child benefited. The dance element proved infectious, drawing in 'all but the most reticent' children, and it prepared them for transferring the movements on to a variety of surfaces, from paper to white board, using large, free movements and employing shaving foam and mashed potato as well as more conventional materials, such as paint, chalk, felt tips, crayons and pencils. Pupils took an evident pride in their work and boys particularly seemed more relaxed and could often be seen carrying round their clip boards, making 'marks' as they went.

Developing leadership

Good examples of developing leadership emerged as the year progressed. One was the lead teacher in Bury who created a comprehensive CPD programme for his school. He handpicked staff to attend training events that met their particular needs. These included the cluster workshop led by Bury's Writing is Primary facilitator, Sally Manser, to develop a writer's 'toolkit' but also sessions run by writing-in-education 'guru' Pie Corbett and writer Gervais Phinn.

The lead teacher worked closely throughout the year with another colleague on modelling, team planning, team teaching and offering any additional support that was required to build her confidence; she has reported since that this has had a considerable impact on her teaching of writing.

Overall, a generally positive attitude to writing emerged, with teachers having noticeably more to say on the issue of writing in school meetings and visible changes in the classroom environment and in lesson planning: 'Rather than acting as "sponges",' the lead teacher concluded, 'they are adapting ideas to use in their own classrooms.'

Writing alongside pupils

Several schools reported an increase in the number of staff who now regularly write alongside their pupils; in one school the number rose from two in November to ten by the following June. When teachers write in class, whether alongside learners or not, children begin to understand what goes into the writing process and the kind of strategies writers use to make meaning. The teacher appears to be an aspiring writer at that moment, rather than someone with all the answers at their fingertips.

As I write and rewrite, I change and debate things with myself and that's confusing and messy - more messy than I realised.

Having acquired a greater understanding of themselves as writers, of the complexity of the writing process and of the skills involved in teaching children to be reflective, teachers could see this already having an effect on their reading of pupils' writing:

I look at children's work, looking at far more than I used to and considering far more factors. The children are now aware that they can be critical readers, even if they are only at the early stages.

When teachers write in class, whether alongside learners or not, children begin to understand what goes into the writing process and the kind of strategies writers use to make meaning.

The freedom to write

The focus for school activities in Bury was on trying out various 'off-the-peg' CPD packages. Much of this process of experimentation and testing out materials went on behind classroom doors but a glimpse of the kind of issues concerning teachers is given by these notes, made at different times by a Year 3 teacher working with a 'lower attainment group':

Freedom to write how they like (no restrictions), so ideas go down and presentation doesn't get a look in. Released from confines of correct spelling, their written work and ideas seem to flow much more readily and some of them are showing that they have more imagination that we previously thought...

Need to put some boundaries in while not taking out the enjoyment/freedom, i.e. limit it to 2 pages (done quite neatly) rather than 6 pages of enjoyed "scrawl". Also, perhaps once enjoyment/freedom established in Autumn Term, introduce a few restrictions e.g. not to mix capitals and lower case up/most writing to be properly joined etc.

This illustrates how excitement at the writing being produced through these new approaches was sometimes tempered with nervousness at how this might compromise pupils' formal performance.

Pedagogic shifts

Each school in Bury made different choices about what year groups and classes they would trial particular approaches with, choices based again on perceived potential for improvement. St Michael's Primary School, for example, decided to introduce two writing interventions: *Big Writing* to Years 3 and 4 and *Picture the Music* to Years 2 and 5. As well as assessing overall impact, the school set up a study group consisting of six children from Years 2 to 5 to measure progress against previous writing samples. This was done through an established school system of individual 'continuation books' (where children's levelled writing samples were kept and passed through the school - these books were then used as the comparators).

In Worcester, Warndon Primary School researched new approaches to the teaching of writing, including visual literacy, particularly through the use of film, and adopting the working wall as a strategy to encourage greater attention to the process of writing, while Red Hill also experimented with writing walls and more conventional approaches to modelling writing, as well as applying Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) principles to monitoring progress. The other two schools in Worcester - Cherry Orchard and Nunnery Wood - perhaps experienced a greater 'pedagogic shift' as a result of workshop-based CPD that affected deeply how they went on to teach writing in the classroom. This was mirrored in the experience of teachers in Kent/Medway.

A writing workshop

The CCCU research team provided both a 'research community' and a 'writing community' based not in the individual schools, but on campus, where lead literacy teachers and other staff were invited to participate in writing and reflection workshops far from the sound of children's voices and the school bell. The purpose of these sessions was practical and theoretical. They discussed, for example, strategies for generating children's engagement, involvement and critical evaluation of their own writing, based on the process that the teachers had just gone through. This encompassed both the generation and evaluation of their own and each other's writing.

A typical session ended with reviewing and applying a new approach devised by the team to help teachers to structure critical and constructive responses to their own and their peers' writing. Called EASE (a handy mnemonic for 'engagement - appreciation - suggestion - extension') this framework was created to 'focus on the impact of the unfolding writing on the reader and to help readers and writers discuss, appraise and critique their authorial choices in order to assess the value of their ideas as well as their ability to convey them', the hope being that children could also use this framework in the same way.

A learning environment

At least one school organised a learning walk around its premises for teaching staff, in order to discover and develop a shared understanding of what such a learning environment might be.

Schools in Worcester made two attempts to create a better learning environment, in and out of the classroom. The first was the introduction of the working wall, an alternative to the usual notice-boards covered in neatly copied out writing by pupils. Rather than showcasing the final products of pupil writing, these walls provided a space where the process could be pinned up.

Writers' working walls were introduced and are being well used in all classes to reflect, stimulate and reinforce children's writing and the writing process - children refer to them as they write and contribute to them in an ongoing way.

Another lead literacy teacher from the cluster visited to observe the use of working

walls, a link made possible by Writing is Primary. The teacher then set up a staff meeting and encouraged teachers to trial the idea, using as much stimulus as possible to support children's writing through pictures and words that the children could add to. Each classroom now has a 'working wall' that is constantly changing.

The other innovation was the creation of an outdoor space in the school grounds that children would be inspired to write in.

We identified a woodland area to work in; made clay bricks to create walls to surround our writing spaces; painted stones with words for outdoor writing displays; made access paths to the spaces and set about some initial experiments with writing to display in the area.

The idea behind this was not just to use part of the school grounds as a stimulus for writing but also to exploit the artistic abilities of both staff and pupils in the process.

Finding a purpose for writing

To extend opportunities for writing that responded to real issues and situations, the head teacher at Cherry Orchard created a series of apparently authentic 'interventions' at school. One of these was provoked by the staff's challenge to practise what he preached:

The Year 6 staff set up a 'fake' letter to myself informing me that they proposed to ban playtimes coming up to SATs as they were taking up too much work time. They published this in their classrooms and included my reply in which I 'agreed' but suggested we might just check if the children had any reason to object. The children's replies were very well written - stimulated by the conviction that they were really going to risk losing their playtimes. My final letter was one in which I acknowledged the points that they made and stated that their letters had persuaded me out of my course of action.

Another intervention came when a silver cup was apparently stolen from the school. A 'crime scene investigation' was launched and pupils were asked to compile a report. The range of possible backgrounds to the 'crime' and the characterisation arising were impressive. The messages learnt, again principally about how to stimulate good writing, were invaluable. Although a hoax, it gave pupils something real to write about.

What have we achieved

Nunnery Wood evaluation of CPD

We've developed a stronger team approach to the teaching of writing.

The team feel more confident in each other and can see how to use the expertise of colleagues and how to raise the status of teaching assistants. There is a clearer focus.

Head teacher and Lead Writing Teacher able to evaluate how embedded ideas about writing are with the team.

A continuity in the teaching and expectations of writing from Reception to Year 6 filtering through school.

By working as adult writers together we explored writing and the process of writing without being hampered by age range - whether it be Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2.

Teaching staff have experimented [particularly KS2] with using clips for a particular purpose and breaking down the writing process by using drama, thought bubbles, story boarding.

All have developed more understanding of using film clips for non-narrative writing and how this could be used across the curriculum

All have had opportunity to revisit techniques e.g. the use of shared writing and the importance of thinking at word, sentence and text level when developing writing. There is now a shared understanding of feedback and what constructive feedback looks like: positives have to be specific, suggestions for improvement are vital, you have to trust the knowledge of the person giving feedback, there can be different types of feedback e.g. from a non-expert, constructive feedback has its motivation in improving the writing for the reader, not criticising the writer.

All had opportunity to explore and reaffirm how to make links across the curriculum.

Some conclusions and a recommendation

Key conclusions

The importance of making a long-term commitment

All participating schools ended the year looking forward to building on what they had learned. Heads know that developing teachers' confidence is about changing attitudes and not just practice and that this cannot be achieved in just one year.

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Although we are seeing evidence of some deep-rooted shifts in thinking about writing, on the part of both children and adults working in school, our journey to establish approaches to writing that enthuse and develop the skills of both staff and children has only just begun. For us, Writing is Primary is not a one-off, short-term project, but the beginning of a series of shifts that will enable our school to effectively support children's development as writers for life. Some of these shifts seem relatively minor and quite easy to achieve, whilst others are more challenging, but what is clear is that the process of deep-rooted change must necessarily take place over an extended period and certainly for us this will be well beyond the life of the project.

These comments from two head teachers, made at the end of the year, suggest that the impact of Writing is Primary is only just starting. A programme like this needs to be a continuing process if it is to result in lasting change.

The importance of building teachers' confidence

Teachers need to be encouraged and supported to try out a range of approaches to the teaching of writing and must be given time to reflect on what is being learned through these new approaches. Skills and confidence should grow together so that the process of teaching writing becomes so enjoyable that the teacher is willing to take risks, experiment and even pick up the metaphorical piece of chalk to do their own writing alongside their pupils.

The importance of creating and sharing a teaching repertoire across the whole school

This kind of journey is personal *and* one that is undertaken with others in a particular institutional context. It is vital for a teacher to develop their own pedagogic repertoire, one that they feel confident with and that they can easily adapt to the changing circumstances of the classroom. However, it is equally important for them and their peers, and indeed the whole staff

team, to agree a common pedagogic language for the whole school to use in defining and developing writing practice and policy, not least for the sake of consistency, especially as far as the pupils are concerned. So, for example, if a new approach to writing has proved particularly helpful for an individual teacher, it is worth sharing this – not least for the individual, who might then receive feedback from their peers on how this particular approach might be adapted and further personalised.

The importance of developing teachers' own practice as writers

By the end of the year, most of the head teachers and their writing lead teachers recognised that meeting this challenge somewhere down the line could have real benefits. This was exemplified in the Bury head teachers' hope that teachers would be able to 'strengthen their lifelong learning' and become 'more reflective and effective' by taking the risk of writing themselves.

The most striking outcome for participants given the chance to work on their own writing was how much this affected their practice as teachers. Those who enjoy writing for themselves, who have confidence in their writing skills and who are able to share all this with their pupils seem, by most accounts, more likely to teach writing effectively than those who lack this experience. The fact that not everyone chose to explore this approach – due more to fear of personal exposure than any more deep-seated doubt about its efficacy – shows that a sensitive and nuanced approach to encouraging this form of professional development will be necessary in any future developments.

Steps to sustaining improvement in writing

Writing is Primary demonstrated some essentials for sustaining improvement in writing at a structural and organisational level.

- Sustained improvement in the teaching of writing in primary school depends on the wholehearted and public commitment of the head teacher to a whole-school approach.
- Commitment means dedicated time, resources and, sometimes, money.
- Commitment also means enshrining the importance of writing in formal school policy and planning as a priority, ensuring that the work is carried forward and refined year on year.
- Sustained improvement is more likely when there is at least one member of the teaching staff with the role of 'writing champion', who is able to work with the head teacher to maintain momentum and enthusiasm amongst staff.
- Continuing professional development for all staff is essential, ideally provided by both external agencies and peers.

- Teachers need to be supported in developing a principled response to national requirements based both on their own action research in classrooms and applied consideration of their involvement as writers and the consequences for their pedagogic practice.
- There is no one model for improvement. Programmes for change should be tailored to suit the school's attributes, its strengths and weaknesses, and its unique culture.
- The sustainability of a school's improvement programme for writing is enhanced by collaborative working and peer networking with neighbour or partner schools, sharing commitment, ideas and practices as well as teaching staff.
- 'Whole-school' awareness of the importance and pleasure of writing is essential, ideally extending to the community beyond its gates.
- Schools setting out to make a significant change in practice in the teaching and learning of writing should note the following observation:

Trying to change too much too fast [militates] against the development of 'slow knowing', a key characteristic of sustainable organisational reform practice. But the vast majority of change programmes have very short lives and overestimate the actual time it takes to embed new practices in schools. Most reforms are thus marked by a brief burst of activity followed by a relapse into long established ways of being and doing things. (Pat Thomson, *Whole school change: A review of the literature*, Report for Creative Partnerships, Arts Council England, June 2007, p.41)

A recommendation

There should be a peer-based approach to disseminating good practice, for example through team teaching and peer coaching, where lead teachers try out ideas that have emerged from Writing is Primary across a group of schools with strong working relationships.

The research team at CCCU is actively disseminating what it learned from its involvement in Writing is Primary. It hopes to integrate its model for professional development into Initial Teacher Education and Training and perhaps promote it through the UKLA with its range of networks and regional groups. This might be the start of something bigger.

The original research that led up to Writing is Primary in 2004/05 turned up the Bay Area Writing Project in California, an expanding network of 'exemplary classroom teachers, kindergarten through university, who, through the summer and school year, conduct professional development programs for teachers and administrators'. A collaborative programme between the University of California at Berkeley and Bay Area schools, it is the flagship site of the National Writing Project. Its goals are to improve student writing abilities by improving the teaching and learning of writing, to provide professional development opportunities for classroom teachers and to expand their professional role. This project was founded in 1974. Something similar in this country may be overdue.

The final word...

...should go to the head teacher of Woodbank Primary School, who, in describing the impact on his own school, seems also to sum up what Writing is Primary meant for all the schools involved:

The focus at our school has been to develop teachers' skills as teachers of writing and to develop teachers' confidence and skills to develop children as writers. Using those criteria as measures there is no doubt in my mind that the project has not only been hugely successful in its own right, but has also breathed new life into a long-standing issue which we feel was becoming stuck in the rut of short-term fixes linked to the latest SATs results, very often linked to input from local authority consultants, which, whilst valuable in themselves and positive in their short term impact, did not have the 'ownership' of staff and have been proved to lack sustainability for the most part.

Appendix

Schools participating in Writing is Primary

Kent/Medway research cluster

Benenden County Primary School

The Village Green
Benenden
Cranbrook
Kent TN17 4DN
T: 01580 240565
Head teacher: Jenny Reich
Liz Havard

Ditton Junior School

New Road
Ditton
Aylesford ME20 6AE
T: 01732 843446
Head teacher: Bill Holder
Anne Terranova, Sarah Goodwin

East Borough County Primary School

Vinters Road
Maidstone ME14 5DX
T: 01622 754633
Head teacher: Jennie King
Helen Nokes, Donna Frith

Elaine County Primary School

Elaine Avenue
Strood
Rochester ME2 2YN
T: 01634 718057
Head teacher: Lynne Garnham
Vicky Muers, Carla Ford Smith

Kingfisher County Primary School

Kingfisher Drive
Lordswood
Chatham ME5 7NX
T: 01634 865758
Head teacher: Susan Priest
Debbie Hooten

Minterne Junior School

Minterne Avenue
Sittingbourne
Kent ME10 1SB
T: 01795 472323
Head teacher: Bill McGrory
Trisha Etheridge, Catherine Ford

Saxon Way County Primary School

Ingram Road
Gillingham
Kent ME7 1SJ
T: 01634 852320
Head teacher: Lynn Andrews
Roger McDonald, Samantha Ketley

St Katherine's Knockholt County Primary School

Main Road
Knockholt
Kent TN14 7LS
T: 01959 532237
Head teacher: Sarah Jane Toomey
Abbie Rowe, Ellie Lake

St William of Perth RC Primary School

Canon Close
Maidstone Road
Rochester ME1 3EN
T: 01634 404267
Head teacher: Deidre Bevan
Donna McRae, Jo Rogers

Bury research cluster

Chapelfield Primary School

Clough Street
Radcliffe
Manchester M26 1LH
T: 0161 253 7440
Head teacher: Malcolm Gates

Christ Church CE Primary School

Church Street
Walshaw
Bury BL8 3AX
T: 01204 883415
Head teacher: Ian Young
(deputy Angela Scott)

Greenhill Primary School

Mile Lane
Bury BL8 2JH
T: 0161 764 7298
Head teacher: Martyn Pilling

St. Michael's RC Primary School

Ribble Drive
Whitefield
Manchester M45 8NJ
T: 0161 766 6628
Head teacher: Norman Duffin

Unsworth Primary School

Blackley Close
Unsworth
Bury BL9 8LY
T: 0161 766 4876
Head teacher: Christine Reynolds

Woodbank Primary School

Brandlesholme Road
Bury BL8 1AX
T: 0161 761 1253
Head teacher: John Wood

Cherry Orchard Primary School

Timberdine Close
Worcester WR5 2DD
T: 01905 352787
Head teacher: Jeremy Harwood

Nunnery Wood Primary School

Prestwich Avenue
Worcester WR5 1QE
T: 01905 354154
Head teacher: Sue Mason

Red Hill Primary School

Midhurst Close
Worcester WR5 2HX
T: 01905 352524
Head teacher: Jane Long

Warndon Primary School

Edgeworth Close
Worcester WR4 9PE
T: 01905 453530
Head teacher: Monika Wadeson-Wilcox
(May–December 2007) and Simon Tranter
(from January 2008)

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“There is no doubt in my mind that Writing is Primary has breathed new life into a long-standing issue which was stuck in the rut of short-term fixes.” Head teacher, Bury

The issue that the Writing is Primary action research programme set out to address was how pupil learning, enjoyment and achievement in writing at primary level might be improved. This report describes how teachers across a number of schools were encouraged to try new approaches to the teaching of writing, including developing their personal creative skills – and how this journey of discovery enabled them, in turn, to inspire their pupils to write with greater pleasure and purpose.

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