

A ROUTLEDGE FREEBOOK

LITERACY INTERVENTION

SUPPORTING STRUGGLING READERS AND WRITERS





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SUPPORTING STRUGGLING READERS AND WRITERS

STATEMENT FROM THE NATIONAL LITERACY TRUST

SUPPORTING STRUGGLING READERS AND WRITERS

The pressure on schools to ensure all pupils make progress has intensified greatly over the years. We all strive to meet pupils' targets, to meet those national expectations and to close that gap between the rich and the poor, because we want our pupils to do well, to be able to find a job and ultimately, to be happy.

To support those pupils struggling to read and write, schools are offering an array of interventions for literacy – these interventions could be in class lessons, additional lessons before or after school and sometimes even on Saturdays. Teachers are always reflecting on what more they could do. For reading, many schools are using a range of different interventions: Lexia and Accelerated Reader for 1:1 and small-group interventions or Reciprocal Reading strategies to embed in mainstream lessons.

To this end, the National Literacy Trust Network has provided a set of resources for its members on how schools are supporting struggling readers and writers and what initiatives exist (from the government and the private sector). In doing so, its focus is on the "3 P's" - Programmes, Pupils and Pedagogy.

THE 3 P'S

The National Literacy Trust has reviewed the various government **programmes** that were developed by the Secondary National Strategy over the last decade to support pupils' literacy. While there was criticism to be made with how these programmes were implemented, resulting in the government's mantra that interventions were about 'pupils not programmes', the materials provided several quality texts and models of activities that teachers often struggle to locate for interventions.

With criticism of programmes circulating in the mid noughties, new models of interventions that met the needs of **pupils** were implemented across the country to support the leadership of interventions. This included the introduction of the three-wave model and the intervention cycle which includes five key steps.

The third P focuses on key **pedagogy** underpinning interventions, no matter what wave of intervention. Key strategies come from several approaches are showcased on the National Literacy Trust Network (such as Reciprocal Reading techniques and Genre Theory).

National Literacy Trust Network members are able to access the full resources in this theme, which are divided into primary and secondary phases and include:



SUPPORTING STRUGGLING READERS AND WRITERS

STATEMENT FROM THE NATIONAL LITERACY TRUST

- Primary and secondary introductory blogs to the topic by Network Advisers Judy Clark and Francine McMahon
- An overview of key documents, research and resources
- Further examination of the 3 P's, including links to key Secondary National Strategy documents and discussion of the waves of intervention model
- Showcases of innovative approaches to interventions including Calmore Junior School's use of ReadingWise, a technology based intervention for those struggling with phonics.



INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The pressure on schools to ensure all pupils make progress in helping struggling children has intensified greatly over the years. To help teachers and school leaders, **Literacy Intervention: Supporting struggling readers and writers**, provides a handy compendium of direct insights and practical advice.

In this FreeBook, you'll discover whether or not children in the twenty-first century read for pleasure, the benefits of adopting a social practice approach to literacy, how you can creatively teach and engage children in reading at 5-7 and then 7-11, as well as helping you to reflect on your own writing identity and ideas for 'getting writing going' in the classroom.

As you read through this FreeBook, you will notice that some excerpts reference other chapters, please note that these are references to the original text and not the FreeBook.

And remember that if you're in search of more in-depth coverage of any of these topics, all of the titles featured are available in full from our website.

CHAPTER 1

In this excerpt from ***Building Communities of Engaged Readers***, Teresa Cremin looks to answer fundamental questions about children and reading in the early twenty-first century. Do they choose to read for pleasure at home and in school? Are they reading for themselves, for their own personal satisfaction or to please their teachers or parents? Perhaps they are merely reading to succeed in their country's assessment system? Additionally, what influences their engagement as readers? What impacts upon their desire to read or lack of it? And what, if any, are the benefits?

CHAPTER 2

Offering an overview of the shifts in teachers' conceptions of literacy, this chapter from ***Researching Literacy Lives***, by Marilyn Mottram and Fiona M. Collins, explores how teachers in their project came to recognise the limitations of conceiving of literacy as a fixed unit. It then looks at the benefits of adopting a social practice approach to literacy, using case studies from the class room.



INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 4

Teaching children to read is neither a trivial matter nor just a technical task. For both children and their teachers, it is probably the most momentous achievement of the early school years. In this chapter from *Teaching English Creatively*, Henrietta Dombey focuses on how to teach reading creatively to 5–7-year-olds and how teachers can support the questioning stance of young learners.

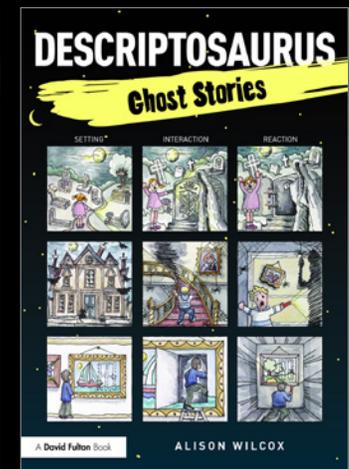
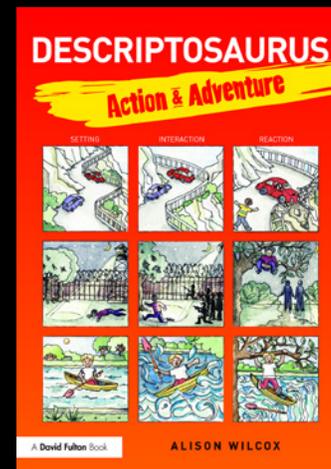
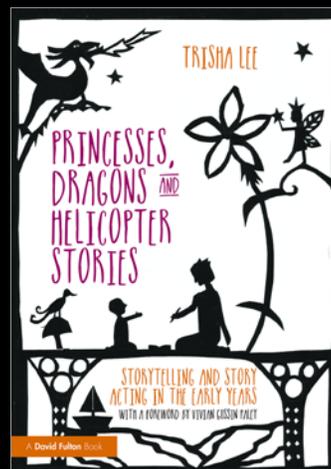
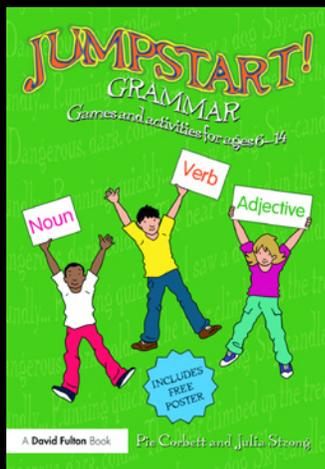
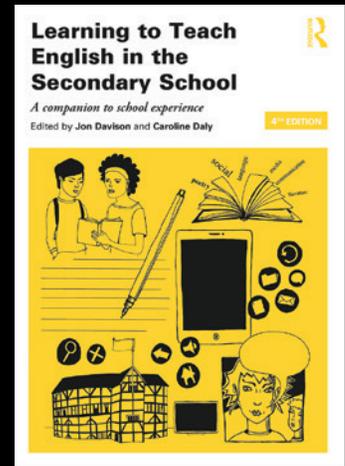
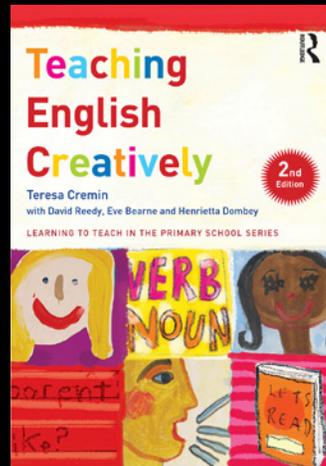
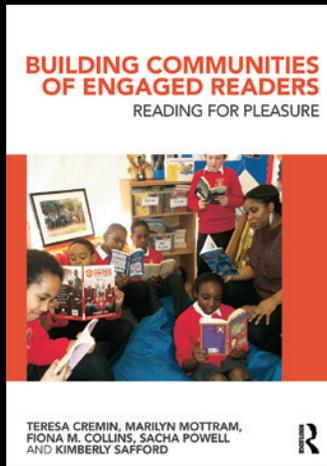
CHAPTER 5

Once children have learned to read, the continuing challenge for teachers is to help them become engaged, enthusiastic and fluent readers who understand the pleasures and value of reading, and who choose to read beyond the demands of the curriculum. This chapter from *Teaching English Creatively*, by Teresa Cremin, focuses on teaching reading creatively to 7–11-year-olds, and how focus is on supporting deeper engagement with texts.

CHAPTER 6

What was your own experience of learning to write, inside and outside school and what kind of experiences of writing do you hope your pupils will have? This chapter from *Learning to Teach English in the Secondary School, 4th Edition*, by Gill Anderson, sets out to help you think more about those two important questions. It will help you to reflect on your own history and identity as a writer, as well as exploring approaches for 'getting writing going' in the classroom.

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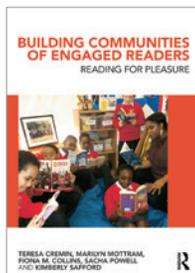


READING FOR PLEASURE AND READER ENGAGEMENT



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The following is excerpted from *Building Communities of Engaged Readers* by Teresa Cremin, Marilyn Mottram, Fiona M. Collins, Sacha Powell and Kimberly Safford. ©2014 Taylor and Francis Group. All rights reserved.

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REVIEWING THE RESEARCH

Do children in the early twenty-first century choose to read for pleasure at home and in school? If so, what are they reading and how frequently? Are they reading for themselves, for their own personal satisfaction or to please their teachers or parents? Perhaps they are merely reading to succeed in their country's assessment system? Additionally, what influences their engagement as readers? What impacts upon their desire to read or lack of it? And what, if any, are the benefits?

This chapter seeks to respond to these and other pressing questions. It examines the extent to which reader engagement and reading for pleasure represent cause for concern internationally, with particular reference to England, the site of the research projects upon which this book is based. The chapter commences by exploring the concept of reading for pleasure, and the evidence regarding the benefits to young people's cognitive, social and emotional development, then reviews a range of studies which document children and young people's engagement as independent readers. The significance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the diversity of children's twenty-first century reading, gender differences, the role of choice, the impact of book ownership and parental involvement are all considered as influential factors, alongside consideration of school provision and practice. It is argued that the profession needs to pay more attention to children's attitudes, their preferences, pleasures and practices and their perceptions of themselves as readers in order to help ensure that they develop as readers who not only can, but *do* choose to read, for pleasure and for life.

EXPLORING THE TERMS 'READING FOR PLEASURE' AND 'READER ENGAGEMENT'

The term 'reading for pleasure' is often used interchangeably with the term 'reading for enjoyment'. Such reading can involve any kind of text – novel, magazine, comic, non-fiction – in electronic as well as in printed form. It can take place anywhere – at home, at school, in the community, on a bus (or any other form of transport), on a beach, in the park (or any other leisure location). It is often characterised as a personal solitary experience conducted in privacy, yet even when readers read alone, the act of reading remains profoundly social. At the core of reading for pleasure is the reader's volition, their agency and desire to read, their anticipation of the satisfaction gained through the experience and/ or afterwards in interaction with others. In the USA, such reading is often described as 'free voluntary reading' or 'independent reading', capturing the reader's sense of agency and choice (Krashen, 2004). It has also been described as 'recreational reading' (Ross *et al.*, 2006), reading undertaken



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for the personal satisfaction of the reader, in their own free time. The National Literacy Trust (NLT) in the UK, recognising that such reading is underpinned by the free will of the reader, further suggests it can encompass reading which, whilst it began at someone else's request, is sustained by the reader, in response to their interest (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

Reading engagement is often associated with reading for pleasure: arguably, engaged readers are those who want to read, who choose to read and who find satisfaction in the process. Additionally, engaged readers tend to display positive attitudes to reading and are interested in it. Motivated to read on, to turn the page or open up new screens, engaged readers make time to read and read widely with the purposeful intention of making meaning which further supports their developing reading habit. The US study by Ross *et al.* (2006) highlights that the experience of reading is in and of itself a motivator, prompting readers to return in search of more. As Sanacore observes, when individuals read for pleasure frequently, they 'experience the value of reading for efferent and aesthetic processes, thus, they are more likely to read with a sense of purpose' (2002: 68). The PISA international survey (see next section) makes use of the term 'reader engagement', framing it as a complex variable that encompasses elements such as frequency of leisure reading, attitudes and interest in reading, and 'depth' (measured by the comprehension strategies that the 15 year olds report using) as well as diversity of reading (Marks, 2000). Other self-report surveys make use of single elements to define reading engagement, including, for example, behavioural engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004), these are sometimes accompanied by teachers' observations and assessments (Lutz *et al.*, 2006). Ellis and Coddington (2013: 228) argue that reading engagement is 'a meta-construct that crosses research disciplines and is studied in the context of schools and schooling, but also in out-of-school contexts such as families and the workplace'.

Engaged readers tend to be focused on finding, making and thinking about meaning. A purposeful activity, reading is related to the human need to make sense of the world, the desire to understand, to make things work and to make connections. Nell (1988) describes reading for pleasure as a form of ludic play, enabling a temporary escape from everyday life and the possibility of learning through vicarious experience and imaginative engagement, relating this to the human propensity to narrativise experience and think through story. In addition to offering enjoyment, literature in particular develops the imagination and supports personal, emotional and cultural development (Cliff Hodges, 2010). In finding textual resonances, whether inter-personal, intra-personal or inter-textual (Smith, 2005), readers make meanings and



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think and talk about them informally with friends, family, work colleagues and even strangers, conferring over news items or sharing views on a popular novel on a train, for example. Different readers find satisfaction in different ways, through perhaps revisiting childhood favourites, reading magazines, newspapers, travel texts, recipes or Facebook pages, or trying out new and recommended authors and non-fiction. Many will experience pleasure in the affective engagement often involved and, in discussing the themes and issues which arise; others may also find pleasure in the social interaction around it.

In the UKLA Phase II project *Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers*, on which this book draws, the term 'reading for pleasure' was used to refer to the volitional act of reading undertaken by individuals and groups, and by children and adults, and was thus closely associated with reader engagement. The 43 teachers involved, identified three disaffected readers in their classes to case study. These focus children were identified using Moss's (2000) category of 'can but don't' readers, that is, they could read but did not choose to do so; this is in line with the finding that whilst many primary learners in England can read, compared with their peers internationally, they find somewhat less pleasure in reading (Twist *et al.*, 2003, 2007). The project teachers identified children who presented as 'disaffected and reluctant' readers, with mostly negative attitudes to reading; they were unmotivated to use their competence as readers and often sought to avoid engaging in it. However, as discussed in Chapter 9, it was found that some of these children did of their own volition read, but at home, not in school.

AN INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL CAUSE FOR CONCERN

In the early twenty-first century, the results of student performance on international literacy tests such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) are seen as key reference points for policy makers. Students' performance in these assessments is seen as a measure of individual countries' comparative success on a worldwide scale. The PIRLS study is a five-year survey of 10–11 year olds' reading behaviour, attitudes and attainment from over 50 countries and nation states across the world, whilst PISA, an assessment of 15 year olds from almost 70 countries, involves assessment of reading, mathematics and science attainment on a regular basis. PIRLS has two strands, a paper-based individual comprehension exercise (focusing on literary reading and reading for information) and questionnaires for children, their parents and teachers on young people's wider experience of literacy. These include



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questions such as whether and how often they 'read for fun' (books and other texts) outside school, and the number of books at home. Statistical analyses of the two strands relate individual's test scores to the questionnaire data (Trong and Kennedy, 2007). Layered upon pre-existing national assessment systems, which many researchers perceive constrain quality professional practice (e.g. Goodwyn *et al.*, 2014), PIRLS may also serve to constrain what counts as reading. As Maybin (2013) observes, this large-scale international study is unable to include any documentation of what children actually do with texts, their interactions around reading, whether at home or at school. Arguably, reading seen through the lens of such large-scale surveys is framed more as a measurable result than a lived experience and a process. The complex factors which interact to develop young readers and the myriad of elements which characterise the experience tend to be ignored in such work. Such studies inevitably emphasise numerical reading scores and measurable data regarding young people's self-reports on multiple factors within the survey's options. Nonetheless, alongside PISA data, PIRLS results can afford insights about the role of reading in the lives of children and young people and can record shifts over time with regard to commonly used measures.

Over the last decade, international evidence from PIRLS and PISA tends to suggest that: the gender gap has not significantly altered; girls continue to outperform boys in reading achievement; and a worrying number of young people report that they do not like reading (Mullis *et al.* 2012; OECD, 2010). PISA data in particular show a decline in both enjoyment and frequency of reading for pleasure among the young, especially boys (OECD, 2010). European analyses of PISA results confirm a decline in reading engagement over the past decade; from 68 per cent of students in 2000 to 63 per cent in 2009 (Eurydice, 2011). In England, for example, 13 per cent of the children in the 2002 PIRLS study disliked reading compared with an international average of 6 per cent (Twist *et al.*, 2003). In the 2006 PIRLS study, a sharp drop in reading attainment accompanied a further decline in terms of attitudes; 15 per cent of English children had unfavourable attitudes to reading, and England was ranked thirty-seventh out of the 45 countries/provinces in terms of attitudes (Twist *et al.*, 2007). Additionally, 42 per cent reported that they rarely read literature for pleasure, a figure more than a third higher than the international average (Twist *et al.*, 2007). In the 2011 PIRLS study, whilst enjoyment in and motivation for reading had improved slightly in England, 20 per cent of the English children responded that they did not like reading, compared with an international average of 15 per cent (Twist *et al.*, 2012).

These results are largely in line with PISA data, which in 2000 showed that in relation to 'engagement in reading' England ranked twentieth of 27 OECD countries involved



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(OECD, 2002). In this study, engagement included reading for pleasure, reading widely and attitudes to reading. Nearly 30 per cent of English 15 year olds reported that they never or hardly ever read for pleasure, 19 per cent felt it was a waste of time and 35 per cent said they would only read if they were obliged to do so. This was despite high average scores in terms of attainment (OECD, 2002). In the 2009 PISA study, deterioration in enjoyment of reading was again notable compared with the OECD average. British teenagers read for pleasure much less than their peers in other countries and an increasing number report never reading for pleasure and feeling that it is a waste of time (OECD, 2010).

These large-scale comparative research studies are mirrored by UK research, affirming evidence of a decline in reading for pleasure in England. For example, in the Nestlé Family Monitor research (2003), whilst most of the 11–18 year olds reported reading books in their spare time, a third said they had better things to do than read books and a quarter suggested that they would be disappointed if someone gave them a book. Comparative work by Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) showed a fall in children's attitudes to reading between 1998 and 2003: although the majority of children in this study still reported enjoying reading stories, their desire to do so had markedly decreased across this period. This was seen to be related to the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998), although the complexity of the issue in the context of rapid technological advances and the changing nature of childhood, homework expectations and leisure activities is acknowledged. A number of other UK-based studies have also shown attitudes to reading declining with age, alongside young people's interest in choosing to read (e.g. Clark *et al.*, 2005; Maynard *et al.*, 2007; Clark, 2011; Clark, 2013).

The National Literacy Trust's annual UK surveys of young people's reading suggest that reading for pleasure is being side-lined by other activities (Clark, 2011, 2012, 2013). The most recent survey undertaken in the autumn of 2012 drew on the voices and views of 34,910 young people from 8 to 17 years in 188 schools. Based on this, Clark (2013) claims that whilst levels of enjoyment in reading remain static or 'stagnate' (with roughly half of those surveyed reporting enjoying reading), compared with previous years, reading has declined and attitudes to reading have become more negative. There was a particularly significant drop in the proportion of 8 to 11 year olds who read for pleasure and who read daily compared with earlier surveys. Over a fifth of children and young people reported rarely or never reading in their own time, and nearly a third agreed with the statement 'I only read when I have to' (Clark, 2013). It is not the case, though, that the young are turning to digital texts; with the exception of text messages, reading across most formats, (including for example



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magazines, comics, websites and emails) was reported to have fallen between 2005 and 2013 (Clark *et al.*, 2005; Clark, 2013). The UK situation is summarised as follows:

Not only are children and young people reading less and developing more negative attitudes towards reading, but there is also a clear correlation between this and their performance in reading tests.

(Clark, 2013: 8)

THE BENEFITS OF READING FOR PLEASURE AND READER ENGAGEMENT

Whilst reading for pleasure is seen as a worthwhile activity in its own terms, it has also been associated, directly and indirectly, with reading attainment. There is considerable international evidence that reading for pleasure (independent choice-led reading) and reading engagement are strong predictors of reading attainment (e.g. Anderson *et al.*, 1988; PIRLS, 2006; OECD, 2002, 2010). A positive relationship between frequency of reading for pleasure and scores on PIRLS literacy tests has been reported (PIRLS, 2006) and endorsed by PISA data (OECD, 2002, 2010). In all three annual NLT surveys, Clark (2011, 2012, 2013) found relationships between reading enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes and reading attainment. In 2012, young people who enjoyed reading very much were four times as likely to read above the expected level for their age compared with their peers who did not enjoy reading at all (Clark, 2013). Whilst claims for causality cannot easily be assigned, Stanovich (1986) posits the presence of the so-called Matthew effect, in that he argues better readers tend to read more because they are more motivated to read, which, in turn, leads to better reading. However, those who do not succeed as quickly he argues, feel neither confident nor capable and tend to read less, thus they practice less, are likely to be less engaged and less positively inclined toward reading. They are more likely to enter a downward spiral and fall behind their more successful peers. The OECD (2010) too asserts that the relationship between reading achievement and positive attitudes to reading is bi-directional.

There is also evidence of reading achievement impacting upon wider academic attainment across the curriculum (e.g. OECD, 2002) and the suggestion that it can diminish the effects of socio-economic status (e.g. OECD, 2002; Topping *et al.*, 2003) and support social mobility (Clark and Rumbold, 2006). Recent longitudinal work endorses this, demonstrating the significant influence of children's engaged leisure reading on test scores in maths, spelling and vocabulary; the researchers found that children who read



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for pleasure made more progress in these areas (between the ages of 10 and 16 years) than those who rarely chose to read (Sullivan and Brown, 2013). In relation to cognitive development, this work, in alignment with the OECD (2002) indicates that reading for pleasure is more important than parental educational levels. As such, enhancing independent reading it is argued can help raise educational standards. Research also points to a multiplicity of other personal and academic advantages of reading for pleasure, including, for example: improved general knowledge (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998); increased self-confidence as a reader (Guthrie and Alvermann, 1999); a richer vocabulary and increased accuracy in spelling (Sullivan and Brown, 2013); an improved capacity for comprehension (Cox and Guthrie, 2001); and greater pleasure in reading in later life (Aarnoutse and van Leeuwe, 1998). Furthermore, reading allows young people to gather information about the world and how they fit into it, thus supporting identity explorations, for example: Rothbauer (2004) shows how independent reading can mediate the challenges of understanding and negotiating non-mainstream identities; Appleyard (1990) reveals the kind of pleasure to be found in finding oneself in the text; Arizpe *et al.* (2014) demonstrate the myriad benefits, personally, culturally and in relation to literacy learning, of immigrant children reading wordless picturebooks; and Schoon *et al.*, (2010) show that high levels of reading engagement in preschool children can help to diminish the impact of language disorders.

In addition and significantly, the experience of reading literature and the deep emotional engagement which can be engendered needs to be more fully acknowledged and explicitly valued as a palpable benefit of independent reading. Children's literature research highlights the particular power of literary texts to help the young as they journey through other worlds, taking on other roles and experiencing engagement with, as well as distance from, the fictional characters they encounter (e.g. Benton and Fox, 1985; Arizpe *et al.*, 2014). This deserves to be acknowledged as an often profound and tangible benefit of reading fiction (Clark and Osborne, 2008; Cliff Hodges, 2010). As Landay and Wootton (2012) show, bringing a literary text to life, either in one's mind or through layered multisensory engagement via combinations of drama, artwork, writing, discussion, dancing and singing, not only enables readers to engage in interpretation, but inspires them to want to read, by provoking curiosity about the narrative or poetic content. The experience of 'living through the text' (Rosenblatt, 1978) and engaging affectively and reflectively often connects to children's positive attitudes to reading and the pleasure and satisfaction they find in it (Cliff Hodges, 2010; Hitchcock, 2010; OECD, 2002). Reading literature distinctively excites and develops the imagination, which is one of Alexander's (2010) key aims for the primary curriculum, in order that children can



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advance beyond present understanding, extend the boundaries of their lives, contemplate worlds possible as well as actual, understand cause and consequence, develop the capacity for empathy, and reflect on and regulate their behaviour... [W]e assert the need to emphasise the intrinsic value of exciting children's imagination. To experience the delights – and pains – of imagining, and of entering into the imaginative world of others, is to become a more rounded person.

(Alexander, 2010: 199, quoted in Cliff Hodges, 2010)

This statement, as Cliff Hodges (2010) observes, could equally apply to reading literature, which many would argue is itself a key creative skill and one which can support children's personal, social and moral education, and can strengthen, challenge or alter the ways in which they see the world and engage with it (e.g. Landay and Wootton, 2012; Ross *et al.*, 2006). Additionally, recent US research suggests that high-quality literary fiction that requires intellectual engagement and creative thought enables young readers to develop the complex social skill of 'mind-reading' in order to understand others' mental states (Comer Kidd and Castano, 2013). Such empathy and mindfulness of others is a valuable personal and social asset. The Phase II project documented in this book also highlights the power of fiction to foster empathy and create bonds between readers.

Additionally, reading is linked to writing, as through independent reading, young people absorb a range of models for writing (Barrs and Cork, 2001; Corden, 2003; Cremin and Myhill, 2012) and develop a wider vocabulary, as well as more secure spelling habits (Sullivan and Brown, 2013). There are also, Clark (2013) asserts, robust links between reading and writing in relation to enjoyment, attitudes and behaviour. The last NLT survey not only confirmed an expected link between high achievers in reading and writing, but also a relationship between reading and writing frequency and revealed that young people who enjoy reading, tend also to enjoy writing (Clark, 2013).

CHILDREN'S READING PRACTICES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Over the last decade the nature and form of what children can choose to read has altered radically, partly as a consequence of rapid technological advances and the increasing ascendancy of the image. Children take their multi-media world for granted, as from birth they are surrounded by multi-modal texts that combine images, words and sound,



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voices, intonation, stance, gesture and movement, as well as print on screen and on paper. Such texts, Bearne argues 'have changed the ways in which young people expect to read, the ways they think and the ways they construct meaning' (2003: 98). A great deal of what children choose to read in their leisure time beyond the school gates is not book based; for example, in the UK comics/comic books and newspapers were popular in 2007 (Twist *et al.*, 2007), whilst in 2011, text messages, magazines, websites and emails were found to be the most popular choices, with fiction being read outside school by 40 per cent of those surveyed (Clark and Douglas, 2011).

Fears and assumptions about the influence of popular cultural texts and TV competing with book reading remain. The UKLA Reading on Screen research (UKLA/ QCA, 2007) showed a higher preference for multimodal screen-based texts over those composed mainly of words in relation to leisure reading, although there was no lack of interest in sustained book reading at home; the children surveyed appeared to be aware that they could gain different reading satisfactions from different types of text. Additionally, these data, alongside the evidence presented by Mackey (2002), suggest that reading on screen often boosts the reading of paper-based texts, with frequent indications of crossovers or links between screen texts and written texts. Online multimedia spin-offs from conventional fiction texts can support rather than undermine the extended reading of the original, since different forms of reading such as magazines, computer games, online material and fiction feed off each other. 'Reading for pleasure should be seen as part of a whole "pattern of entertainment" which supports and is supported by other media' (Hitchcock, 2010: 14–15). Research has also shown that the processes involved in reading print and TV have similarities as well as differences (Robinson and Mackey, 2003), that children's reading skills can be developed through reading film and that moving image texts can enhance learners' motivation to engage in print related texts (Marsh, 2000). This raises the question of how such reading for pleasure can be successfully resourced and supported in school.

The challenge for teachers is to find out about and capitalise on children's self-chosen informal everyday reading practices, practices they choose to undertake of their own volition for the pleasure and satisfaction they offer. In the project *Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers*, teachers sought to do just this (see Chapters 4 and 6 for more details).

GENDER DIFFERENCES

Internationally, girls remain more likely to report reading for pleasure than boys (OECD, 2010). This trend has also been documented in the UK (e.g. Nestlé Family



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Monitor, 2003; Clark and Douglas, 2011; Clark and Foster, 2005; Clark and Osborne, 2008; Maynard *et al.*, 2007; Clark, 2013). In both the most recent NLT surveys (Clark, 2012, 2013), nearly twice as many boys as girls report not enjoying reading at all and never reading outside of class. Although Clark (2013) suggests the gender gap may be beginning to narrow slightly, widespread gender differences in reading persist into adulthood, with males being less likely to read than females (EU, 2012). When teenage boys do read for enjoyment, PISA data indicate that they tend to read newspapers or comics, whereas girls are more likely to read fiction or magazines (OECD, 2010). Topping's (2010) UK data, from young people aged 5 to 16 in 664 schools, found that boys tended to read easier books than girls in the same year. Moss's (2003) earlier work in England suggested that when boys read, they tend to read fiction, but, in order not to be perceived as struggling readers, status-conscious low-attaining boy readers may select non-fiction texts as these are not as readily associated with reading levels or abilities and may enable them to take part in reading networks and conversations by reading small chunks. However, such reading, as Moss (2003) notes, may not be as influential on reading attainment and reading engagement in the longer term.

Research also suggests that boys' motivation to read is generally lower than girls (Baker and Wigfield, 1999). This connects to attainment, with PISA 2002 showing girls had more positive attitudes, read more often and outperformed teenage boys in reading (OECD, 2002). More recently, the PISA 2009 results show that boys are the equivalent of one year's schooling behind girls (OECD, 2010). Lafontaine and Monseur (2009) argue part of the difference may be related to the PISA test characteristics as boys show lower scores in test items requiring written answers to open-ended questions. Motivation and engagement are key to understanding the gender gap. Research shows there is a closer reciprocal relationship between intrinsic motivation, competency beliefs and reading skill with boys than there is with girls (Logan and Medford, 2011). This study suggests that either boys' motivation and self-belief about their abilities as readers are more dependent on their success as readers or that boys' lower motivation and less assured self-beliefs about their competence as readers influence the effort they put into reading, thus holding them back.

This is a complex issue and likely to relate, amongst other factors, to boys' conceptions of reading, the choices they are offered and the gap between self-selected reading materials and those validated by teachers in schools (Moss, 2000). All young readers deserve to encounter texts which are relevant, interesting and personally engaging, such that they are intrigued and inspired; motivated to read of their own free will. But the gap between the texts affirmed as appropriate reading material by teachers and the



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range of texts accessed by boys elsewhere may well be growing. Nonetheless there are a number of strategies which teachers can employ in order to motivate boys (e.g. Younger and Warrington, 2005; APPLG, 2012; Guthrie *et al.*, 2006). Many of these relate to enhancing engagement through connecting to boys' individual interests, offering more choice in reading material, more male reader role models, stronger home-school links and making reading more interactive and fun. Many of these strategies will benefit both boys and girls. As the All-Party Parliamentary Literacy Group assert in the recent Boys' Reading Commission in England:

A refreshed commitment in schools to promoting reading for enjoyment will strongly benefit boys, who want to read around their interests. To enable this to happen reading for pleasure needs to be an integral element in a school's teaching and learning strategy and teachers need to be supported in their knowledge of relevant quality texts that will engage all pupils. There is a specific danger that a predominantly female workforce will unconsciously privilege texts that are more attractive to girls.

(APPLG, 2012: 4)

In the Phase II project, through widening their own repertoires of children's texts, transforming what counts as reading in school, and connecting to peer group cultures in the classroom, as well as developing a Reading for Pleasure Pedagogy, the project teachers gradually altered the attitudes of young male readers. Over time the focus group boys and others boys in their classes began to find more pleasure in reading.

MOTIVATION

Those who read for pleasure exercise their own independent judgement about what they want to read and about the kind of readers they are/wish to become. Such readers are also often purposeful in their endeavours, and read in anticipation of some form of satisfaction. As the EU Expert Panel on Literacy recognise:

The emphasis should be not just on reading well, but also on reading for pleasure, as one supports the other. Children should be given free time for pleasure reading for relaxation and escape In this process, intrinsic motivation is key – reading for its own sake rather than for reading other rewards.

(EU, 2012: 68)



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Intrinsic motivation, which Sainsbury and Schagen (2004: 374) suggest encompasses a positive self-concept, a desire and tendency to read and a reported enjoyment of an interest in reading, is crucial. Readers who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to be reading for their own pleasure and satisfaction. Research suggests these readers may be reading more widely and more frequently and enjoying their reading more (Cox and Guthrie, 2001) and that such highly engaged readers who are interested in the text and are confident in their capacity as readers are more likely to persevere when they encounter more challenging texts (Schunk, 2003). The aspects of intrinsic motivation identified by Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) which, according to their study, predicts both reading breadth and comprehension, include importance, curiosity, involvement and a preference for challenge. It would appear then that keen independent readers believe reading is a worthwhile activity and continue to challenge themselves, reinforcing and developing their competence as readers in the process (for a more extended examination of reading motivation see Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000). Extrinsic motivation, by contrast, involves reading for recognition, reading for grades and for competition (Wigfield and Guthrie, 1997). Studies have found that the greater the emphasis placed on performance and grades, the less students are motivated to read (Guthrie and Davis, 2003) and that extrinsic motivation has a detrimental effect on reading comprehension (Schaffner *et al.*, 2013).

Whilst reading for pleasure is more closely related to intrinsic than extrinsic motivation, as Clark and Rumbold (2006) note, the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is not straightforward or a simple 'good versus evil' scenario, since children may well be motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects; they may read for their own pleasure and be obliged to (and derive some satisfaction from) reading for others' purposes (Lepper and Henderlong, 2000) and constructive teacher feedback, for example, can be a valuable extrinsic motivator (Wang and Holcombe, 2010). However, excessive extrinsic motivation and pressure to perform may drown a child's intrinsic desire to read. As Bernard Ashley, the author, observes 'because children have to sweat so much over books, reading for recreation for some is like going for a leisure swim in their own dirty bathwater' (2003: 4).

Low achievers often have limited intrinsic motivation to read and indifferent or negative attitudes towards reading; they may see reading as a chore. For struggling readers, one of the most demotivating factors is a lack of interest in the available reading material, so acknowledging textual diversity and enriched access, as noted earlier, is essential. As the EU Expert Panel on Literacy recognise, low achievement may reduce children's desire to read and lead to disengagement which further lowers their achievements and self-efficacy – a vicious circle – often compounded by



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sustained experience of perceived 'failure' and a lack of self-efficacy as a reader (Ivey and Guthrie, 2008). In Meek's (1991) words, 'poor inexperienced readers' have not yet found 'what reading is good for'. Moreover, since motivation to read appears to decrease with age (Clark and Osborne, 2008), ensuring commitment in the primary years is important.

Unmotivated, disaffected readers fail to benefit from reading teaching (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000), so teachers need to plan to foster learner engagement and motivation, recognising the social, emotional and cultural dimensions of being a reader and finding out about the interests and preferences of the young. Children report that they would read more if only they enjoyed it more, if they had more time and if books were cheaper or about subjects they were interested in (Clark and Foster, 2005). Readers deserve to encounter texts which have particular salience for them, as caught in a web of fiction or in widening their knowledge of a favourite team for example, they become motivated to renew this rewarding experience. The affective dimension is seen by children as a vital motivator (Dungworth *et al.*, 2004), a view which some adults also affirm (e.g. Spufford, 2002). This was demonstrated in the Phase II project (Cremin *et al.*, 2009a), although in other research, young people additionally report that they read for reasons to do with learning and understanding (Nestlé Family Monitor, 2003; Clark and Foster, 2005).

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The impact of the home environment and parental involvement in their children's reading is widely accepted as influential on reading performance (OECD, 2010). Parental involvement is seen as a more potent force than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education (Flouri and Buchanan, 2004). The beliefs held by children's parents about the purposes of reading and how children learn to read can shape children's motivation to read. For example, parents who believe that reading is a rich source of entertainment have children with more positive views about reading than parents who only emphasise the skills involved (Sonnenschein *et al.*, 2000), and children whose parents view reading as a source of pleasure are more motivated than those whose parents hold less positive views (Baker and Scher, 2002). Worryingly, over a quarter of the nearly 35,000 8–16 year olds surveyed in the UK in 2012 reported that their parents did not care whether they spend any time reading (Clark, 2013).

However, research reveals that there is marked heterogeneity across the body of parents and that, within different ethnic and class groups, parents may have very



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different understandings/perceptions of the nature of reading and use it differently in their own lives. The work of Gregory and Williams (2000) for example, drawing on detailed ethno-graphic data collected in multi-ethnic communities in London, has shown the wealth of literacy practices and reading-related activities in the lives of those often considered by the establishment to be 'deprived' of literacy. This work also revealed the breadth of formal learning and reading experienced outside school by children in multilingual families, as well as the range of 'unofficial' reading matter found in monolingual families. It is clear that traffic between home and school is persistently one way, with reading materials moving from school to home (Marsh, 2003b). Also schools tend to have very stereotypical expectations of parents, expecting them to induct their children into school reading practices, and rarely attending to the assets that all children bring to school in their 'virtual school bags' (Thomson, 2002).

Parents and the home environment support both the early teaching of reading and the development of a love of reading, not only through book sharing and space for relationship building, but also through the use of books in playful activities (EU, 2012), and research suggests many parents want to be involved (Peters *et al.*, 2007). In this study, the desire to get more involved tended to be stronger amongst disadvantaged parent groups (e.g. those in lower social grades, ethnic minorities, respondents with a long-term illness or disability). As the authors suggest, more work is needed to understand how to involve parents and any barriers to involvement (Peters *et al.*, 2007).

Other evidence suggests that children are more likely to sustain their engagement as readers in homes where books are present and reading is valued (Baker and Scher, 2002), confirming the view of reading as a highly social activity that begins in the home (Holden, 2004). In the USA, one study showed that owning books influences children's expectations and experience of reading, as well as their preparedness to engage in reading (Allington *et al.*, 2010), and in a not unrelated manner, a UK survey showed that young people who had books of their own were twice as likely to report reading daily, whereas those without books of their own were more likely to say they never read (Clark and Douglas, 2011). In this study, 80 per cent of children who read above the expected level for their age had books of their own. Clark, *et al.* (2011) also found that the young people in their survey who had never received a book as present (19 per cent) were more likely to read below the expected level. More worryingly still, Clark's 2011 survey suggests that 3 per cent of UK children do not have any books in the home. Furthermore, international research indicates a relationship between book ownership and reading attainment: in the USA, through meta-analysis of 108 studies, Lindsay (2010) found that access to print material improves children's performance,



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encouraging them to read more and for longer, and in a longitudinal study across 27 countries, Evans *et al.* (2010) also found that having books in the home is as influential on a child's attainment as the education level of their parents.

To help ensure that reading becomes a lifelong habit, children need to see themselves as members of communities that view reading as a significant and enjoyable activity. It is therefore important that parents and teachers work together and are joined by librarians in order to understand the role of reading in children's everyday literacy lives. Libraries and the expertise of children's librarians can make a significant contribution to children being able to read independently and pursue their reading preferences (Ross *et al.*, 2006; Goodwin, 2011). Librarians, like teachers and parents can offer rich models to children and show what it is like to get pleasure from reading, though this can be problematic in the context of continued cuts to library provision.

SCHOOL PROVISION AND PRACTICE

School provision and practice varies, but in countries where a narrow assessment of reading skills is foregrounded, children's free-choice reading is likely to be side-lined. From the inception of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in England in 1998 (DfEE), in which there was no specific mention of reading for pleasure, scholars predicted that children's independent reading would take a step backwards (Meek, 1998; Dombey, 1998; Furlong 1998; Burgess-Macey, 1999). As noted earlier, research across the following years that recorded a decline in voluntary reading affirms the accuracy of their prophecies. Additionally, classroom-based studies have documented a high degree of fragmentation of the reading experience in school, in part through the use of decontextualised text extracts, a lack of meaningful interaction in shared reading (Burns and Myhill, 2004), reduced opportunities to enjoy texts at length (Gamble, 2000; Fisher, 2005), a reduction in spending on books by schools (Hurd *et al.*, 2006) and a focus on text analysis and skills at the expense of pleasure and engagement (Frater, 2000; Cremin *et al.*, 2007; Lockwood, 2008).

Additionally, a narrow conceptualisation of reading and literacy underpins the curricula of many countries, including England. This views literacy as a set of cognitive skills owned by individuals, and as separable from both the text and the context in which a particular book, magazine or blog is being read, shared and potentially enjoyed. This 'autonomous' model of literacy (Street, 1984, 2008) has become popular with educational regimes driven by market-based notions of accountability. Such a model fails to take account of difference, of different learners, different texts, and different contexts. An alternative view of literacy is that it is richly embedded in social and



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cultural practice. Street's (1994) 'ideological model' emphasises the varied, situated and contingent nature of literate activity. This reveals that what constitutes reading will vary, depending on the institutional, social and cultural contexts in which reading 'events' occur (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Such a model, which was adopted by the research team in the Phase II project, recognises difference and diversity and affords attention to learners' everyday reading practices and preferences.

Many studies show that when children select texts for themselves in school, this enhances their motivation and self-determination as readers (Krashen, 1993; Sanacore, 1999; Gambrell, 1996). Agency, interest and motivation are critical in fostering reading for pleasure, but those who struggle or who are less fluent are often given less autonomy as learners in school (Lupton and Hempel-Jorgansen, 2012) and less choice as readers (Schraw *et al.*, 1998). As a consequence they are less likely to find reading rewarding and may seek to avoid reading activities, perpetuating their sense of failure. Such children not only need support that enhances their motivation, engagement and self-esteem, they also need to be supported in making choices; indeed, Ross *et al.* (2006) argue that being able to choose successfully is an important skill that is never directly taught in school, but is learned through the experience of success fostered by early confidence.

Other research also confirms that choice, interest and reader engagement are closely connected (Clark and Phythian-Sence, 2008; Manzo and Manzo, 1995). Children are more likely to want to read material which connects to their personal interests, and may as a result discover what reading can offer them as individuals. To support children's engagement in reading, arguably therefore teachers need to know about them as individuals, and need to know about and be interested in what they are reading. In a UK study, Moss and McDonald (2004), through analysing school library borrowing, showed that reading networks (shown by the practice of friends borrowing the same titles at the same time or in close proximity), developed differently across two classes. One teacher afforded the children time and space to choose what they wished to read and showed interest in them as readers; the other teacher, in an effort to ensure breadth and maintain quantity, monitored the children's reading choices very closely. In the former's classroom, rich reader networks and positive reader identities developed; in the latter's, there was limited evidence of such networks, and Moss and McDonald (2004) suggest the children read because they were required to do so, not because they chose to.

However, to support reading engagement and enhance reading for pleasure, teachers not only need to know the child readers in their class (and what they like to read



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outside school), they also need to know a wide range of children's literature to read to and recommend to the young readers. The Phase I survey of teachers' repertoires of children's literature suggests that such knowledge may well be lacking (Cremin *et al.*, 2008a, b) (see Chapter 4). Additionally, professionals need to consider their own conceptualisation of reading and what counts as reading in school and question whether an implicit hierarchy of reading materials exists in their classroom. Through their involvement in the Phase II study, many teachers came to examine these issues (Cremin *et al.*, 2009a, Cremin, 2010a) and made significant changes in their practice as a consequence (see Chapters 6 and 7).

Where the diversity of children's home practices is under-recognised (Marsh, 2003a), their favourite reading materials are often unavailable in school (Clark and Osborne, 2008), and there appears to be a distinction between the reading matter that is enjoyed in the home and that which is sanctioned in school (Gregory and Williams, 2000; Hopper, 2005). In tending to reify the 'residual tradition' of fairy tales and approved or significant authors in schools, Luke (1988) argues that teachers fail to recognise 'the emergent alternate tradition' and as a consequence reduce the relevance and interest of much of the reading material presented to young learners. In England, whilst the new National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) recognises a need to promote reading for pleasure, digital and multimodal texts are not mentioned, yet these are an integral part of young people's reading diets. The emphasis on print texts (and by implication books) is likely to hold back the development of wider reading repertoires and further reduce the potential for pleasurable engagement in reading. As the EU Expert Panel on Literacy state:

There should not be a hierarchical ranking of reading material. Books, comic books, newspapers, magazines and online reading materials are equally valid and important entry points to reading for children and adults alike. ... Books and other printed texts are important. But in recognition of the digital opportunities, people should be encouraged to read what they enjoy reading, in whatever format is most pleasurable and convenient for them.

(EU, 2012: 42)

Research regarding what children read in school and at home and the associations between different kinds of reading and reading attainment appears to offer contradictory messages. For example, it has been shown that regularly reading stories or novels outside school is associated with higher scores in assessments



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(PIRLS, 2006; OECD, 2010) and that compared with instruction in basic decoding and comprehension, reading and responding critically to literary texts leads to enhanced educational outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2011). Furthermore, work in the UK indicates that young people who read above the expected level for their age read more of the traditional forms of reading, such as fiction, non-fiction, poems and plays, compared with those who are reading below the expected level for their age (Clark and Douglas, 2011). However, recent results from PISA suggest that, although compared with not reading for enjoyment at all, reading fiction for enjoyment appears to be positively associated with higher scores, it is the young people who read a wide variety of material who perform particularly well in reading assessments (OECD, 2010). Nonetheless, of these 'deep and wide' readers who perform highly, over 99 per cent report reading fiction several times a month or more, 53 per cent report reading non-fiction just as regularly (OECD, 2010: 55). Whilst the breadth of these readers' practices is evident, the markedly strong emphasis on literature deserves recognition, arguably such reading serves young people well, both as readers and as learners. This suggests that whilst recognition of diversity is important, a high profile for literature in school is needed to ensure young people are introduced to a wide range of literary texts which engage them, prompting them to try new authors and more challenging narratives and poetry. This is only possible however, if professionals keep up to date with contemporary writing for young people and have rich repertoires of literature on which to draw.

CONCLUSION

The accumulating evidence indicates that increased attention should be paid to reading for pleasure and reader engagement in schools. However, particularly in accountability cultures the dominant discourse is one of reading attainment alone. Few countries appear to recognise that their scores in PIRLS or PISA in relation to reading attitudes and engagement are likely to relate to the predominant educational focus in schools on basic reading levels, sounds, blends, fluency and comprehension. Few countries appear to acknowledge the potential potency of enhancing children's independent reading, their pleasure in reading and engagement as readers. As Steve Anwyll, the director of the NLS in England, acknowledged in 2004: 'If we're increasing the attainment of children at the expense of their engagement and enjoyment, then we're failing to do the whole job and we have to take that seriously' (quoted in Hall, 2004: 120).

A decade later the situation remains serious and needs to be taken seriously. Whilst countries and their cultures differ, the EU Expert Literacy Group, in identifying



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the skills and characteristics of outstanding teachers, note, amongst a longer list, that teachers' abilities to 'increase learners' motivation to read and write and their 'strong personal interest in and passion for teaching and reading in particular' remain of crucial importance (EU, 2012: 43). Both international and national studies of children's attitudes to reading signal the value of volitional free-choice reading and of reading literature in particular. Such studies also suggest a need for qualitative research that does not rely solely upon large-scale quantitative self-report data. Whilst useful, such data have limitations; they cannot afford insights about what children actually do as engaged readers, nor can they document children's interactions around reading, whether at home or at school. Additionally, the numerical data collected in PISA and PIRLS, whilst highly influential, cannot afford insights about how teachers can foster reader engagement within or beyond the classroom. The Phase II project *Teachers as Readers: Building Communities of Readers* responded to these concerns and sought to increase children's reading for pleasure at home and at school. It also sought to widen teachers' knowledge and use of children's literature and other texts, and to associate reading with positive, interesting and satisfying experiences for both children *and* teachers.

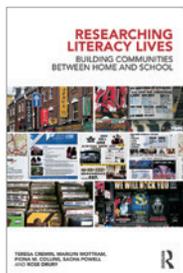


CHANGING VIEWS OF LITERACY AND PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE



2 :: CHANGING VIEWS OF LITERACY AND PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE

MARILYN MOTTRAM AND FIONA M. COLLINS



The following is excerpted from *Researching Literacy Lives* by Teresa Cremin, Marilyn Mottram, Fiona M. Collins, Sacha Powell and Rose Drury.

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Through work in their classrooms, finding out about the children's literacy lives and through research in homes, the *BC: RLL* project teachers were enabled to develop new knowledge and understanding about the children's everyday literacy lives and practices. They were also involved in reflecting upon their own literacy practices and in reading related academic texts. As Edwards (2010) notes, there are often contradictory beliefs within the profession; some educators 'see a family's lack of school-like literacy as a barrier to learning' while others see the 'home literacy practices that are already present – however different from school based literacy – as a bridge to new learning' (189). The project explicitly adopted the latter belief and sought to help teachers explore and extend their own stances and build on the children's home literacy practices that they observed and documented. As the Chief Ofsted Inspector for English, a member of the project's Steering Committee observed: 'What's really important here is what the teachers do with their new knowledge and understanding – what difference it makes' (Jarrett, 2010).

This chapter offers an overview of the shifts in teachers' conceptions of literacy and their pedagogy and practice. Many of the teachers came to recognise the limitations of conceiving of literacy as a fixed unit, a set of skills that can be taught and tested, and began to adopt a social practice approach to literacy. Rather than starting from the more conventional approach of the given school curriculum, the teachers took account of the children's funds of knowledge and sought to integrate these within the curriculum, making subtle pedagogic shifts in the process. A case study explores Viv and Razia's journeys as they learned more about Idris and came to re-shape the one-to-one curriculum provision for him with positive consequences. While embedding this approach more systematically into the wider curriculum represented a challenge, more flexible and responsive classroom approaches were adopted, characterised by greater choice and independence, more space for digital literacy, and more attention to the children's lives and interests.

CHANGING VIEWS OF LITERACY: THE START OF THE JOURNEY

From initial interviews it was evident the majority of the teachers held a view of literacy centred on the original, arguably limited, conceptualisations of reading and writing in the UK government's first National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998) which aimed to raise standards of literacy. While the later Primary National Strategy (DfES, 2006) adopted a broader conception of literacy, included oracy and recognised reading and writing on screen as well as on paper, the need to remain focused on 'the basics' continued to dominate the educational agenda in both political and media



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forums, as indeed it does today (DfE, 2013). An 'autonomous' model of literacy (Street, 1984) continues to underpin policy in England. Framing literacy as a set of self-contained transferrable skills, it recognises neither difference nor diversity in relation to children's everyday literacy practices in different social cultural contexts. Thus the project teachers were oriented towards instructional targets related to the standards agenda; officially they were not expected to pay attention to children's literacy practices beyond those measured by the assessment system.

This orientation was demonstrated through Erica's experience; in her journal at the beginning of the project she explained how she tried to build on one child's interest in fishing to stimulate his reading but that this was difficult because of perceived 'problems':

Erica: There are a lot of children with problems here. Also I try to connect you know to individuals, for example Charlie is keen on fishing – we were just talking in class last year and suddenly he was off – all about bait and that and I thought hang on a minute here – so I tried to get some reading books for him he might be interested in.

Researcher: Does that sort of thing happen a lot?

Erica: No not really I guess – rarely in fact and with the SENCO info – well it's a certain sort of info – if you know what I mean – behaviour problems and special needs and that – as well as social problems at home. (Initial interview)

This position was echoed in other teacher commentaries at the start of the project. For example, teachers referred to 'a lack of support for reading at home', and observed for example that 'it's not the kind of home where literacy counts for much'. These commentaries, which were not atypical, indicate, as Comber and Kamler (2004) point out, that even with the most well-intentioned teachers, pervasive deficit discourses continue to exist in classrooms and are also reflected in records of pupil progress and assessment processes. These can significantly lower teachers' expectations and hinder children's success. Such discourses were not merely employed by the project teachers in relation to children from 'those kinds of homes – if you know what I mean' as one noted, but to children from homes across the socioeconomic spectrum. Initially when teachers voiced their perceptions about their focus on children's literacy, where difficulties existed these were often connected to the support they were perceived to receive at home. For example, 'he struggles but then he gets no support for his reading, his parents just don't seem to be interested – they never sign his book' and 'They both work full time so he gets free rein



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and his homework's never done, but what can you expect?' The strong impression here was that some of the children's homes were deficient in the values and specific literacy practices that schools want to promote.

Additionally, at the start of the project, the teachers, as custodians of literacy in their own classrooms, tended to refer to reading and writing in ways that related to print texts and that focused on the genres expected to be studied. It seems that the work of the New Literacy Studies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000) has failed to permeate many primary classrooms and that initially few of the teachers involved in the project saw literacy as plural, multiple and an evolving set of practices, rather they tended to perceive it as a singular and definable set of skills and abilities, framed by the assessment system. Additionally few were aware of the deep significance of digital literacy in the lives of their pupils and in the same manner, some of the teachers, as others have also noted (Volk, 2004; Gregory and Williams, 2000) did not fully value the linguistic and cultural advantages that their multilingual learners brought to school. While demonstrating confidence in relation to their knowledge of school-focused curriculum requirements for teaching literacy, it was clear that few of the teachers had given serious thought to the richness of the literacy practices of their pupils beyond school. The research team realised that this was a challenge not only because of the size of task, the timescale and the historical context, but also because the majority of the teachers had not been involved in the earlier project (Cremin *et al.*, 2014), and had not therefore been party to developing new understandings about children's contemporary out-of-school reading practices or identities.

To different degrees, during the course of the project the teachers all expanded their conceptions of literacy according to their experience, the different positions held during their careers, the contexts in which they worked and the case study children upon whom they focused. Three strands of the work in particular encouraged the teachers to widen their conceptualisations of literacy in the twenty-first century, to re-view literacy as social practice and to explore the relationship between literacy and learning. They were involved in:

- Exploring and sharing their own literacy practices. This included, for example, teachers creating their own literacy histories and sharing some of their own involvement in literacy and learning in school.
- Developing a range of classroom activities designed to involve the children in capturing and communicating their everyday literacy practices.
- Undertaking Learner Visits in order to learn more about the children's literacy and learning practices in the home.



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LEARNING ABOUT CHILDREN'S OUT-OF-SCHOOL LITERACY PRACTICES THROUGH CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

In an effort to find out about the children's out-of-school literacy practices the project teachers explored a range of strategies which initially focused upon children's personal reading practices at home. Most teachers invited children to bring in favourite texts to share. When two teachers, Sharon and Jocelyn working in the same school, organised weekly paired reading between their classes and a reading group after school, they found that many of the books which the children brought along linked to popular culture and digital media. As Gregory and Williams (2000) established over a decade ago, many children choose such arguably 'unofficial' (Luke, 1988) texts to read at home. Yet in these teachers' classrooms, books linked to television series or films, and comics and magazines were not regularly available for reading. However, through allowing the children to share their favourites, Sharon and Jocelyn began to recognise and significantly validate a wider than usual range of texts in their classrooms. In this way, they demonstrated both to themselves and to the children that textual diversity was both normal and acceptable. In so doing they were arguably broadening their own conceptions of literacy, and recognising themselves as key agents in maintaining or contesting more limited schooled notions of literacy.

Most of the teachers came to recognise this textual and reader diversity and widened their understanding of the significance of texts that resonate with the lives and interests of the learners. This move to explore the material that children read, wrote or designed privately was enlightening; children led their teachers into new textual territories which prompted the practitioners to broaden the range of material that was welcomed in school. Over time this variously encompassed magazines and comics, graphic novels and catalogues, books, fiction and non-fiction, poetry, newspapers – both local and national, sports reports, junk mail and reading online. For example, after developing Literacy Rivers with their classes (collages of their reading and writing over a weekend), Katy and Charlotte were astonished by the diversity reflected in them. Both were completely unaware that particular children had access to and enjoyed Polish comics and magazines, and were surprised by the number of websites, drawing and computer work depicted. They were also encouraged by the enthusiasm that the children showed when talking about their everyday practices which were more diverse, more demanding and more complex than either of the teachers had appreciated. Charlotte noted: 'I had no idea of all of this, it's just amazing – so much more than I imagined', while Katy observed:



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I hadn't really thought about it before and I guess if I am honest I didn't think many of them really read or wrote much at home, there is never anything much in their contact books. But there is masses in their rivers, so many examples, so many different kinds of literacy, hidden literacy really. I'm not sure I'd have seen all this as literacy before. It's certainly different from school literacy.

(Journal)

Through making space to discover the children's home literacy experiences and preferences, the teachers gave public credence, space and time to profile a wider conceptualisation of literacy and came to recognise and affirm the children's interests and the ways in which these texts linked to their identities. Significantly, many also began to question the weight afforded to school literacy.

In one local authority, the project teachers all sent disposable cameras home with their case-study pupils. Drawing on the work of Pahl (2002) and Yamada Rice (2010), the children were invited to take photos of their literacy lives and from the subsequent teacher pupil and whole class discussions about the images depicted, the teachers were able to ascertain a much richer understanding of the children's perspectives of their home literacy lives. Teachers too took photos of their own literacy lives beyond the school and shared these. A key factor in this was that the children had chosen the images they took so that their own preoccupations and interests were at the forefront. It became clear that reading material was linked to television viewing and to toys (Carrington, 2007) and that family members, grandparents, siblings as well as parents, and even pets, were important companions in literacy (Gregory, 2007). In the classes' photographs, screens were in evidence and children mentioned television programmes, and many screen-based games and computer activities as well as writing on paper and screen and text messaging. Most striking was the diversity in types of literacy that the children captured in photographs or mentioned when talking about their literacy practices. This surprised the teachers – while cognisant of technological changes they were less aware of the deep commitment, knowledge and expertise which the young people demonstrated in the resultant conversations about their home-based digital practices.

LEARNING ABOUT CHILDREN'S LITERACY PRACTICES THROUGH LEARNER VISITS

Through the Learner Visits the teachers were able to observe the children in their home environments and learn from their parents about their daily routines, personal



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passions and practices; these helped them learn about the children's literacy lives. However, in the data analysis (post visit) sessions with their linked university-based researchers, many of the teachers had to be prompted to recall whether there were computers, Wii, PlayStations and other forms of digital technology visible in the home. It appeared that the presence of digital texts either did not seem obvious enough for some of them to note, that such technology was 'taken for granted' or was perhaps not yet recognised as an integral part of the children's literacy lives. While several teachers commented upon the size of the televisions observed and the fact that these were often playing unwatched in the background during the visits, (potentially affirming a sense of otherness as part of a deficit discourse), others appeared to demonstrate a degree of 'digital blindness' to the presence of technologies in the homes. Several only began to uncover the layers of media and digital literacy on their second or third visit. In addition, in a couple of instances it appeared that the parents themselves may also have viewed literacy as more conventionally book/print bound, and only opened up and shared examples of the children's digital practices when these were explicitly mentioned by the teachers. It is possible that parents may 'not have wanted to own up' to (as one teacher put it) to other forms of literacy, in case these might be considered inferior by their child's teacher. Mollie's mother, for example, pointed out an easel in her kitchen on the first visit and referred to the fun her daughter had copying words and drawing on it. Children's books were also in evidence. On the second visit, through the presence of Mollie and gentle probing, it became evident that a wider range of non-print based texts were also shared and used by Mollie in her home. Her teacher Freda felt that Mollie's mum wanted to be seen as a 'good mum':

[placing] what she perceived to be markers of this for literacy there so I'd notice them. It wasn't that she was hiding the digital and other popular texts, but I don't think she saw them in the same way, or thought I wouldn't want to see them perhaps?

[Journal]

Was Mollie's mother concerned about being judged in relation to such texts? This raises the important point about the possible relationship between how parents view texts and how teachers, through sending home particular school literacy work, may frame, define and validate a narrow perception of what counts as valuable literacy.

It is perhaps likely that the teachers were looking for, or were more alert to, more conventional forms of literacy, such as books or newspapers. Framed by notions of



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school literacy exemplified in policy documentation and the assessment system, perhaps they did not perceive computers and televisions as textual sources or as the focus of a range of literacy practices. With prompting and through discussion and documentation however, the project teachers identified a rich and diverse range of texts that were in everyday use by the children in their homes and communities. These included, for example Wiis, PlayStations, television, CDs, and mobile phones, their own or their parents' and the computer. The computer was also a rich source of literacy activities including playing computer games, searching for cheats, Skyping, emailing, searching for information about subjects of interest in addition to homework, game playing on internet sites, as well as watching programmes on BBC iPlayer. Observing the children's pleasurable engagement with these multimodal texts in the home, discussing this and the significance of it in children's lives had a significant impact on the teachers' conceptions of literacy. As Andrews and Yee (2006) point out, 'children's own perspectives need to be respected and acknowledged so that stereotyped understandings of their lives out of school are not developed' (14). In addition, however, they draw attention to the fact that in terms of investigating funds of knowledge, 'knowledge is not a static entity and new learning and new interests emerge and develop over time' (ibid.) so that pedagogic practices need to be alert to children's changing literacy experiences in order to accord them validity and build upon them; this is particularly the case in an age when new technologies and multimodal texts are flourishing.

The centrality of talk and the influence of the oral tradition such as storytelling – dialogue and narrative – in some children's families and cultures were also noted by the teachers. They appeared to be particularly visible in multi-ethnic, multilingual communities and where families were in transition; this was expressed emphatically by some parents in such phrases as 'I want her to know where she comes from'. Children's roots, values and cultures as well as experiences and aspirations were seen to be part of their literacy lives and shared through sustained family narratives, such as that of the grandmother who told stories of her childhood in India to her grandchildren in England on Skype from New York. Interestingly, the verbal research medium of interviews and conversations was mirrored in the oral narrative medium of literacy lives explored, moving the teachers' focus away from books and traditional text-based notions of literacy to a broader conceptual frame. In one local authority this was particularly highlighted as teachers noted that 'speaking and listening' in the English curriculum tended to derive from reading and writing, creating a disjunction with the everyday storytelling and dialogue that they heard and saw as a habitual, natural part of some families' lives and cultures. Children's lived experience of talk



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did not relate easily to speaking and listening 'exercises' or time-bound text-based talk activities which some of the teachers' described were part of their spoken language focus. This lack of alignment prompted conversations about the value of oral storytelling and talk as a tool for learning.

INTERRELATED SHIFTS IN CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE

As a consequence of undertaking classroom activities and Learner Visits, the project teachers were challenged to develop classroom approaches that built on the children's literacy lives and fostered positive literacy identities. Their reflections were gathered as an 'asset blanket' of the new knowledge they developed. Considerable discussion ensued about the commonality demonstrated: the agency, autonomy and personal passion observed, the ways in which the children used digital texts with ease and the highly social and interactive nature of their literacy practices. As a consequence, the teachers were invited to:

- continue to consider the consequences of their new knowledge, and their possible re-positioning in relation to children, parents, communities and other teachers;
- be open to what the children shared of themselves and their learning, incidentally and through observation, reflect on what it might mean and seek to build upon it; and
- plan at least one unit of work which explicitly built on the new strands of knowledge identified and the key elements and consider the consequences for themselves and the children.

Drawing upon the research literature and readings discussed at national meetings, the project team and the teachers identified some key elements of classroom communities in which teachers built upon children's funds of knowledge and home learning. The features noted included common elements of good practice, such as offering choice and fostering independence; child ownership of the curriculum; time and space for exploration; collaboration and teachers' full involvement. It was also recognised that building upon children's twenty-first century literacy practices and connecting to their lives and interests meant quite substantially re-shaping the curriculum, not merely making token gestures. Creating relevant, responsive and co-authored curricula that use children's local community and cultural experience as a starting point for building learning is a complex and long-term task, as previous studies and development projects have shown (Thomson, 2002; Comber and Kamler, 2005; Comber *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, this aspect of the *BC: RLL* project was genuinely challenging to the teachers, who were, in the eyes of their LA co-ordinators, more comfortable drawing on the government's required literacy framework (DfES, 2006)



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and planning from set objectives rather than planning from principles which drew on identified knowledge about the children. As one LA co-ordinator noted, they are 'used to delivering a given curriculum, not planning a responsive curriculum built on the learners' practices; this makes it very demanding'. The teachers expressed concerns about generalising from the case study homes they had visited and needed considerable support from the LA co-ordinators and the university-based linked researchers to take the risk and make changes to their classroom approaches and curricula based on their observations and new understandings about the young people's literacy passions and practices. The focus on pedagogy and practice created new opportunities and challenges for the LA co-ordinators too, some of whom moved into a position of more active support for the teachers in their classrooms, as they sought to help them move out of their comfort zones and operate more adaptably, building work around children's home learning.

Nonetheless institutional and wider policy contexts constrained the potential pedagogic developments. As González *et al.* (1995: 107) also acknowledged, while curriculum units connected to households' funds of knowledge were created, the task of 'developing a tangible systemic link to classroom practice has been more elusive'. Rodriquez (2013), in reviewing the body of work connected to and originated in the funds of knowledge approach, questions the sustained transformational nature of pedagogical change, suggesting it focuses more on changing teachers than changing practice. She argues that although in the original work examples are offered of 'how practitioners, within the limits of their very real structural constraints, [can realistically] carry out emancipatory and liberatory pedagogies' (González *et al.*, 2005: 2) their efforts are always local and, she suggests that the approach 'never distances itself theoretically or in practice from the surrounding environments of neighbourhoods and society' (Rodriquez, 2013: 112).

Notwithstanding these concerns and the challenges relating to the *BC: RLL* teachers' inexperience at responsive curriculum planning, the practitioners did seek to build on what they had learned and over time some began to adopt more flexible and responsive classroom approaches. These were characterised by: greater choice and independence, more space for digital literacy, and more attention to the children's lives and interests, though such attention did not always follow through into sustained curriculum transformation. As they worked to 'turn around to the children' (Comber and Kamler, 2005: 7) they came to recognise the young people's knowledge, capacities and interests, and began to see these as potential assets for learning. In several cases teachers came to re-connect with young learners whom they had chosen to case study and developed more permeable curricula.



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OFFERING MORE CHOICE AND FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE

In appreciating that in the home most of the children made their own choices about their after-school activities and demonstrated considerable independence and volition as learners, most of the project teachers worked to offer more choice and nurture the children's competence as decision makers and autonomous learners in school. In so doing they arguably shifted from enacting more highly performative pedagogies to offering more control to the learners as in competence pedagogies (Bernstein, 1996). These are not simple dualisms however; teachers may employ both a product-oriented pedagogy and one more focused upon the learner at different times, though tendencies can be seen. The data suggest that the project teachers, drawing on their experience of children's agency in the home sought to afford them more space for self-regulation in school, thus orienting more towards competence pedagogies. For example, Charlotte who taught 6–7-year-olds observed: 'For me now, it's more about creating opportunities for the children to get involved in their own learning, by asking them what they want to do and learn about.' This was a marked shift for Charlotte, who in her own words had for planning purposes 'always relied upon downloads before' and now was seeking to make the curriculum relevant offering more choice and 'opening it up to them and not always letting the learning objectives dominate'.

Another teacher, Sophie, the deputy head in her school, noticed that 10-year-old Jo, whom she saw as a 'behaviour problem' in school showed considerable organisational ability and independence at home, choosing, shaping and following through activities related to his own interests, as well as collaborating with family and friends in ways that were supportive of their needs. Sophie was conscious that in class, she offered relatively few opportunities for children to make their own choices and decisions or to take responsibility for their learning in collaboration with others. Working with the oldest children in the school for whom the assessment stakes were high, it may have been the case that Sophie tended towards enacting performance pedagogies, which Bernstein characterised by a focus 'upon a specific output of the acquirer [learner] upon a particular text the acquirer is expected to construct and upon the specialised skills necessary to the production of this specific output, text or product' (1996: 44). In this more 'visible' practice as he describes it, the sequence, pace and criteria for assessment of the products will be known to the pupils in advance. After the Learner Visits in Sophie's account of her practice she appeared to be enacting a more competence oriented pedagogy in which 'the hierarchical rules, the rules of organisation and criteria were implicit and so not known to the pupils'; what Bernstein (1996: 109) describes as invisible pedagogic practice. For example,



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Sophie planned some open-ended choice driven project work, and set aside quite extensive periods of curriculum time for this which was not led or directed 'in the way I usually do' as Sophie observed. Jo found the independent project work on the theme of Exploration highly engaging, and chose to focus on Christopher Columbus. Unusually for him he completed four pieces of homework in a row about this topic, though these pieces were not 'set' in the usual manner with clear expectations, but remained open as spaces for the children to pursue their project work in whatever way they wished. In this way her practice afforded greater agency to the children. Jo also produced detailed drawings for his project with considerable enthusiasm. He knew that his teacher, who had seen his artwork at home, would credit this expertise and perhaps perceived he had been given 'permission' and the independence to use this skill in school. In this way Sophie began to stand back and avoid over-intervention, making the curriculum more accessible, building on the children's expertise and increasing their volition. She commented: 'now I actually let the children run some things. It's a control thing, 'cos if I take away some of my control they're actually easier and more engaged.' In addition, she deliberately took some of the pressure off them, since through the Learner Visits she had come to realise that the parents' aspirations for their children were not focused entirely upon academic standards: 'it's not the be all and end all in their lives; it is in school because that is what we're measured against, but it's not their only concern.' As she loosened the reins of the curriculum, she offered more opportunities for individuality and child-led activities and perhaps also loosened up herself in the classroom. (See Chapter 7 for a case study of Sophie learning about Jo.) Furthermore, she sought to offer more collaborative work and commented on the consequences for the boys she had visited:

At home they both helped family members; in school they both tended to dominate, so I set up more group work with less competition and more collaboration. It hasn't all been plain sailing, but they have worked in teams . . . Jo was great helping Emma, just like he helped his sister. I told him so and he grinned.

(Journal)

Issues of control and ownership of the curriculum were also raised by several of the LA co-ordinators, one of whom also noted that their teachers had become 'less controlling of the learning and provision' and were showing an increased 'respect for what and how children want to learn'. This was marked across the project and built upon the self-directed literacy practices seen within the home. It reflected not only less emphasis on performance pedagogies and more orientation to competence



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pedagogies, but also a 'pedagogy of mutuality' where teachers recognise pupils' agency and build relationships to enhance learning so that 'the distribution of expertise in classrooms and schools shifts and pupils and teachers become self-regulating learners' (Murphy and Wolfenden, 2013: 271).

INCLUDING MORE DIGITAL LITERACY

Despite the wealth of research evidence demonstrating that children's literacy practices in the home are varied and frequently focused on digital media and popular cultural texts (e.g. Marsh, 2004; Grieshaber *et al.*, 2012) it appeared that few of the teachers in the project had previously recognised the breadth of these experiences or considered their place in children's literacy development. As they began to do so, and saw these practices embedded in social contexts in the home, some of the teachers challenged themselves to make more use of the pupils' digital expertise, so that learning in school was more closely rooted in children's life experiences and connected to their expertise.

On visiting the homes of Molly and Lucca (both 4-year-olds) Freda was 'amazed' as she observed each of them log onto the computer and connect to the internet. She found that their favourite sites included Ben 10, Club Penguin and C Beebies, that Molly's hero was Diego (a character from the Nick Junior website), that she regularly texted her uncle on her mother's phone, was devoted to her Mamma Mia DVD and knew many of the songs by heart. Also that Lucca, a young Italian child could access his favourite apps on the family iPad and was knowledgeable about them, often seeking out new ones in the App Store. Freda had not fully appreciated before that this was part of the competence of such young children and while she was somewhat nervous of using technology in school could see this had potential:

I would have shrunk away from it in class and might have said, 'that's for when they're a bit older', but because I know now that they're really into the computer at home I try to bring digital things into the classroom more, so the camcorders which I would have been terrified of, I could see that they're so comfortable with. The power of image as well because they do watch a lot of DVDs, and bringing that into the school is a good way forward.

[Final interview]

Offering the children increased chances to use the computer and the digi-blue cameras for the first time had several consequences in her classroom. Lucca was



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new to the area, had not attended a local nursery and had found it hard to settle in the school, but when he was given the chance to use and share his digital expertise, he developed increased assurance and standing in the classroom:

Watching Lucca now I mean he helps everybody in the class if they're going on the computer. He goes through all the different tabs to get to the website so he's using more when he's doing that, he'll shrink away from having to read a school book but he's accessing loads on screen.

(Final interview)

Freda also established a project with her reception children that involved visits from a number of the children's and other local grandmothers to share their skills and life experiences, passions and interests with the children. There were mini teach-ins on yoga, cake baking, philately and gardening for example, some of which were filmed by the children. Significantly, the visits also involved the children teaching their visitors about using digital technology, giving demonstrations, writing instructions and labelling pictures showing how to text, to access and use internet sites and download games for example.

Several teachers, however, did not build explicitly on the children's digital practices, and the discontinuities between their home and school literacies in relation to the use of new technologies remained. In the context of their homes the teachers documented that the young people were engaged in purposeful interactions with multimodal screen-based texts, and although they began to recognise this, they did not feel sufficiently well equipped to bridge the boundaries in school and were uncertain about the way forward. Whether this uncertainty emerged from the tensions around their own identities as literacy teachers in this new media age is not known. There are resonances, however, with McDougall's (2009) assertion of a professional identity crisis in the primary phase due to the changing face of literacy. Sophie, for example, while recognising: 'it's where we have to go, because that's what their future is' and 'it's a huge part of their skill set', perceived she lacked the expertise to plan a curriculum involving digital analysis and production: 'I'm not a digital phobic or anything but I am just not sure how to build on all this.' Sophie and several other teachers explained their limited use of new media for learning on the grounds that they did not feel that they had the assurance or skills to engage with digital texts meaningfully in class. Such a lack of confidence, McDougall (2009) suggests is characteristic of professionals in 'survival mode' and that this creates tension and a reluctance to move forward into curriculum action. It may be this also relates to the 'digital blindness' noted earlier, where some of



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the teachers appeared not to recognise the presence of digital texts in the home. Was this because unconsciously they were concerned about their capacity to facilitate such learning though their teaching? As Bearne (2009: 184), points out, teachers' awareness and use of 'the semiotic resources of different modes and media and a sense of their distinctive qualities', linked to 'deliberate teaching' are essential if children's contemporary communicative practices are to be given status in the classroom and curriculum. While Sophie might be described as in 'survival mode', like some of her colleagues, she may have been caught in competing discourses which on the one hand espouse new and more progressive views of 'literacy' as plural, while policy and institutional discourses reflect more traditional views. Such tensions, created by coming to terms with competing expectations, can leave teachers 'expressing emotions ranging from a steely determination to resist change, to feelings of confusion, guilt and frustration' (McDougall, 2009: 6). However, some of these tensions may have acted as catalysts to change. The opportunity to undertake Learner Visits and to see 'first-hand' the breadth of digital literacy practices in the home arguably helped many teachers move away from a traditional approach to literacy and in the process not only widened their understanding of new literacies, but opened up for them the relationship between literacy and learning and learning and literacy.

Where teachers felt able to respond to their newly acquired knowledge of children's multi-literacies experience, they noted shifts in pedagogy which altered some of the messages about ownership and control in their classrooms and prompted subtle changes in power relations. Some sought to use the children's evident expertise and knowledge about digital and multimodal texts as a scaffold for new learning, and built upon their prior experience and their enthusiasm. However, including digital and multimodal texts in classroom activities is not an automatic route to a more responsive curriculum. Developing multiliteracies pedagogy (New London Group, 2000; Unsworth, 2001) is not in itself sufficient; there is need, as Lankshear and Knobel (2006) argue, for a new mindset. As the project showed, teachers have to be in a position to recognise the funds of knowledge about texts children possess, to reflect critically on their own practice, and to be able to co-construct a pedagogy that can accommodate the shifts in power necessary for greater space to be afforded to children's expertise with and experience of contemporary multimodal and digital texts.

BECOMING MORE FLEXIBLE, ATTENTIVE AND OPEN

Following the Learner Visits and the teachers' increased awareness of children's learning assets, many voiced the view that they perceived there was more openness



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and attentiveness in the classroom. One described this as: 'I open up and let the children in now', perhaps referring to her own sense of sharing as well as a more open attitude in the classroom. Moll *et al.* (1992) argue that listening to children, observing them and learning from them is critical and this was evident in the project, as one teacher noted: 'I've slowed down a lot, and take more time to listen to the children and not just say oh I haven't got time for that ... I make the time.' As the project progressed there were various examples of the teachers being more open to what the young learners brought to school, whether this was in the form of physical artefacts, comments in informal conversations or was expressed in their written work, attitudes or responses. These were attended to more assiduously. As one teacher observed when a child in her class had commented her father had been telling her stories 'without books' she immediately wanted to know more. She found he was a professional storyteller and invited him in to school, noting 'in the past I reckon I would just have said "that's nice" and left it at that'. The teachers commonly sought to create spaces within the curriculum which enabled them as practitioners to connect to the children's personal interests, lives and passions. One found that when she turned her role play area into a building site, it was not only the case study child who revealed an in-depth vocabulary (as she had expected having done Learner Visits) but others too, based she perceived, on having fathers in the trade. Several tried to be less predetermined in planning work and allowed more time and space for children's funds of knowledge to both be drawn upon and help shape the unfolding unit of work or activity. Rachel, for example, teaching a class of 6 and 7-year-olds, began to make use of a new 'Show and Tell' time which she perceived became: 'an unexpected source of information regarding children's literacy practices and identities'. While unsure whether this activity might be seen by other staff as 'time-consuming or elitist', Rachel persisted with it and found the children valued the sustained time to talk to their friends about subjects and objects of their own choosing and recent activities. She believed that setting this time aside to 'actually listen properly' helped her to recognise the highly agentic role children took in their out-of-school lives, some of their multiple literacy practices, the influence and involvement of their siblings, and the potency of popular culture on their emerging identities. She also noted the children brought passion, enthusiasm and motivation and were keen to listen to others, enabling in her words a 'mini-community to be created'.

Later Rachel built on these insights through her Learner Visits; in one she visited 6-year-old Oliver's home where she found he was an ardent Batman fan. He liked dressing up as Batman while watching the film and often acted out the scenes as they were being shown and in role voiced lines from the text 'as if in his own world'.



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He also had a Batman game on his PlayStation. As Kinder (1991) argues, such transmedia intertextuality is frequently present in children's play as they take pleasure in engaging in the same narrative in a variety of forms, whether through digital texts, print-based media or in play. In talking to him about his Batman PlayStation game, Rachel found that the language Oliver used in this animated conversation was far more advanced than she had heard him use before. Although he was on the Special Educational Needs register at school, at home he used a specialised language and knowledge about the text and could read difficult vocabulary, including for example: 'driving level, gas mask and poisonous spray'. Additionally, and unprompted, he wrote with passion and more skill than usual about his hero while at home. Realising the significance of this for Oliver, Rachel invited him to bring in his costume into school, dress up and talk to the class about being Batman. They kept it a secret between them and he changed in the school office, later leaping into the classroom and taking up Batman poses and posture. In role he responded with assurance to questions about his daily schedule, his friend Robin, imaginary objects attached to his belt and so on. As she noted:

It demonstrated a 'fund of knowledge' which I might not have tapped into had I not done the interview with mum and probed a bit more . . . It seems to reveal a wealth of interest, motivation and experience around the character, vocabulary specific to the character, plot and genre, and merchandising.

(Journal)

Afterwards, in order to support his academic progress, Rachel sought to ensure the extra literacy help Oliver received was embedded in a strong narrative context, linked to Batman and other popular cultural heroes. His investment in this cult figure highlighted for Rachel, as the other teachers also noted, that children's knowledge, experience and home practices may remain invisible in school and their resources for learning may remain unused, unless teachers seek to establish the resources buried deep within their 'virtual school bags' (Thomson, 2002). The teachers repeatedly voiced the view that they had come not only to see the children differently, but that they were learning to listen in new ways, to 'really hear' as one noted. Another commented: 'my ears are open now, both ears rather than just one of them'. As Charlotte commented:

It feels like I pay more attention to them as children now, I listen harder and think, what is he telling me, why is he saying this, rather



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than just nod and move on if you know what I mean? . . . I find I can make connections if I try, they may not be earth shattering, but it's personal and they know it.

(Interview)

These more attentive child-focused approaches indicate a disposition towards a more culturally responsive pedagogy (Conrad, 2012) which recognises culture as a lens 'through which human beings experience the world and is an integral part of their students' identities, worldviews, etc' (31). However, as Conrad warns, such a disposition has to be deeply embedded if it is to contribute to a culturally responsive frame: 'to engage in personalized pedagogy, what is being taught and how it is being taught, has to be meaningful to the teacher and cannot simply be something the teacher says or does' (2012: 32).

Those teachers who were able to 'open both ears' and had the confidence to take time with learning, not be driven by the perceived demands of curriculum delivery, found that their practices fundamentally shifted to accommodate to the newly acquired information about the children's diverse communicative practices, capacities, interests and cultural investments.

PLANNING FOR A MORE PERMEABLE LITERACY CURRICULUM

The project teachers frequently commented upon the increased flexibility and assurance needed to shift to a more responsive curriculum, which also connected to the prescribed curriculum and its multiple objectives. They were very challenged by this strand of the work and some faltered, though many planned work which offered more choice and created more 'open' spaces in which teachers and children could explore together, taking an arguably more iterative journey across a day or in a unit of work, rather than a more prearranged route. In addition, the content of units did not always remain the exclusive domain of the teachers, nor was the plan rigidly adhered to; rather the teachers sought more explicitly to share some of the responsibility for the selection of content and areas of enquiry with the children. As Kara noted: 'For me what's been important has been making the curriculum flexible enough to allow time for children's interests to be addressed . . . and I'm working on making learning relevant for the children, I want them to own it.' There were multiple examples of teachers making small shifts and being more open to what young learners bring, as well as sharing more of themselves with children and parents and helping to build new kinds of communities. Some of the teachers were supported in moving from the



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pervading school-centric culture and prescribed curricula by individual headteachers who, through meeting with their project teachers and learning about the insights gained from the Learner Visits, were more open to developing a curriculum more connected to the children's funds of knowledge. As one headteacher observed: 'how dare we have created and imposed a curriculum all these years that doesn't have anything to do with the children's lives?'

One of the pairs of project teachers, who sought to involve all members of staff in building on the new knowledge and understanding of children's home learning practices, described how their curriculum planning became more focused on children's needs and interests and less focused on set outcomes. They talked about tensions between two seemingly irreconcilable approaches: the need to keep high expectations of all children ensuring the highest possible outcomes related to the standards agenda and the need to plan more flexibly for learning that is more open-ended and responsive to what the learners bring:

I think what we tend to do is . . . over-scaffold the learning. We try to ensure the best work from all the children – and we really try to ensure their success really. But it just doesn't leave any space.

[Final interview]

The Learner Visits provided new insights about how rich and diverse the children's everyday interests and cultural practices were outside school and the teachers in this staff team were eager to find ways of organising learning in school to take account of this, nevertheless they found this very demanding:

But, how do we do this? How do we build on this so that we have a curriculum that is more child-led but still providing challenge and high quality learning opportunities for all the children?

[Journal]

As they planned literacy units of work, the staff team considered whether or not there were sufficient opportunities for children to have ownership and make choices about the learning and whether there was sufficient space for connections to be made to children's lives and interests. They were willing to be more flexible so that time could be well-matched to learning and not pre-planned. One pair started a unit of work by sharing a personal memory box with the class:



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The idea of using memory boxes was a perfect starting point for our poetry work. So, for example, this class is very boy-heavy and we really didn't think that they would respond to the idea of sharing memory boxes – after we shared our own memory boxes we weren't certain whether they would engage, but actually they took it on wholesale. In fact they took over. It became theirs!

(Final interview)

The teachers were surprised and delighted at the change in attitude and motivation, but the breadth of learning took unexpected turns:

They came up with this list of protocols to support their individual presentations and some basic rules about how everyone was to be respectful ... and they even made sure that there was a timetable for presentations [to each other's class's] each day and this time was secured. It was really really good. And so much writing came from it.

(Final interview)

In this context it appeared the children were afforded more control and seized it; they exercised their individual and collective agency and the teachers took more of a facilitative role and perceived that this subtly shifted their relationships with the young learners, who were 'eager to lead and more committed than usual'. As a consequence of appreciating the rich multidimensional nature of the children and the families whose homes they visited, the project teachers came to recognise the need to flex their classroom approaches in order to enable increased choice and ownership, more links to the digital practices of their world and more openness on their own part. They began to see that the perceived boundaries between school and home learning were in fact less clearly defined than they might have supposed and that there was value in validating home literacy experiences and connecting to them in the classroom. In commenting upon the consequences of the Learner Visits in relation to developing the curriculum, one LA co-ordinator summarised her perception of this enhanced permeability by observing that in her group there had been:

- *A move from sometimes uninspiring and unquestioning following of a given curriculum towards a more innovative and confident approach which takes into account the unique nature and literacy practices of the individuals in the class.*
- *Less controlling of the learning and provision and respect for what and how children want to learn.*



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- *Greater respect for the children and their families; less judgemental and assumptive attitudes.*
- *More openness in trying to understand what the learning needs are, based on genuine interest in their backgrounds, their personal and their family strengths. (Report)*

It appeared that teachers and LA co-ordinators were beginning, many for the first time, to acknowledge the crucial significance of creating learning environments that allow agency and decision making to be experienced by all learners and to develop curricula which were more open, permeable and responsive to children's everyday literacy lives beyond school. There were also local links made in one school to a community theatre project which foregrounded the history of the local community and to which the project teachers, their classes and the children's families were specifically invited to contribute. This not only honoured the teachers' new knowledge but widened it still further, providing a connected curriculum focus which expanded well beyond the remit of the actual project year.

However, it should be acknowledged for many of the teachers, radically reshaping the curriculum around children's funds of knowledge was a step too far in the highly prescribed and controlling accountability culture in which they worked. Many of the younger practitioners expressed the view that they had not been expected to plan literacy curricula before and explained they were used to relying upon commercial plans or plans received from the school's literacy co-ordinator or age phase leader for example. Significant support was needed for these and other teachers and although as described above, there were forward moves, the tight timeframe of the project with only the summer term for such explicit development work (following the Learner Visits), constrained these developments still further. While there was some discomfort in attending to practices aimed to open the school to home knowledge and make the curriculum more permeable, there was also productive friction in taking risks in order to increase understanding. For some of the teachers in the project, the work meant coming to understand and acknowledge that they were in a position of power in defining for parents and children what counts as valid and valuable literacy. Greater cultural responsiveness led to asking themselves some hard questions about their own – and the school's – role in either creating or breaking down barriers to learning between home and school experience. What became clear, however, through observation and practice, was that when the teachers adopted a more open and responsive approach in the classroom, there was a marked difference in the children's motivation and engagement as learners. This can be seen in the following case study.



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VIV AND RAZIA LEARN ABOUT IDRIS: A CASE STUDY

This case study shows how one teacher steadily developed a more open and flexible approach to teaching literacy and to learning as a result of developing her pedagogy to accommodate recognition of the children's funds of knowledge. Viv, the Deputy Head and Razia, who taught 10–11-year-olds both worked at St Mary's Primary School in a large city authority where all the children speak languages other than English at home and in the community. (See Chapter 8 for a fuller case study of the school as a whole.) Razia and Viv identified 3 children aged between 10 and 11 as their focus group for the project:

We selected three children from different ethnic groups, different home languages and different abilities. They were chosen for different reasons: hard-to-reach parents ... the older children often came in alone or they were being tracked for literacy ... reluctant writers.

(Interview)

One of these children was Idris. Viv recorded what she knew about him:

I am working with him for one-to-one tuition and find him fascinating. ... He is a level 3a reader but he doesn't usually read much at home. He needs a lot of support with spelling and sentence structure.

(Journal)

Figure 6.1
Idris' Draw a Reader





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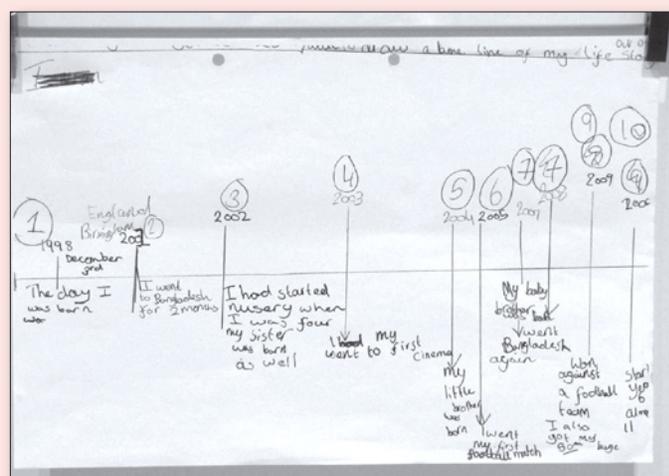
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She expressed concern for him as an unmotivated reader, who did not read much at home and was not a library member. Later that term, however, when the class were asked to draw images of a reader, Idris chose to draw an 'X Factor' contestant showing Jamie Archer as a reader (see Figure 6.1).

In Viv's session with him she was able to talk to him about this and his other popular cultural and reading preferences. She discovered that they shared a love of biographies and was thrilled to find they also shared a similar sense of humour. The nature of the one-to-one tuition sessions began to change as Viv was able to make connections with the things she now knew about Idris' interests and choices. As he enjoyed biographies they decided to write autobiographies and Idris planned his by plotting his timeline (see Figure 6.2), including:

- 1998 – The day I was born.
- 2001 – I went to Bangladesh for 2 months.
- 2002 – I had started nursery when I was four, my sister was born as well.
- 2003 – I went to my first cinema.
- 2004 – My little brother was born.
- 2005 – I went my first football match.
- 2007 – My baby brother was born, went Bangladesh again.
- 2009 – Won against a football team. I also got my 50m badge.
- 2009 – Started Year 6.

Figure 6.2
Idris' timeline





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In noting events that marked important times in his life, Idris shared these with Viv and this opened up additional discussions. In this way she was able to develop new knowledge about him which she perceived began to have an impact on their relationship in the one-to-one sessions and beyond.

VISITING IDRIS AT HOME

In undertaking Learner Visits to Idris' home, Razia and Viv who went together began to expand their knowledge and understanding of this young Bangladeshi boy. On their first visit they were accompanied by Anna, a support teacher. All three teachers walked to Idris' home after school one day. Idris led the way. Viv recorded her feelings:

The household visit really does begin long before you enter the home. We walked from school with Idris chatting away, telling us about the shops as we walked past: 'In God we Trust' written in Arabic over one of the shop doors. The road was very busy with lots of litter and fast food venues, food being sold on the pavement, chicken roasted on a spit, groups of men standing around – so very noisy. Razia said it was a 'buzz' and 'like Pakistan'.

[Journal]

The team all noted how proud Idris seemed as he 'marched ahead, leading the way'. When they arrived at the flats Idris pressed the buzzer and called upstairs. As they began to walk up the steps to the top floor flat, other children came out of the various flats and were peering over the balcony smiling and laughing:

There was such great excitement that we were visiting Idris' family. Samara had her head through the railings! There are six children in the family and it's a two bedroom flat!

[Learner Visit notes]

As the team entered the flat they all immediately noticed and recorded some salient things:

A nail was prominent on the door and the school book bags were hanging there. Idris immediately hung his book bag on the nail. Music was playing in one of the flats below, the toddler was singing and playing with a small pile of books, the Qu'ran was on the shelf,



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and there was a faint smell of curry cooking in the kitchen.

[Learner Visit notes]

Viv, Anna and Razia talked about being struck by the warmth of their welcome and by the way that the atmosphere lightened very quickly when Viv shared some of her own experiences living in the area as a child when her own family arrived from Ireland to settle in England. Sharing this experience opened the door for Idris' mother to talk about her life in Bangladesh. The team noted how proud his mother was of her children's successes. She spoke to them about her eldest son, Jugpal for example explaining that:

He started at St Mary's when he was aged five, he couldn't speak any English and I couldn't speak any English either ... he couldn't do anything ... and now he is nearly twenty and he is finishing college.

[Transcription from home visit]

She also talked about Idris' sister Samara who had started at the local secondary school. Idris showed them some books that Samara had brought home from the school library for him and it was clear there was a tiered support system between the siblings for reading, books and school work. Throughout the visit Idris' 2-year-old brother was playing at reading some picture books and he repeatedly took books to Viv to read to her. As the teachers commented afterwards the audio recording was constantly interrupted by the baby shouting, laughing and singing. When Idris' older brother, Jugpal arrived there was additional laughter and evident camaraderie, as he teased Idris about his love of Michael Jackson and passed comments on Idris' skills at X-Box and football.

After the visit, Anna's reflective summary noted that for her the salient moments were:

- *The nail on the wall*
- *The tiered down effect of older siblings reading with young ones*
- *Samara bringing books home for Idris/Idris reading to his younger brother*
- *Mother reading books brought home by Samara*
- *The little board books that were on the floor for the baby*
- *The sharing on the computer with Jugpal and Idris. (Journal)*



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A key consequence for all three teachers was the immediate impact the Learner Visit had on their relationship with Idris at school. Razia captured this when she commented, 'I saw him differently, I just saw him differently because I knew him as a whole person.' Viv also added that Idris' mum had seen her across the playground the next day, and came straight over to her and gave her a hug.

The initial notes about Idris (recorded in his teacher's portfolio) suggested that he did not read at home, that he was disaffected, unmotivated and that the family did not use local facilities such as the library. The Learner Visits revealed that Idris did read at home – both on and off screen. By adopting a more inclusive view of what counts as reading, the school team were able to see a greater breadth of reading experiences in Idris' life. He engaged with his X-Box and with computer games and digital texts daily with his older brother. He enjoyed biographies linked to popular celebrities, was a football fan keen to follow his team's results, and enjoyed watching popular TV shows like *X Factor*. Additionally they noted his sister brought books home for him from her school library and he even ordered some from her, requesting another in a series or books his friends had recommended. It was clear that the siblings supported each other's learning and the teachers also found that his mother reads their school books too – for her own learning. Idris' parents deeply value education: the nail on the wall and its incidental yet daily use was a potent sign of the importance given to school books in his home. The Learner Visits, in which the teachers were positioned as learners and enquirers, uncovered a complex web of learning processes and social interactions across a diverse range of situations and contexts in Idris' life. They raised questions about learning and pedagogy and the implications of a deeper understanding of Idris' and other learners' cultural and socio-historical situations.

THE EFFECT OF RECOGNISING IDRIS' FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Viv's discoveries about Idris and her fuller understanding of his potential for learning are a reminder of the need for pedagogy that is informed by authentic knowledge of children's home learning and literacy experience, the 'informal' learning highlighted by Moll *et al.* (2013). There is a danger that if these funds of knowledge are not taken into account, children will lose confidence in their own literacy practices (Levy, 2009) or, worse, become alienated from an educational system that they feel they cannot or do not wish to 'buy into'. Views of situated learning have led to an understanding of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) but this case study, and the project as a whole, suggests that there should be a closer focus on where the communities of practice of the school and the home intersect and overlap. If, as Wenger (1998)



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argues, communities of practice develop through 'the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise' (45) then, as argued in Chapter 2, the classroom needs to become a site which fosters the mutual exchange of children's and adults' funds of knowledge and the basis for the development of a newly forged community of practice. When Viv learned about Idris' home literacy experience and interests, she found a new dimension of shared understanding which not only informed her classroom practice, but shifted her view of literacy learning and where it might be located. Lave (2008), in arguing against the generally held view that learning means moving away from the ordinary and everyday, sees such a view as creating divisions and polarisations, shown in this project as a separation between home and school knowledge. He posits: If learning isn't movement away from ordinary social existence, perhaps it is movement more deeply into and through social existence (Lave, 2008: 13).

An intersection between the community of practice in the classroom and that of the home offers the possibility of such a move into and through a newly forged social existence, where pedagogy and the curriculum become hospitable to the children's funds of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Initially working with fairly narrow conceptions of literacy, defined by the education system and its attendant assessment framework, many of the teachers came to expand their understanding of literacy significantly and sought ways to reflect this enriched and more diverse conception of literacies in school. Although some lacked confidence about linking to and extending children's digital competencies, even the most digitally averse teachers came to see the importance of home digital and media experience. In taking a more culturally responsive stance, the teachers not only widened their professional horizons, but began to work to recognise and validate the everyday literacy lives and popular cultural interests of the children, creating more responsive and flexible curricula that sought to build on the children's funds of knowledge and learning practices observed in homes. Not only did many of the teachers reconceptualise literacy to encompass a social literacies perspective which acknowledged the multiplicity of children's communicative practices, in some cases these new understandings led them to question the dominant discourse and encompassed shifts in power relations in the classroom.

There were significant changes in teachers' self-perceptions and professional practice, though many found this mediational work between home and school difficult in relation to fully transforming the prescribed curriculum. There are many



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potential barriers to shifts in practice becoming embedded within and across schools, especially if the school discourse about literacy is tightly framed and if national policy is changing (this was happening at the end of the project). If the school itself is not a community of practice, then individual teacher action may be significantly hampered. In re-examining the significance of 'productive pedagogies', developed in order to create more equitable educational experiences for marginalised students, Lingard and Keddie, drawing on Giroux, note that:

Maximising the potential of the productive pedagogies is supported by a particular kind of teacher – a public and oppositional intellectual who takes seriously 'the supposition that in order for social arrangements to be otherwise, they must be able to think and act' against the grain.

(Giroux, 2003: 6, quoted in Lingard and Keddie, 2013: 444)

In the *BC: RLL* project, some teachers found it hard to go against the grain, whilst others found the friction caused by doing this resulted in a more satisfying and reflexive pedagogy, one that built upon a conception of literacy as social practice – as contextualised and culturally embedded – recognised the significance of the children's actual uses of reading and writing in everyday life and sought to build bridges between home and school practices. However, opening the classroom (and, indeed, the eyes and ears of the teacher) to new forms of text or different kinds of knowledge is not without risk. Some teachers were able to run with complexity and uncertainty as they strove to assimilate their growing awareness of the children's and families' funds of knowledge. That others were not so able to do this, or maintain their initial impetus in making changes, does not suggest wrong headedness or recalcitrance; rather, it may indicate the persistent pressures and constraints of the politics of literacy and the curriculum. In accountability cultures which retain a highly stratified view of learning, space for the development of professional knowledge or the emergence of a newly forged professional mindset is limited. This makes the contribution of participatory research projects even more significant, as they afford opportunities to develop new knowledge and understanding, question and contest poorly conceptualised policies and explore possible ways forward theoretically and pedagogically.

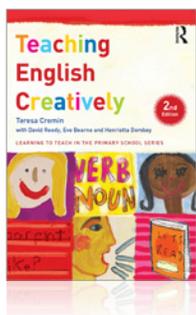


CREATIVELY ENGAGING READERS IN THE EARLY PRIMARY YEARS



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HENRIETTA DOMBEY



The following is excerpted from *Teaching English Creatively, 2nd Edition* by Teresa Cremin.

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching children to read is neither a trivial matter nor just a technical task. For both children and their teachers, it is probably the most momentous achievement of the early school years. So, primary professionals should approach it thoughtfully and creatively. This chapter focuses on teaching reading creatively to 5–7-year-olds and looks at how teachers can support the questioning stance of young learners, helping them to apply this both to lifting the words off the page and also to making sense of what they read. In addition, it reflects on teachers as readers, on enriching children's responses to reading and encouraging their independence.

The first two aims set out for English in the NC (DfE, 2013: 3), that all pupils in the early years of primary education should 'read easily, fluently and with good understanding', and that they should 'develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information', need to colour all teachers do in the name of teaching reading. In the Northern Ireland Curriculum (DENI, 2011: 1), it is expected children will 'read, and be read to from a wide selection of poetry and prose; read with some independence for enjoyment and information; and read, explore, understand and make use of a range of traditional and digital texts'. To achieve these laudable aims, which are echoed in the Scottish and Welsh curricula, teachers need to understand the complex process of literacy learning and be imaginative in their approach to both children and the task of teaching them to read. A 'tick box' approach will not produce fluent, perceptive and committed readers, nor will the rigid separation of word identification from comprehension.

Learning to read, particularly in English, is difficult for most children. Teachers need to constantly demonstrate that it is not just a series of arbitrary tasks that children need to do to please the teacher, but a communication system that is worth the effort. Teaching reading well means tapping into the energetic desires of children to make sense of the world and to connect with the people in it. So, although it is often useful to focus on one aspect (such as particular spelling patterns or story structure), this does not mean that this complex endeavour should be segmented into its component parts, with each of these addressed in turn and in isolation from the others. A narrow conception of learning to read as primarily concerned with learning phonics may conflict with the idea of reading that children bring to school and restrict their understanding of what reading has to offer.



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PRINCIPLES

Children have to learn how to make the black marks speak – out loud at first, and later in their heads. However, the English language, with its complex spelling, makes lifting the words from the page much more difficult than it is in other languages, such as Italian or Finnish, that are fortunate in having more regular spelling systems. So, if children are to persist, teachers need to make reading and learning to read both pleasurable and creatively engaging. Unfortunately, England's primary schools are less successful at building positive attitudes to reading than those in most other comparable countries (Mullis *et al.*, 2012a), and this has an impact on children's decoding proficiency and their readiness to make the most of the written word. If teachers are to help children understand themselves and the world around them in complex ways, then reading must be made a creatively engaging activity for them, one that they will choose to do outside school, as well as inside it.

Becoming familiar with the language of written texts is an essential part of this early learning, for written language is very different from spoken language. It tends to be more tightly constructed, both at the level of the sentence and over large stretches of text. This is true for texts ranging from shopping lists to novels and is certainly true of texts written for young children. Extensive written texts also tend to use a wider range of vocabulary. So, if they are to become effective and enthusiastic readers, children need to become familiar with the language of books, to experience making sense of the world through this language, and to take pleasure in its power. Children need to taste the fruits and experience the rewards of learning to read if they are to invest the necessary energy, commitment and focused attention that are required.

'Learning to read is fundamentally a task of learning how to orchestrate knowledge in a skillful manner' (Bussis *et al.*, 1985: 113). To achieve this orchestration requires both creative teaching and creative learning. However, it is certainly not the case that anything goes: all teaching acts should be shaped by principles arising from knowledge and understanding about how children learn most richly. In reading, these include the following:

- *Learning to read, write and talk are interdependent.* As the NC (DfE, 2013) states, 'Spoken language underpins the development of reading and writing'. There is substantial evidence to support this view (e.g. Clark, 1976), and talk can also be enriched by reading as is evident when a more experienced reader mis-pronounces a word encountered in print. Similarly, it is clear that what children read influences their writing, and writing can also make them more aware of how authors make choices and structure the texts they read. So, teachers need both to plan specific



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activities that encompass reading, writing and talk, and also to work to make the schoolday a ceaseless interplay of language in all its modes.

- *Reading is an active, creative process from the earliest stages.* In order to make sense of the text in front of them, children need to make creative use of both their knowledge of letters and spelling patterns and also their knowledge of other texts and the wider world. Making imaginative links to their own experiences and engaging as active constructors of meaning are important from the earliest stages.
- *A rich experience of stories and poems has a central role to play.* While it is essential that children learn how to read non-fiction texts, it must be acknowledged that poetry and stories have a particular power. Through literature, we all experience other ways of looking at the world and can savour the heightened use of language. Through poetry, children can take pleasure in the patterns and rhythms and the evocative power of memorable language. In re-reading their favourites, they gain practice in decoding words and making deeper meanings from them. Narrative enables us to give shape and meaning to experience and can inspire and excite, giving children a powerful incentive to read and offering deep satisfaction. This is essential if children are to persist and engage with the large quantity of text that is necessary if they are to become effective readers. It is particularly important for those who start school with a limited experience of being read to (Lefebvre *et al.*, 2011).
- *The experience of hearing stories has particular importance.* For decades, it has been established that listening to stories enriches children's literacy learning in powerful ways (Bus *et al.*, 1995). Creative teachers read aloud frequently, offering children a rich experience of narrative and providing common points of reference.
- *The texts that children experience out of school are significant.* Text pervades children's out-of-school lives. Most learn early to 'read' signs such as McDonald's and the labels on the coffee jar and their favourite sweets. Eye movement studies have shown that children attend even more closely to the words in such 'environmental print' than they do to the words in stories (Neumann *et al.*, 2014). Teachers also need to find out about their preferences and the techno-literacy practices in their homes and communities, their 'funds of knowledge' (Moll *et al.*, 1992), in order actively to build on these in school, while also introducing them to other texts that extend their grasp of the world. Young children's experience of text may be largely digital: they come to school with a breadth of experience of such texts, many of which involve written language (Carrington and Robinson, 2009; McPake *et al.*, 2013).
- *Play provides a vitally important context for young children's literacy learning.* Play of different sorts (role-playing the teacher, fantasy role play, play in the home corner) can give children the opportunity to rehearse and integrate what they have



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learned about literacy at home and at school, and also to extend their literate behaviour (Wohlwend, 2011). Play can provide a 'third space', where children can bring different 'funds of knowledge' into conversation with one another (Levy, 2008).

- *Assessment of children's experience, strengths, needs and interests is central.* Numerous research projects show that successful early teaching of reading always takes account of individual learners' literacy skills and experiences (Pressley *et al.*, 2001; Taylor and Pearson, 2002).

These principles connect to the conception of creative practice permeating this book. Their implications are explored in the sections below. Adopting a creative approach to early reading involves engaging in a variety of classroom experiences, including, as national curricula across the UK emphasise, the teaching of both letter-sound relationships and comprehension. However, a creative approach means more than this: it is also concerned to foster children's imaginative engagement in meaning making that matters to them.

TEACHING PHONICS CREATIVELY

There may be a temptation to view the teaching of phonics as the antithesis of creative teaching, as an exhaustive and exhausting drilling in phonic rules. Certainly, the statutory requirements for children aged 5–6 years in England look daunting (DfE, 2013: 10). However, phonics can be conceived of and taught as a creative enterprise. Such teaching needs to be set in the context of a rich and rewarding experience of written text. Given the vagaries of English spelling, children need a commitment to the language and meanings of written text, if they are to make phonics work for them. Research evidence that has stood the test of time shows that the most effective phonics teaching places it in the context of making meaning from text (Medwell *et al.*, 1998; for a review, see Hall, 2013). Recent research into eye movements has also shown that more effective learners, even children taught by a strictly phonic approach, aim to make sense of what they read and should be encouraged to do so (Brown *et al.*, 2012).

Books such as *Tanka Tanka Skunk* by Steve Webb, *Wriggle Piggy Toes* by John Agard and many by Julia Donaldson, Dr Seuss and others can make this learning meaningful and fun-filled. Such enticing and highly patterned books enable children to participate in playing with the sounds of words as they read and make meaning. Treating children as active learners makes the process more enjoyable for both teachers and children. So, although phonics teaching needs structure, it is also necessary to appeal to children's inventiveness and make use of their interest in language play. Useful guiding structures are provided by *Letters and Sounds* (DfES, 2007), which sets out a sequence for teaching



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the correspondences between spoken and written English that operate at the level of the phoneme. It also includes activities for teachers and teaching assistants to use to implement this teaching. However, a number of these are fairly rule-bound, with little appeal to children's inventiveness, and need to be supplemented with activities of a more engaging and open-ended nature. Playing with magnetic letters can involve children in inventing nonsense words and their meanings, the most interesting of which can be displayed on the classroom wall.

Collaboratively constructed class alphabet books or friezes can give children a greater sense of possession of their own learning than commercial ones. This is especially true if children's own interests and experiences are drawn upon in the creation of the book or frieze. Popular culture print – names and catch phrases from TV shows the children know, in the print format they are used to at home – can be useful, with the children being invited to match these with the same words in the classroom format (Vera, 2011).

Rhyme and analogy have a key role to play when someone is learning to read English spelling. It is not infallible, but rhyme is often a better guide to a word's pronunciation than synthetic phonics on its own, providing a more direct route to decoding than sounding and blending each phoneme. So, drawing an analogy with a familiar word such as 'ball' is more helpful to a child trying to work out an unknown word such as 'fall' than sounding it out letter by letter. Young children need experience of playing with language through rhyme and alliteration (Bradley and Bryant, 1983) and instruction in onset and rhyme (Goswami, 1999). Songs, rhymes and tongue twisters can all develop children's phonological awareness and are extensively used by creative teachers who seek to adopt a playful approach to language, highlighting pattern, sound and rhythm. In addition to introducing children to memorable examples of language play in books such *Chicky Chicky Chook Chook* by Cathy MacLennan, and playground rhymes and chants, teachers can help children construct their own nonsense rhymes and play their own phonic games. This could include 'silly registers', where the teacher adds a rhyming epithet to children's names, or creating alternative variations to 'Two Little Dicky Birds' and other rhymes.

Many children have reliable phonic knowledge but do not always put it to use in reading. They need extensive demonstrations of how this is done and opportunities to do it themselves in supported situations. Perhaps the most creative aspect of teaching phonics involves teachers in seizing unexpected opportunities to draw children's attention to letters, words and sounds, as they seek to make learning to read a positive and engaging experience.



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Children who experience some difficulty in phonics learning may be significantly helped by well-designed computer-assisted reading interventions. One such is GraphoGame (<http://info.graphogame.com>), developed at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland and adapted for English in two versions, one based on phonemes and one on rhymes. Six- and 7-year-olds in England, who spent a total of 11 hours over 12 weeks playing GraphoGame, made considerably greater improvements in their reading than classmates who did not have this opportunity (Kyle *et al.*, 2013). The rhyme version was particularly effective.

READING AND LEARNING

Outside school, young children like to read jokes, magazines, comics, fiction, TV books and magazines, signs, poetry and websites (Marsh, 2011; Clark, 2013). Many children show a preference for multimodal screen texts (Nestlé Family Monitor, 2003). Children as young as 5 demonstrate sophisticated expertise in on-screen reading, influenced by experience gained at home through friends and family. Extensive use of DVDs also appears to contribute to children's early awareness of screen conventions (Bearne *et al.*, 2007). So, classrooms need to be hospitable to a wide range of texts, reflecting the range available in twenty-first-century digital homes. The texts teachers choose for inclusion should all have something interesting to say and be capable of opening new doors, as well as making connections between home and school. Encouraging children and parents to add to the class collection can make the classroom a lively meeting place for the children's different out-of-school experiences and help children develop an integrated understanding of what literacy is about and how it works (Rogers and Elias, 2012).

However, stories and poems in books still have a potent role to play in teaching children to read: nothing else offers such a rich experience of language, such an infectious demonstration of its powers. Reading stories and poems aloud in an inclusive and involving way makes this language available to children and is an essential daily practice throughout primary school. Creative practitioners draw extensively from literature and invite children to engage in other worlds and imagine other possibilities through sharing a wealth of powerful narratives and poetry with them (Gamble and Yates, 2008).

Some children come to school having experienced over a thousand story readings, many of which will have been tuned to their particular interests and experiences by people who mean a lot to them. As well as enlarging their sense of the world and how people live in it, this daily encounter with the language of written text widens their vocabularies, extends their command of sentence structures and gives them a sense



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of the shapes of stories and poems (Purcell-Gates, 1988). So, these children approach the business of learning to read with a strong sense of the rewards it can yield and also a familiarity with books and the language of stories. They know the kinds of thing books say and the sort of language through which they are said. Put this together with phonic knowledge, and they can move forward with assurance.

However, others will have considerably less experience of books on arrival in school. So, teachers need both to value the print with which children are familiar (e.g. environmental print, household labels, TV guides and DVD covers) and also to initiate them quickly into the pleasure of hearing stories and poems read aloud. Teachers may choose to start with alluring, wordless texts that involve high drama and encourage the reader to turn the page. When such 'reading' is established, teachers will want to read books that reverberate – texts that speak to the children and bear considerable re-reading, ensuring that the experience of listening is an active one. However, such reading aloud needs to be fully interactive. Through joining in, speculating on what might happen next and checking to see if this is the case, children can identify with the characters and situations and make connections to their own lives in the process. This is possible well before the start of primary school, as the following example demonstrates.

It is towards the end of the summer term in a nursery class where only one child has been read to at home before school. However, since the start of the school year, the 3- and 4-year-olds have been involved in active exploration of picture books through a daily 'story time'. They have learned to predict what will happen on the next page and to check carefully to see whether they are right. Today, however, Lee is wriggling, as his teacher, Nicky, is reading a carefully chosen text for the first time – Leo Lionni's *Fish is Fish*, a story of friendship between a minnow and a tadpole. Lee is successfully re-engaged as Nicky comments:

'Fancy that, Lee, fancy waking up in the morning to find you'd grown two little legs in the night!' A few pages later, the minnow, having leapt out of the water in imitation of his friend, lies stranded on the bank.

'He began to die' reads Nicky.

'But the frog might push him back!' shouts out Lee.

Instead of asking him not to call out, Nicky responds, 'D'you think he might? Let's find out and see'.



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This sort of approach to reading has a value that endures throughout the primary school. The texts will change, but the teacher's open invitation to the children to join their teacher and the author in constructing meaning should ensure that reading is a truly creative activity, both when children are engaged in shared reading and when they are reading independently. Part of the significance of a story is always that it might have been otherwise. In Pat Hutchins' *Rosie's Walk*, for example, each time Rosie the hen sets off on her odyssey around the farm, her life is at risk, as she is unknowingly being followed by a fox. The enduring pleasure of the text lies in the tension between the possible, as presented in the pictures, and the actual, as presented in the verbal text. Texts such as this and the work of picture-fiction creators such as John Prater, Colin McNaughton, Jeanne Willis, Emily Gravett, Lauren Child and Philippe Dupasquier, for example, offer considerable imaginative scope. Novels, too, offer similar pleasurable tensions and rich possibilities for readers to imagine, create visuals in the mind's eye, ask questions and engage affectively.

Shared reading of Big Books, whether in paper or electronic format, gives an unrivalled opportunity for children to combine their growing knowledge of the language of books and how stories work with their developing skill in word identification, and to make meaning together. 'Home-made' posters of poems provide similar opportunities. Books with a simple repetitive text, such as *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen, *Mrs Wishy Washy* by Joy Cowley and Quentin Blake's *All Join In*, bear repeated re-reading. And children can be helped to identify key words such as 'mud' with the aid of their phonic knowledge, as well as some of the more common 'tricky words', such as 'the' and 'to'. The aim should be to ensure that reading the text is not a laborious exercise in word identification, but a quest for pleasurable meaning in which word identification contributes to the process, rather than distracting from it.

Repetition has an important role to play. Hearing the story for a second or third time gives children the opportunity to deepen their understanding and, where a Big Book is involved, to recognise more of the words. Re-reading favourite stories is also hugely helpful in developing fluency.

TALK AND CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Children need to establish connections between their own experience and the texts they encounter in school. Life-to-text and text-to-life connections enhance the significance of both. 'Is your bedroom like that?' asked a nursery teacher, as she showed the children the forest growing in Max's bedroom in Maurice Sendak's *Where*



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the Wild Things Are. Leaving space for children to think, connect and voice their thoughts is a crucial element of creative practice. Teachers' questions and comments can guide children to identify their own connections, but, in addition, the voicing of children's own questions and puzzlements needs to be actively encouraged.

Moving around in an imaginary world can greatly enhance children's pleasure in text. If the role-play area is turned into the Three Bears' kitchen, the 'Zoopersmarket' from Nick Sharratt's book or a magical castle, children can get right inside the story. More informally, hats or masks for outdoor play may help young learners re-enact the week's key book. Props of all kinds, as well as puppets and storybags, can also support retellings, and, in improvised classroom drama, children can explore gaps in the story and deepen their understanding of the particular text and their larger awareness of the possibility of texts in general. Powerful texts provide rich spaces for all forms of improvisation. For more ideas on developing children's creativity in role-play areas and through drama based on fiction, see Chapter 3.

The most important talk happens as teachers read and explore powerful stories with children. The meanings of written texts can only be fully realised through active engagement, through connections with first-hand experience, identification with the characters, wonder at their circumstances or moral judgement about their actions. Making story time the site of such open explorations is a rich and thoroughly enjoyable way of initiating children into reading for significant meaning. By engaging in this process together, children can support one another and so learn more than they could on their own (Vygotsky, 1978; Mercer and Littleton, 2007). To do this, children need to listen to and build on each other's contributions. This means that teachers need to take a less dominant role in the process than they usually do. They need to listen to and respect children's comments and questions, creating an atmosphere in which all observations are welcome, provided they enrich the process of making sense of the text. Teachers can repeat or expand a pertinent observation in a way that invites other contributions. 'What does anyone else think?' asked his teacher, when Charlie, aged 5, interpreted one of the early pages in *Farmer Duck* by Martin Waddell as indicating a flood. This prompted close examination of the picture and consideration of the story so far, in an interchange in which three other children made overt contributions, leading another to make an apt prediction.

Teachers have privileged access to printed text, but it can be highly productive to relinquish an all-knowing role, handing it over to the children to decide whether a particular prediction was right and encouraging them to use the evidence of both words and pictures. Once the children have a purchase on phonics, it can even be



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useful for teachers to make carefully chosen errors in their Big Book reading, provided they are confident that a child will correct them. For example, when a teacher of 4–5-year-olds read, 'No, said his mum', Freddy, in outraged tones, corrected her, saying, 'Look, it's got a "the" in it, so it says "mother", not "mum"'. The teacher acknowledged her error and reminded herself out loud how important it is to look at all the letters.

TEACHERS AS READERS

Teachers' attitudes to reading and their knowledge about children's literature and other texts can markedly influence their capacity to teach reading creatively, their ability to engage learners in extended units of work based on texts, and their ability to foster independent reading for pleasure. Unfortunately, many primary professionals feel less than confident in this area and tend to rely on the books they enjoyed as children (Cremin, Bearne *et al.*, 2008; Cremin, Mottram *et al.*, 2008). In a survey of 1,200 teachers, UKLA found there was evidence that teachers relied on a narrow canon of children's authors and, in particular, had very limited repertoires of poetry and picture fiction (*ibid.*).

In relation to picture books, when asked to name six picture-fiction creators, only 10 per cent of the teachers could do so, and a worrying 38 per cent named only two or one. Remarkably, 24 per cent named none at all (Cremin, Mottram *et al.*, 2008). The highest number of mentions by far was for Quentin Blake (423), and four others were mentioned more than a hundred times: Anthony Browne (175), Shirley Hughes (123), Mick Inkpen (121) and Alan Ahlberg (146). Some of these picture-book makers were also named in the 'authors' list. There were also 302 specifically named books whose authors were seemingly not known or could not be recalled while the teachers were completing the questionnaire. These included, for example, multiple mentions of various Martin Waddell and Jez Alborough titles. However, without knowing the authors, teachers cannot seek out more of their books, or recommend the writer or illustrator to children.

So, many teachers are not in a position to encourage children to branch out and taste the powerful texts produced by a wide range of authors, nor to teach as creatively as they could with the invaluable support of contemporary writers and illustrators. To widen their repertoires, teachers can use a number of strategies, including regularly visiting the local library with the class, working with librarians and other teachers to share texts, reading Saturday review sections in newspapers and browsing in bookshops. There are also a number of excellent printed guides and websites to help teachers extend their knowledge of good books for children. These include:



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- Gamble and Yates' *Exploring Children's Literature* (2008) is packed with productive ideas.
- *BookPower Year 1* (Bunting, 2009) and *BookPower Year 2* (Bunting *et al.*, 2010) are publications that put literature firmly at the heart of literacy teaching. Both contain suggestions for programmes of literacy teaching and learning, based on children's texts of high quality, 'chosen because they will stir children's ideas and feelings and involve them in discussion' (www.clpe.org.uk/publication/2).
- *Books for Keeps* (www.booksforkeeps.co.uk) is a magazine, packed with book reviews and recommendations and published six times a year.
- The Book Trust (www.booktrusted.co.uk/books) is a free-access website that constantly updates its recommendations.
- Write Away (www.writeaway.org.uk) is a free-access website with information on new books.
- Seven Stories, the centre for children's books in Newcastle upon Tyne, has a good recommendations area on its free-access website (www.sevenstories.org.uk).

Most teachers do some reading for pleasure. By alternating adult fiction with books written for children, they can extend their knowledge. This may rekindle some of the pleasures of childhood reading and will help teachers to share new books more effectively with children, to tempt them into new texts and guide their choices. It is also certain to make the process of exploring literature in class more varied and enjoyable for all concerned. This approach is supported by research evidence. In a careful and wide-ranging survey, Medwell *et al.* (1998) found that knowledge of children's literature was one of the key features distinguishing the most effective literacy teachers from their less effective colleagues.

RESPONDING TO READING

Learning to read, as outlined above, is about learning to orchestrate knowledge on a number of different levels, from word, to sentence, to whole text. It is a complex process, but, in the most successful classrooms, children encounter engaging texts and learn how to put their technical knowledge to use in making sense of them (Hall, 2013). Reading in these classrooms always involves response, both the reader's response to the words and the teacher's response to the reader's attempt to make sense of them. To develop active, engaged readers who approach reading with enthusiasm, carry it out effectively and relate what they read to what they have learned elsewhere, both kinds of response are crucial.



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So, whenever teachers model reading, they need to model a response to the text, whether it is 'That sounds tasty!' to the dinner menu, or 'I'm not sure I would wish for that!' to one of desires expressed by the *Fish Who Could Wish* by John Bush and Korky Paul. Whenever children read to teachers, their responses should be invited. Sometimes, predictions may be appropriate; sometimes, it may make more sense to ask for genuine clarification, as I did of my 7-year-old daughter: 'I don't understand. Is Robin Hood outside the castle trying to get in, or inside trying to get out?' Frequently, it may be to make connections with the children's own experience: 'Have you played a game like that?' Teachers voicing their own responses can elicit responses from children and prompt questions, which are central to learner engagement in the activity of making meaning.

There is a danger that responding to text orally is not perceived as a legitimate literacy activity, because it doesn't look like work. But it serves three essential purposes. Through refocusing the reading on meaning, it promotes comprehension in all its complexity. Through helping children make personal sense of texts, it makes reading more enjoyable and fosters the positive attitudes that children in England lack. Through encouraging reflection on such matters as moral issues and the writer's skill, it enables children to become more discerning readers. So, responding to text is a central part of learning to read, not an optional extra.

Formative assessment of children's reading requires a rather different kind of response. Effective teaching is always informed by continuous assessment of how the children are doing, against identified learning goals and targets. This involves watching what they do and talking with them. Many teachers use notebooks to make brief, concrete, dated observations about each child's reading. These might include comments on a spelling pattern the child is finding problematic or surprisingly easy, the child's need to slow down and look at words more carefully, or to speed up and focus more on their meaning. Effective teachers also note how a child copes with complex sentence structures, their readiness to read for pleasure, their persistence in doing so and their newly acquired interest in a particular author. The richer teachers' conceptions of reading are, the more creative their responses are likely to be to individual children. Such day-to-day observations help teachers decide when to wait, when to intervene and what to point a child towards. This knowledge is useful in whole-class, small-group or one-to-one contexts. It is helpful to go through the notebook systematically once a week or so.

Children need both to hear their teachers' reflections on their progress and to make their own observations. They need to be helped to appreciate and articulate their



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strengths and areas in need of attention. This can be formalised in jointly agreed target setting that takes into account the importance of engaging with and responding to texts. An agreed response target might, for example, be 'find three books that I would want to read again and recommend these to others'. There should be a time when the child's progress towards this is reviewed.

FOSTERING CHILDREN'S INDEPENDENCE AS READERS

In a sense, all the activities mentioned above are about fostering independence. From the nursery on, however, children also need time when they read self-chosen books, individually or in twos or threes. At first, they may just turn the pages, commenting on the pictures. As they become familiar with the language of books, they will start to 'talk their way through' them, drawing on their knowledge of how stories work. Children in all age groups choose their texts and read them for pleasure: it's not the time to urge a child to choose a 'harder' book. Re-reading a much-loved text can have a number of positive effects.

Although younger children cannot be expected to be silent, as they have to talk to think, teachers tend to aim for a quiet hum and model the process by reading themselves, or use the time to work with an individual or group. Many teachers working with 6–7-year-olds introduce quiet reading with a daily 10-minute session, expanding this by degrees, across a year, to 30 minutes or so. Teachers also often include a short plenary, in which readers can share enjoyable incidents or pictures. However, effective teachers of reading don't use reading as a filler activity for children who finish other tasks early, as this does nothing to encourage concentration. Instead they offer word searches or maths puzzles.

A system of taking books home, some to be read by the child and some by the parent, helps strengthen connections between home and school and fosters independence. It has repeatedly been shown to be effective in improving children's reading, in research summarised in DCSF (2008). Here again, choice matters. The more familiar teachers are with children's books, and the better they know the children, the more they will be able to guide their choices effectively, first of all by the selection of books available in the classroom, second, by whole-class 'taster' sessions of these books, and, third, by individual recommendations. A number of other activities can actively foster children's growing independence as readers, some of which are noted below:

- *Offer guidelines in making choices:* 'Look at the cover. Is this an author/illustrator you know? What do you think it might be about? Read the blurb on the back. Still interested? Read the first page and see if you want to turn over' can be useful



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advice. The books teachers read aloud, however, may have the biggest influence on children's choices.

- *Offer a diverse range of texts:* Create boxes with comics and magazines, joke and poetry collections and non-fiction books on subjects that interest the children. Offer these for quiet reading and to take home.
- *Involve children in book ordering:* It is important to involve the children in selecting new books, perhaps through voting for favourite authors, or examining websites and publishers' catalogues.
- *Create a class library/ book area:* Class libraries and book areas should be both orderly and highly appealing. Boxes are easier to riffle through than shelves and can be arranged by topic and moved around to keep the display fresh. Comfortable book areas, which the children help to plan and create, can make reading more inviting, as can book displays and comments encouraging children to try new authors and titles.
- *Promote book ownership:* It is hardly surprising that possessing books is connected to reading proficiency. Developing a parent- and child-friendly way of selling books increases the potential for commitment to reading. A school bookshop run by parents, with savings cards available and stock from a local bookshop on a sale-or-return basis, can make a real difference, as can publishers' book clubs. For other possibilities, see Lockwood (2008).
- *Join the national Young Readers' Programme:* This enables children to choose up to three free books a year to take home and keep. The programme draws on the expertise of local teachers and librarians. To find out more, see www.literacytrust.org.uk/yrp
- *Connect to the local library:* Signing children up as members and taking them on visits can help, as can inviting the librarian to visit and share new titles, and encouraging them to register on the Summer Reading Challenge. See <http://summerreadingchallenge.org.uk>
- *Organise a book-swap day:* Everyone, teachers and parents included, brings a book to exchange for a book ticket, the books are spread out in the hall, and classes visit to choose different books. Class books swaps are also worthwhile.
- *Organise a book week:* This needs to be planned well in advance and should preferably include the involvement of a children's author. The benefits of a well-organised book week are enormous in terms of raising the profile of reading.
- *Shadow a children's book award:* Buying or borrowing the shortlist of the Kate Greenaway award or the UKLA book award for children's books can help introduce new books and engage the children in the process of text selection.



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CONCLUSION

Teaching young children to read can be a tiresome and frustrating business, if a rigid phonics programme dominates and if reading instruction is not concerned with reader engagement. However, if teachers treat it as a joint voyage of creative exploration, in and out of the spelling patterns of English, as they travel through stories and poems, sharing inventions, wonder and laughter along the way, it can be a source of pleasure and satisfaction for teacher and taught. And the children are much more likely to become committed, engaged, imaginative and successful readers.

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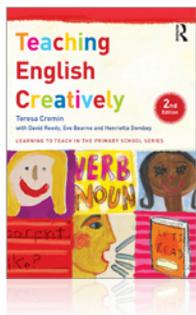


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TERESA CREMIN



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INTRODUCTION

Once children have learned to read, the continuing challenge for teachers is to help them become engaged, enthusiastic and fluent readers who understand the pleasures and value of reading, and who choose to read beyond the demands of the curriculum. Helping children develop into such readers requires more than simply giving them opportunities to read longer and increasingly complex texts, although such experiences are important. This chapter focuses on teaching reading creatively to 7–11-year-olds; the primary focus is on supporting deeper engagement with texts through creative approaches that build a reflective reading culture within the classroom, develop children's understanding of the texts they read and encourage personal responses, including critical readings. It also looks at how teachers can support children as they develop and expand their reading preferences and highlights the importance of teachers' own experiences and knowledge of children's books in building communities of readers.

National curricula across the UK include the requirement to help readers develop a love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment. For example, the English NC (DfE, 2013: 3) aims to ensure that pupils 'develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information'; the Northern Ireland NC (DENI, 2011) states that, in the later primary years, pupils should 'engage in sustained, independent and silent reading for enjoyment and information'. These statutory orders and those in Wales and Scotland also suggest an acknowledgement of the importance of the reader developing personal preferences and responses to reading and developing their capacity to understand, analyse and evaluate texts. In a creative classroom, as well as through independent, private reading, these elements should be developed by experience of reading as a social activity, where readers share their responses and experiences within a community of readers.

PRINCIPLES

Creative teachers of reading who teach to promote children's engagement with and response to texts, and who seek to build reading fluency at this age, use pedagogical practices underpinned by a number of principles. These include:

- valuing reading and reflection;
- knowing that understanding (comprehending) texts is critical to engagement, enjoyment and learning;
- providing potent and engaging texts;



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- recognising the importance of talk around and in response to texts;
- building a reading culture within the classroom (including reading aloud to children);
- encouraging independent reading and personal choice (including texts from children's twenty-first-century culture);
- offering clear modelling through their own reading experiences, responses and expertise;
- giving supportive feedback and suggestions for further development.

Various factors have been identified as important in teaching reading. Based on an extensive research review, Pressley (quoted in Harrison, 2002: 16) listed those factors he regarded as 'research proven' in the teaching of reading. Removing the use of decoding skills from his list as being largely used in the early reading stages, the list contains the following: encourage extensive reading; do explicit work on sight vocabulary; teach the use of context cues and monitoring meaning; teach vocabulary; encourage readers to ask their own 'Why?' questions of a text; teach self-regulated comprehension strategies (for example, activating prior knowledge, visualisation, summarising); encourage reciprocal teaching (teacher modelling of strategies and scaffolding for independence); and encourage transactional strategies (an approach based on readers exploring texts with their peers and their teacher).

The teaching approaches of reciprocal teaching and exploring texts with peers and teachers that Pressley (*ibid.*) identifies are central to the collaborative, reflective and supportive ethos found in creative and playful classrooms. However, the specific teaching strategies he mentions, such as teaching comprehension strategies and vocabulary, need to be embedded and contextualised in the extensive reading of exciting and affecting texts (Cremin *et al.*, 2014). This is because becoming a fluent reader does not just mean getting quicker and more accurate at automatic word recognition and recognising an increasing number of words. Although fluent reading – being 'the ability to read with comprehension, accuracy, speed and appropriate expression (prosody)' (Johns and Berglund, 2006: 3) – involves using cognitive skills, becoming an engaged and motivated fluent reader means much more than this.

Children who are not engaged and motivated to read do not benefit from reading teaching (Wigfield *et al.*, 2004; Krashen, 2011). Becoming an engaged and motivated reader has social, emotional and cultural dimensions and involves the reader in seeing a purpose for reading. This is supported by children positioning themselves as a reader within a social, collaborative community, with shared practices and expectations. It also involves readers in responding to the feeling and emotions in



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texts. Sensitive and creative teachers of reading seek to create a community of readers within their classrooms, a context in which children's diverse cultural capital and home literacies are acknowledged, and creativity, speculation, experimentation, play, risk taking and reflection on reading are all encouraged.

READING AND LEARNING

Reading is a central tool of learning and one that underpins learning across the curriculum. In order to learn from reading, readers must engage with the text they are reading in a way that ensures that what they read connects with what they know and stays in their minds afterwards; that is, readers need to read actively, making links with what is already known and expanding or adjusting schema to include the new information (Rumelhart, 1985; Wray and Lewis, 1997). However, readers come to texts with many different purposes – they may want to identify specific information, get a sense of what it was like to live in a particular time, entertain themselves, and so on. Rosenblatt (1985) distinguishes between two different kinds of reading: efferent and aesthetic. In efferent reading, the reader's attention is centred on what should be retained after the reading, such as information to be acquired or a process to be followed. In aesthetic reading, readers focus on what they are living through during the reading and pay attention to ideas, characters, images and so forth. Of course, either kind of response is possible to most texts, depending on the reader's stance. Creative teachers of reading seek to maintain a balance between these two kinds of response in literacy sessions and across the curriculum, for example, seeing the aesthetic potential within information texts, as well as using them for information gathering and textual analysis. (See Chapter 10 for discussion of non-fiction texts.)

A study of World War II at KS2, for example, will involve reading information books on the topic, watching film materials, exploring written and visual artefacts such as ration cards and posters, and searching the Internet for relevant websites, which need multimodal literacies to be read. These reading events offer opportunities for efferent transactions and – in creative classrooms – aesthetic transactions. A ration card, for example, could be viewed as an information source, but it could also prompt discussion, drama and role-play about queuing for supplies, the desire for rare foodstuffs and the struggle to feed a family. In planning to work creatively, teachers need to consider their purposes for examining texts, as they will prompt different stances.

Learning about this period should also involve reading narrative, poetry and first-person accounts. These offer rich opportunities for the reader to engage with the emotions, sights, sounds and smells experienced. Emotionally engaging stories



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about this period include, for example, the novels: *Goodnight Mr Tom* by Michele Magorian, *Line of Fire: Diary of an unknown soldier*, translated by Sarah Ardizzone, *Once* by Morris Gleitzman and the picture fiction books: *War Boy* by Michael Foreman, *My War Diary* by Marcia Williams, and *Rose Blanche* by Christophe Gallanz, edited by Ian McEwan. Each of these offers powerful opportunities for readers to be involved in aesthetic transactions with the text. Creative teachers often offer a summary of several novels and then negotiate with their class which of these might become the core book for their extended unit of work, which will also encompass writing. As Clark (2013) has shown, young people who read above the level expected for their age also write above the expected level, and the inverse is also evidenced. Reading challenging texts to children and fostering independent reading remain important in the later primary years. Creative teachers will also recommend texts to readers, perhaps seeking to stretch the oldest primary children's understanding about war through suggesting Mal Peet's *Life: An exploded diagram* (set in the time of the Cold War) or Jason Wallace's *Out of the Shadows* (about a newly independent Zimbabwe), during a unit on war.

TALK AND PLAYFUL ENGAGEMENT

Through talking about texts, learners come to articulate and share their thoughts, feelings and ideas, and listen to those of others. Talking about and questioning a text enables children to share their understanding and puzzlements. Hearing the ideas of others may deepen their understanding and offer new insights, as social enquiry promotes metacognition and reflection. Creative teachers encourage curiosity and ownership of the learning process, enabling focused conversation to enrich comprehension and the development of empathy. As Maybin (2013: 65) argues, 'imagination and creativity, emotional and moral engagement and humour and fun are all intrinsically important aspects of children's responses to fictional texts'. Through book discussion circles, book groups, book buzz sessions, book swaps, book recommendation slots, *X Factor*-style book awards, guided reading and so on, creative teachers of reading develop an ethos where response to texts is taken as the norm in the classroom. They encourage and support talk by asking open-ended, higher-order questions and spend considerable time encouraging children to ask these too. Their questions and enquiries, their interests and confusions can lead to discussions around texts, supported by their teachers, who help them make connections both to their lives and to the text. The 'Tell me' approach (Chambers, 1993) and the use of literature circles offer examples of how such discussions can be organised and guided. See Chapter 8 for more details.



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Spending time on a powerful, affecting book can enhance the quality of the talk, as discussion becomes more informed and complex over time. If this is picture fiction, it can be revisited, and new insights can be discovered. Highly potent examples that trigger discussion include *The Wolves in the Walls* by Neil Gaiman, *Black Dog* by Pinfold, and *Belonging and Mirror* by Jennie Baker (both of these Baker texts have no words, but prompt curiosity and conversation). Gathering collections of books that explore particular themes enables contrast to be made and diversity to be recognised. For example, books that explore bereavement and loss, such as the novels *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness and *My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece* by Annabel Pitcher, or the picture texts *The Scar* by Claire Moundlic and *The Heart and the Bottle* by Oliver Jeffers, offer rich material for reflection, when sensitively read and discussed.

Focusing on a single novel too can also enable teachers to teach reading skills in context. A creative teacher used the class novel, *King of the Cloud Forest* by Michael Morpurgo, with 10–11-year-olds over several weeks, to encourage aesthetic responses and talk and teach comprehension skills in context. The result was a high level of motivation, understanding and engagement. The text is full of action, emotion and dilemmas and offered plenty of opportunities for discussion and drama, encouraging personal and critical responses and building understanding through creative activities to develop empathy, inference and deduction. It linked to the theme of mountains, being studied elsewhere in the curriculum. The class was used to working on a class novel over a period of weeks, with the teacher reading aloud, alongside reading in independent and guided contexts. Reading journals, in which the class recorded comments, questions and drawings, were also kept (see Chapter 8 for more details).

Modelled by the teacher, the class developed an ethos of discussion and listened supportively to others' ideas during extensive book talk. The children were encouraged to reflect, both on their growing understanding of the story, and on how this had happened. Encouraging the children to be metacognitive – to think about how they had learned, as well as what they had learned – is part of the process of creating reflective readers (Kelley and Clausen-Grace, 2007).

To foster close attention to the text and deduction, and to teach visualisation as a skill that can enhance understanding, the children made a map of the compound after reading the first chapter. This involved careful re-reading and deduction and helped children 'see' the setting, as well as read about it, enabling their teacher to assess their comprehension of the story so far, and enabling them to make



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connections to map-making/scale plans in geography and mathematics. Throughout, they noticed how the descriptions of the mountain environment and its weather gave richness to their studies in geography.

A compare-and-contrast activity was used to illuminate the relationship between the main character and his best friend. Children noted that, over time, the main character began to question what his father told him. This led to drama and an intense debate about tolerance, with the class drawing on their own lives for examples. The respectful ethos being developed, where talk and risk taking were encouraged, meant that one child felt able to reveal that his parents had divorced because of different beliefs. This aspect of the story touched on a deeply personal experience and enabled the child to examine it.

Freeze-frames, drama and hot-seating were used throughout to consider cause and effect and develop empathy, and the boy's decision whether or not to leave was explored in a conscience alley. Critical and alternative viewpoints were encouraged. After drama activities, children sometimes completed a 'think, feel, say' grid from a chosen character's perspective.

The class also reflected on the characters' changing emotions. Key points were noted on a board using post-it® notes, and groups arranged these on an emotions chart, which triggered further discussion. Finally, emotions graphs were made that involved identifying effective vocabulary in this purposeful, contextualised context (see Figure 5.1). The teacher felt that the quality and amount of talk about the text increased 'phenomenally' over this unit of work, and the children's comprehension improved as they explored the text orally, visually, aurally and kinaesthetically. This active, creative and collaborative approach had an impact on the readers' enthusiasm and enjoyment of the text, and several of them went on to buy their own copy.

TEACHERS AS READERS

One significant omission from Pressley's list of factors noted earlier is the teachers' attitude to reading and their knowledge and experience as readers. Studies of effective teachers of literacy show they are knowledgeable about children's literature and teach reading in context (Medwell *et al.*, 1998; Hall, 2013). However, it is questionable whether primary professionals have sufficiently enriched repertoires to foster reader development (Cremin, Bearne *et al.*, 2008; Cremin, Mottram *et al.*, 2008), and studies show teachers can constrain and limit children's reader identities (Hall, 2012). Nonetheless, research studies highlight an apparent continuity between Reading



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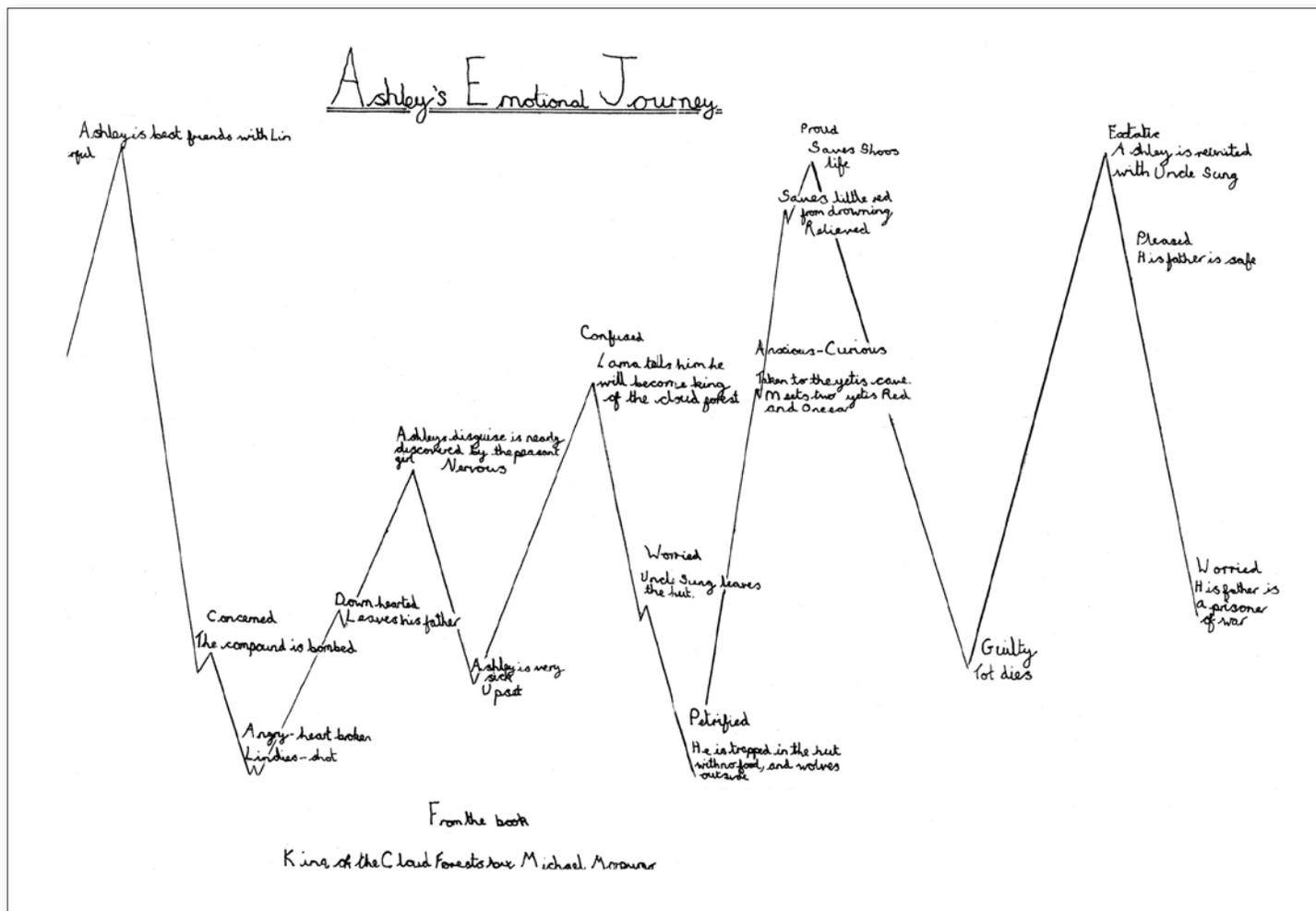


Figure 5.1
An emotions graph to reflect Ashley's journey.

Teachers – teachers who read and readers who teach (Commeyras *et al.*, 2003) – and children as engaged and self-motivated readers. Such teachers model being readers and share their reading lives and strategies in order to build genuinely reciprocal reading relationships that support young readers. They share explorations of texts with children, model the speculation, questions and responses that happen as they read and hook children into reading by reading books aloud, giving less-able readers access to books they could not read independently. Reading Teachers are well enough informed to introduce children to new writers and genres and to select complex, potent books for extended study.



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Aware of their own reading preferences, habits, behaviours and strategies, Reading Teachers capitalise upon their own awareness of the social nature of reading, recognise the significance of readers' rights and identities, and successfully influence both children's engagement as readers and the pleasure they derive from it (Cremin *et al.*, 2014). They do not seek to foster imitation – a do-as-I-do frameset – rather they:

work[ed] to recognise diversity and difference. They encouraged children to develop their own preferences and practices as readers; readers who could choose what to read, and, where possible within the school day, when and where to read. In sharing their own identities as readers, the Reading Teachers came to consider the ways in which they framed and positioned young readers in school, and sought to offer new forms of participation and engagement.

(Cremin *et al.*, 2014: 153)

As a consequence of teachers repositioning themselves as readers in classrooms and teaching 'from a reader's point of view', as one teacher described it (Cremin *et al.*, 2014: 86), new reader relationships and networks developed between teachers and children and children and children. The role of 'texts in common' (which had been read aloud and/or swapped) was evident, providing a focus for conversations and making connections. The teachers shared their reading identities, interests and preferences with children, who in turn were invited to reflect upon their own reading histories and habits, their likes and dislikes.

Activities that reflect a Reading Teacher stance should be mapped into classroom practice on a regular basis, so that insights about reading are not just offered to certain individuals (e.g. the most able/interested readers), but to the whole class. Such activities involve the teacher initially, and then the class, talking about the experience of being a reader and reflecting on their reading practices. They could include the following:

1. *Bringing in texts from childhood*: This might also involve visiting an early years classroom to borrow their collection for an afternoon of pleasure, re-reading and related activities.
2. *Exploring and creating reading histories*: This could involve noting the wide range of texts encountered, and the people and places involved. Visuals from the Internet could enable PowerPoints of these histories to be made, and actual copies could be sourced from classrooms of younger children.



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3. *Exploring reading diversity*: This could involve doing a 24-hour read, where all reading undertaken across 24 hours is collected and displayed – individually or as a class.
4. *Focusing on readers rights*: This could connect to Daniel Pennac's (2006) *The Rights of the Reader*, wonderfully illustrated by Quentin Blake (see the Walker website to download this) and might include examining the right to be silent, the right not to finish, the right to skip pages and so forth.
5. *Focusing on space, place and time for reading*: This could involve teachers sharing where and when they like to read – at home, in the community, at work, on holiday – and discussing whether the place influences the choice of reading material. Photos and displays could be created.

RESPONDING TO READING

Children's personal and critical responses to a text are supported through the kinds of teaching outlined earlier. Creative teachers seek to enable children to become readers who ask questions of texts and use each other and their understanding of the world to make multiple interpretations and personal connections. Such readers are enticed and prepared to imagine, to inhabit and to interrogate what they read and, as a consequence, learn to appreciate and understand the texts they read on several levels. Response to text can involve talk, drama, art, dance, photography, writing and use of multiple media to convey emerging meanings. Any discussion prompts and questions that teachers use need to focus on engagement and response first, leading to interpretation and consideration second. This will help to ensure that the pleasure principle is retained, and reading fiction engages children as enquirers and problem-solvers. Teachers can also engage learners in discussion through Chatterbooks clubs, which, facilitated by The Reading Agency (TRA), can be run in schools, or by encouraging them to join the Summer Reading Challenge, again run by the TRA, in local libraries, though schools too can get involved in order to avoid the summer dip in reading performance. See Chapters 4 and 8 for more details of response activities. Developing children's response to increasingly complex texts across the years is not an optional extra, but an essential element of fostering reflective, creative and critical young readers.

Formative assessment of a child's reading and their responses is also an essential element. This goes well beyond just 'hearing a child read' and putting a tick or comment in a record book. It includes oral feedback and might include self-assessment, peer assessment, such as reading-partner comment books, and parents'



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comments and observations. Encouraging children to self-assess and compare this with teacher assessment provides areas for discussion, and any gaps between the two can help identify next steps. Assessment of reading should also publicly acknowledge and celebrate reading success and endeavour, be it via a Mexican wave, a 'happy teacher' postcard sent home, a certificate in assembly or a book award.

Involving children in reading assessment is valuable, as the following example demonstrates. Simon was a fluent reader, in the sense that he was reading at an age-appropriate level. His automatic word recognition skills were good, and he seemed to enjoy reading, but he read aloud in a monotone. His teacher taped him reading aloud, played it back to him and asked him what he thought. He was quick to identify that, 'I read in a boring voice', and agreed a target with his teacher, 'to read with expression and pace'. His teacher ensured he had lots of opportunities to hear fluent, expressive reading, including hearing her read aloud to the class, listening to story CDs, watching stories enacted on screen and being matched with a reading partner who modelled fluent reading. She gave him the chance to re-read familiar texts, to reduce some of the cognitive demand, build familiarity and deepen understanding of stories. She planned activities where he would have a purpose for using expressive reading in context, such as reading play-scripts, taking part in choral poetry readings with actions, creating 'radio broadcasts' such as commentating on a playground football match, recording stories for younger children and so on. Simon often had an audience and, having listened to his own, recorded performances, he discussed his progress with his teacher. His improved oral reading was celebrated by his performance of an action poem in assembly, one that he performed with expression and passion.

Increasingly, children like Simon are being assessed against targets linked to specific learning goals/objectives, making the criteria for assessment clear and giving feedback against the target (Black *et al.*, 2003; Clarke, 2005). Such an approach aims to help a child see where they are in their learning and how to move forward. Specific feedback such as this is important, but teachers must guard against teaching to the target and criteria in such a way that they limit the range of possible ways of learning and demonstrating that learning. A child's target of 'I can recognise how characters are presented in different ways and show this using evidence from the book' could be taught and demonstrated in many ways: through discussion, role-playing characters and drawing or making puppets of the characters. It could also involve enacting a scene, through identifying 'show not tell' passages and talking about what they mean, and making character fact files, character pockets and so forth. Teachers must also be alert to the potential danger that, in focusing on one or two targets, they miss



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other significant evidence of learning. A child may demonstrate an understanding of simile in their reading, even though that is not their target.

In creative classrooms, teachers will balance the focused nature of targets with a commitment to an engaging, playful and wide-ranging exploration of texts that foster skilled, assured and independent reading.

FOSTERING CHILDREN'S INDEPENDENCE AS READERS

International evidence tends to suggest that a worrying number of young people report that they do not like reading (OECD, 2010; Mullis *et al.*, 2012b). In the 2011 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, which assesses 10–11-year-olds' reading behaviour, attitudes and attainment in over fifty countries and nation-states across the world, although enjoyment in and motivation for reading had improved slightly for English children, 20 per cent responded that they did not like reading, compared with an international average of 15 per cent (Twist *et al.*, 2012). British teenagers also continue to report reading for pleasure much less than their peers in other countries, and an increasing number report never reading for pleasure and view it as a waste of time (OECD, 2010).

In a UK-based survey undertaken by Clark (2013), which involved nearly 35,000 young people from 8 to 17 years, although roughly half reported enjoying reading, fewer reported reading on a daily basis than in previous National Literacy Trust surveys, and, more worryingly still, attitudes to reading had become more negative. Additionally, the proportion of 8–11-year-olds who read for pleasure and who read daily had dropped very significantly, compared with earlier surveys. Over a fifth of children and young people reported rarely or never reading in their own time, and nearly a third agreed with the statement, 'I only read when I have to' (Clark, 2013). Nor is it the case that these young people are turning to digital texts, as, with the exception of text messages, reading across most formats (including, e.g., magazines, comics, websites and emails) was shown to have fallen between 2005 and 2013 (Clark and Foster, 2005; Clark, 2013).

In this context, fostering reading for pleasure and nurturing children who can and do choose to read are particularly critical. In order to do so, teachers need to find out more about children's everyday lives and reading practices and broaden their understanding of the wide range of texts that children choose to read in their homes and communities. One strategy, developed from Cliff Hodges's work (2010), to find out about children's reading practices beyond school is to create reading rivers, through

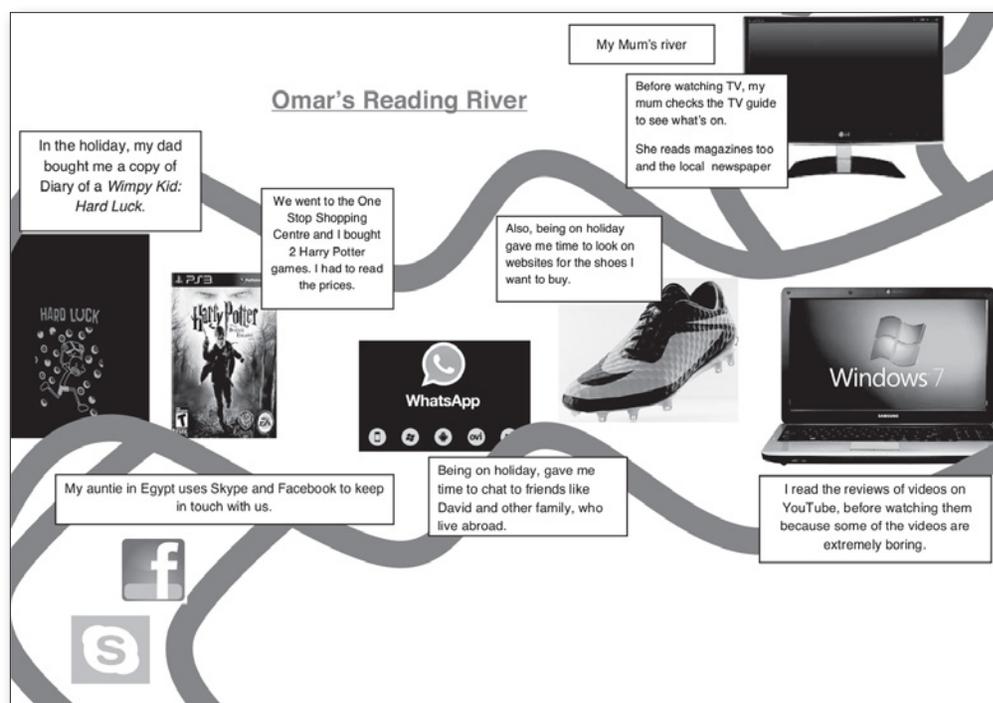


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collage or PowerPoint or in any medium. Omar's reading river (see Figure 5.2) indicates the breadth of his reading and the pleasure he finds in searching the Internet for possible bargains, as well as reviews of YouTube videos. He is also involved in reading on social networking sites and is aware his mother likes magazines and newspapers, as well as perusing the TV guide. With new knowledge of children's current reading practices, teachers can honour and validate these in school and potentially broaden children's conceptions of what reading encompasses.

Figure 5.2 ▶
Omar's reading river.



In order to develop as independent readers and recognise themselves as readers in diverse contexts, children need:

- to understand the pleasures and purposes of reading, so they can see what is in it for them;
- opportunities to read individually and independently, as well as in shared and group contexts;
- access to high-quality, motivating materials;
- opportunities to choose their own reading materials and explore their own preferences;



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- experiences and support that encourage them to widen their range, persevere and try new things;
- opportunities to become members of a community of engaged readers.

Although events such as World Book Day and Book Week can raise the profile of reading, they cannot, as stand-alone events, permanently influence the reading culture of the school. In order to foster independent, volitional reading, a classroom reading-for-pleasure pedagogy is essential, alongside and as part of reading instruction and wider reading events and opportunities (e.g. bookshops, trips to the local library). A reading-for-pleasure pedagogy involves four core elements: a rich reading environment, varied read-aloud programmes, substantial space for book talk and book recommendations, and the provision of quality time for independent, choice-led reading (Cremin *et al.*, 2014). These pedagogic practices can help to build reading communities in the classrooms of teachers who share a wide and encompassing conceptualisation of reading and do not see it merely as the elements defined within, and assessed by, the NC. Much, however, will depend on the manner in which they are offered and developed. For example, to what extent are the children themselves involved in deciding what their teacher is going to read aloud? Is space built in for children to make suggestions and requests? To what extent is reading time enforced as a silent period? Who decides? What reading materials are available to read in this context? Must children read their assigned colour-coded or reading-scheme book?

Children need to select their own reading materials to develop their independence as readers with preferences. As well as a free choice of books provided by the school, creative teachers encourage children to read materials from their life outside school, be it books, comics, magazines, hobby texts, collectors' cards or instruction manuals. Teachers include such texts in their teaching sessions to give them value and status and to engage interest. They also encourage children to share their choices with each other and suggest related items that might extend children's choices. Schools can set up regular orders for comics such as *Shout* and *The Simpsons*, magazines such as *The Young National Geographic* and newspapers such as *First News* and, in so doing, help to motivate young readers. Teachers also invite children to share their ideas about creating comfortable classroom spaces to relax in while reading. Negotiating new ways of responding to children's needs as readers and honouring their choices (while also introducing them to new writers) are important, if communities of readers are to be built.

Through the creation of such communities, characterised by reciprocity and interaction, increased independence and pleasure can be developed (Cremin,



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Mottram *et al.*, 2009, 2014). Such communities arguably encompass:

- a shared concept of what it means to be a reader in the twenty-first century;
- considerable teacher and child knowledge of children's literature and other texts;
- pedagogic practices which acknowledge and develop diverse reader identities;
- new social spaces that encourage choice and child ownership of their own reading for pleasure;
- spontaneous 'inside-text talk' on the part of all participants;
- a shift in the locus of control that fosters reader agency and independence.

(Cremin *et al.*, 2014: 155)

FOSTERING IMAGINATIVE ENGAGEMENT: EXTENDED EXPLORATIONS

Creative teachers of reading find imaginative ways to journey inside a book on extended explorations, as outlined throughout this book. For example, several teachers using the book *Dragonology: The complete book of dragons*, by Dr Ernest Drake, shared their ideas and found a myriad of ways of firing children's imaginations and heightening engagement.

In one class, children received a letter telling them that their application to take the secret and ancient Society of Dragonologists Course 'Working With Dragons' had been accepted (see Figure 5.3). Each morning thereafter, the class repeated the oath of the Dragonologist Society, and their teacher 'found' an old school report that showed that the most famous dragonologist, the 'author' of the book, had attended school nearby (see Figure 5.4). The report gave them evidence about his interests and skills that led to some informed and engaging hot-seating.

On another occasion, the teacher created a nest of stones and rocks in the middle of the classroom. Inside were thirty dragon eggs waiting to hatch. Candles were burning and music was playing as the children entered the classroom. The teacher spoke of the tangible sense of awe and wonder present. How long would it take for them to hatch? What care would a baby dragon need? The book might provide the answers.

Other children watched a video their teacher had filmed in advance. Face to camera, in documentary style and using formal language, she confessed to being a secret dragonologist and showed them sites in a nearby forest where she claimed there was evidence of dragon occupation. Thus, a dead tree had been killed by the heat of the dragon's breath, broken branches showed the dragon's flight path, a large heap of

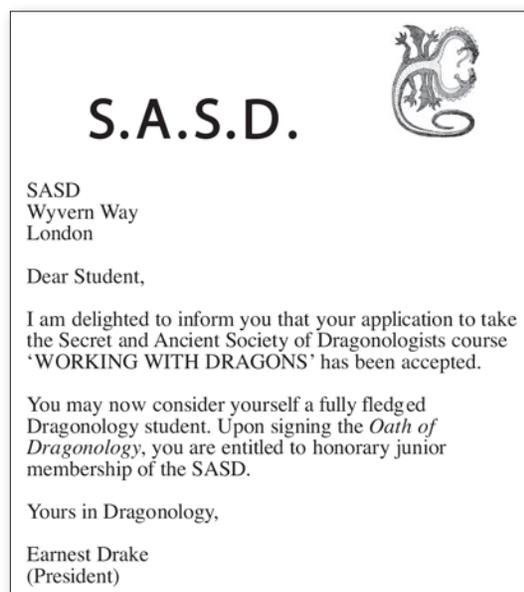


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Figure 5.3

The invitation to join the Ancient Society of Dragonologists.



brushwood was the remains of a dragon's nest and so on. Still on camera, she told them that they would be visiting the forest the following week to undertake their own search for evidence. What other signs might there be? Would they recognise them?

A real purpose for reading was established in these classrooms, imaginations were fired, and the motivation to read was high. For several weeks, the children read books about dragons, found a wealth of stories and myths about dragons, role-played dragons, created a dragon's den in their classrooms, and produced live and exclusive TV news reports, as well as newspaper articles. The writing that arose from this engaged reading was, unsurprisingly, of consistently high quality. The teachers' creative approach inspired intense levels of imaginative engagement.

CONCLUSION

If teachers wish children to become lifelong, committed readers, then they must bring passion and excitement into the teaching of reading and teach reading creatively, as well as teaching for creativity. Building communities of engaged readers in school will mean creating new spaces for children and teachers to participate in, shared talk about reading and readers' lives, recognition and valuing of diversity in reading preferences and practices, the teaching of reading skills in motivating contexts and more choice in independent reading. In such communities teachers will be providing imaginative ways into reading and creative activities to explore texts of all kinds.



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Figure 5.4 Ernest Drake's school report.

 Celtic Preparatory School		Progress report on Earnest Drake Age 10 yrs 11 months Form 6H Term 18 48		
SUBJECTS	REMARKS	Examination	Effort	Teacher initials
READING	<i>A keen reader but spends too much time reading about dragons, fairy tales, myths and legends. Needs to widen his interests.</i>	98%	B	MH
WRITING	Earnest is a very capable writer. I am pleased to hear he keeps a journal of the wild life he has observed. He must NOT use the margins of his exercise book to draw dragons	92%	A	MH
ARITHMETIC	Earnest could do better if he applied himself. He spends a great deal of time daydreaming rather than getting on with his sums.	63%	C	CP
HISTORY	Has a strong interest in history, but needs to be more critical in distinguishing facts from fiction. Must realise that myths are NOT facts.	56%	B	GF
GEOGRAPHY	<i>V. good. Knows all principal rivers, mountain ranges, climates of Great Britain and Europe etc. One would think he was a great traveller.</i>	95%	A	WK
NATURAL SCIENCES	Has an excellent knowledge of fauna and flora and exceptional field work skills for a boy of his age.	99%	A	AE
CONDUCT Good		ATTENDANCE one absence		PUNCTUALITY
Good				
GENERAL COMMENTS: Earnest has the ability to go far if he concentrates on practical, everyday knowledge rather than ancient myths and stories. HEADMASTER				



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FURTHER READING

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CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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Baker, J. (2010) *Mirror*. London: Walker.

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Gallaz, C., McEwan, I. (ed.) and Innocenti, R. (1985) *Rose Blanche*. London: Jonathan Cape.
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Peet, M. (2011) *Life: An exploded diagram*. London: Walker.

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Pitcher, A. (2011) *My Sister lives on the Mantelpiece*. London: Indigo.

Steer, D.A. (ed.) (2003) *Dragonology: The complete book of dragons*. Dorking, UK: Templar.

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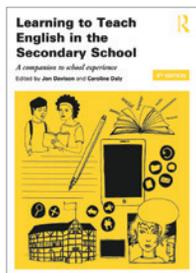


GETTING WRITING GOING IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL



5 :: GETTING WRITING GOING IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

GILL ANDERSON



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WRITING

Although writing development is talked about 'in general', it always happens 'in particular'.

[Lucy Calkins, 1983, p. 7]

If we are successful, children will continue to write as themselves . . . What is important is that children in school should write about what matters to them to someone who matters to them.

[James Britton, 1982, p. 110]

The best writing is vigorous, committed, honest and interesting. We did not include these qualities in our statements of attainment because they cannot be mapped onto levels.

[Brian Cox, 1991, p. 147]

INTRODUCTION

What was your own experience of learning to write, inside and outside school and what kind of experiences of writing do you hope your pupils will have? This chapter sets out to help you think more about those two important questions.

But first, and so often a useful way into writing – a story.

My brother came home from his final school English exam and told us he had written his 'usual' story, about the bank robbery. It had plenty of dialogue and description and 'the twist in the tale' (which he knew to be a sign of a good story) was the revelation that the apparently reliable narrator had been one of the bank robbers who had in fact, escaped. He revealed that the title he chose from that day's list was 'Curtains'. I can still remember the mix of hilarity and horror that greeted his irreverent explanation that he just wrote the story, same as always and then added a final line: 'Curtains to you!' 'And anyway', he added, 'that's the last time I'll write it and the last time I'll ever write a story'.

There are some assumptions that underpin this experience that are perhaps more lasting and more prevalent than you might think, including:



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- the main purpose of writing in school is for assessment – of writing. There is little link made to writing in the world or to the personal purposes of the writer;
- writing is envisaged as a discrete and an innate individual skill that a pupil needs to demonstrate periodically. There is little sense here of the way writing is related to talk and reading or of how it may be connected to thinking or learning (in fact, the successful repetition of the story over several years demonstrates that learning is not what seemed to be required);
- ‘doing well’ in the assessed writing depends on manipulating a limited and apparently fixed set of generic features: dialogue, description, ‘a twist in the tale’;
- it is therefore reasonable to expect pupils to write to order in highly controlled conditions with the most minimal stimulus (the famous one word titles). Pupils are not required to engage affectively or to negotiate the task or the content and are not required – and often do not expect – to have their own view of what good or useful writing is.

There are assumptions indicated in this story which, at the very least, need more probing. If there are flaws in this kind of thinking, what are the alternatives and what kinds of practice might support them?

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter you will:

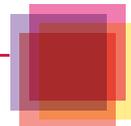
- have reflected on your own history and identity as a writer and considered some of the values and assumptions that underpinned your experiences of learning to write;
- be aware of some more approaches to ‘getting writing going’ in the classroom and where to find further ideas and resources to support your developing practice;
- have considered why and how you might respond to pupils’ writing;
- understand some of the different theoretical approaches to thinking about writing and about the teaching of writing and begin to situate yourself within these debates.



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Now try a piece of reflective writing based on Task 6.1.



TASK 6.1 ■ WRITING AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Try writing a reflective piece on your own history as a writer. This might include some of the following:

1. What kind of writing tasks do you remember from your own education? Did particular kinds of writing dominate at different stages; primary, secondary, degree level or beyond? Was any rationale ever offered for this and reflecting on it now, what do you think the rationale was? Is it one you agree with?
2. Do any pieces of writing stand out as particularly memorable or enjoyable? Try to describe the processes and feelings involved in producing this writing. How can you account for this experience?
3. How would you describe your own journey as a writer – the high and low points? If you ever struggled with any particular aspect of writing – handwriting, spelling, dyslexia, expression – it can be really helpful to think about this and what did and didn't help. If writing has always come easily, how can you account for this?
4. Reflect on any significant writing you did outside school: diaries; fanzines; writing in role or to support play? How was this writing similar to or different from school writing?
5. Think about the kinds of responses made to your writing by the teacher or by others. What kinds of features were commented upon and how much sense did these comments make? Can you think of one really helpful response anyone has ever made to your writing and try to say something about what made it helpful?
6. How aware were you of written language being different from the language you spoke? If you write in other languages, you could reflect on any different contexts, relationships or practices surrounding these and your own developing feelings about them.

Compare your experiences with some other student teachers'. In what ways might your own experiences shape your values and expectations about what should happen in the classroom and has anything you have seen in schools challenged this? Discuss how you might get pupils involved in reflecting on their own writing histories, too.



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GETTING WRITING GOING

THREE STORIES OF CLASSROOM WRITERS AND THEIR WRITING

These stories were collected in the course of recent work with PGCE student teachers and master's work with a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT). They each reveal something different about writing processes and practices in the classroom. As you read them, consider what choices the teacher has made in their planning and what kinds of experiences of writing these pupils had.

The first story is about a pupil called Toby, who could be described as a resistant writer.

TOBY

Toby is in Year 8 in a boys' school. The data the school has collected about him presents him as a 'below average' pupil in English with a reading age of 8. He has difficulties with spelling and says he hates poetry, which he thinks is 'boring' and 'dead'. As illustrated by the following extract from a conversation about tsunamis after a Geography lesson, he likes to present himself as down-to-earth and actively resists complex vocabulary and 'school knowledge' that does not fit with his current identity.

Zach: *Did you know miss, when the wave gets near the water that isn't as deep, it gets more slow and then its amplitude increases?*

Imran: *What's amplitude?*

Jude: *Like how high it is.*

Toby: *Just say that then!*

Zach: *It's the proper word.*

Toby: *Whatever!*

At the end of a sequence of four lessons, Toby wrote the following poem (spelling corrected):

The tornado ripping houses apart
churning the earth like a fork
spreading across the earth like
a wild fire.
It screams
like a baby crying.



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Ripping trees out the ground.
demolishing
anything in its path.
the tornado circles in
the air making cars,
trees, houses look like ants.

It roars like a hungry lioness
like a savage in the air
ripping branches and
tossing them in the air.
It is a demand in the wind.

The savage eating till it's full
to the brim
spinning in the
wind like a whirlpool
churned and spat out like
a grown man spitting. It starts
to die down.

There is much to admire here by any standard, but for a pupil who is very far from being an experienced or keen writer, it is a really significant achievement. So what kinds of teaching and learning might account for this?

Toby's teacher had picked up on a current enthusiasm amongst the boys for extreme weather events and asked them to carry out their own research and *present it in a way that interested them*. Toby presented detailed information about tornados, and his writing reflects his ownership of the topic and his fascination with the possibility of some big weather closer to home: 'Most people think that you can't get tornados in England but there have been some before'. His teacher introduced the pupils to two poems, Whitman's 'Patrolling Barnegat' and Heaney's 'Storm on the Island'. Before reading the first poem, she gave them a 'crunched' version like this:

a a advancing air along and and and beach beachy breasting by
careering careering combs combs confronting cutting daylight
death-wind demoniac dim distance easterly edge gale group fierce
firm fitfully flaring forms high hoarse in in incessant is is lashing
laughter milk-white milk-white midnight midnight murk muttering
never night of of of of on out piercing peeling red remitting roar



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roar running sand sand savage savagest sea shadows shouts
signal slanting slowly slush slush snow spirits spray steadily steady
storm struggling swirl that that the the the the the the the that
the the the the their there those through through through till
tireless trinity trinity undertone warily watchful watching waves
weird wending where wild wild with wreck

Pupils were asked to use the words to create three sentences of their own. (An alternative activity would be to cut up the words from the poem and give them out in envelopes and ask pairs or groups to construct their own poem by selecting from and arranging the words in any way they liked.) Readings of the poem followed, with extended, open class discussion about lines that interested them. Individual observations became a shared resource for the class. One pupil noticed the word 'trinity' and drawing on his own experience of Catholicism explained how it made him think the storm was 'all-powerful like God in The Trinity', leading to a discussion about how the readers of poems create new readings by drawing on their own experiences. A group discussion about 'Storm on the Island' saw Toby worrying away at the poem's image of the spray that 'spits like a tame cat turned savage'. Toby spoke at some length about his nan's friendly tabby cat, Tommy, and how difficult it was to imagine him spitting; 'it's not what you expect to happen like the cat wouldn't be savage, so it's more scary'. After writing the poem, Toby spent some time discussing some of his language choices; why he put the word 'demolishing' in a line on its own and why the present tense. He then redrafted his poem for display on the classroom wall, with a second copy for his grandmother's fridge.

The second story is not about an individual writer, but about collaboration, role-play and the opportunities presented by digital technologies in a Year 8 class, 8T.

8T

It is early on a Monday morning and a class of Year 8 boys are well into a scheme of work on 'news'. 8T are in the basement classroom which is bare except for an inspiring quotation or two and some graffiti-style doodles painted on the walls; 'Don't press this button', or 'What happened here?' beside a large red paint splat on the wall. Previously, they have considered examples of different news reports from various media, reflecting on issues of content, style and mode of production and audience and they are now working from lesson to lesson in role as two competing media companies, each with TV, radio and print sub-groups. (For further details of such work, see Chapters 8 and 9.) This morning's task is to produce a print, radio or



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TV news report on the earlier sighting of a bear in the school. They have only 25 minutes. Writing straight onto the class set of iPads on their individual blogs they get underway.

Some groups move to the walls and use aspects of the graffiti as prompts for improvised drama to get things going, others start to search the Internet for information on bears, some start writing on their own, others in pairs or groups within the sub-groups. They form and re-form physically like shoals of fish and for a while it looks unlikely that they will all produce a finished piece in time. They discuss and amalgamate their ideas. Their teacher, who works in role as commissioning news editor to begin with, now moves into role as a teacher within the 'bear in the school scenario' and feeds in some prompts to develop the content of the writing ('there was a strange smell at the bottom of the stairs during assembly!'). At some point, a few pupils decide to break the 'stay in your classroom' rule and check whether it is safe to go outside. Some are prompted to interview other witnesses, such as Teaching Assistants who have been primed with extra pieces of information about further sightings of the bear and the havoc it has caused. One of the TV crews goes out to a courtyard to film the live broadcast on the iPads and after exactly 25 minutes they are back together watching and reading all six multimodal reports directly from the online blogs on the large interactive whiteboard. An absolutely serious discussion follows in the course of which each piece is critically evaluated. Issues of content, style, medium and audience arise.

The final story is about the writing of a bilingual pupil newly arrived in a school in London.

ALMAZ

Almaz has joined a Year 7 class half way through the autumn term. She arrived in the UK from Eritrea having travelled through Sudan to escape the war. She attended school in Eritrea and speaks and writes Tigrinya. She speaks hardly any English when she arrives. By the beginning of January, Almaz has done some writing and drawing to introduce herself to her teacher and her teacher has written back. She is now joining the class in exploring the First World War novel *Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo.

Almaz's teacher communicated an initial interest in who Almaz is and what she knows and this resulted in a series of pieces about her life before the UK, which included some words in her own language. Perhaps enabled by this interest, a very short time later, Almaz began making predictions about the class novel and using writing to draw on her own life experiences in making sense of a book cover. She also made notes for herself in two languages in ways that supported her learning as a



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bilingual pupil in all sorts of ways; explaining the cultural associations attached to the rank of 'Private', translating key words like 'peaceful', as well as developing personal readings of the images on the book cover.

WRITER IDENTITIES

Perhaps the most obvious point is that in each case above, writing is not 'taught' as a series of discrete or de-contextualised skills that can be 'delivered' in individual lessons or 'measured' in a linear way. At no point did the class teacher teach a lesson 'on similes', and yet Toby's poem is full of them. I could have told you that Almaz has a sheet pasted into the back of her book saying she is level 3c and her target is 3b, that Toby is level 3 and has Special Educational Needs and that most of 8T are working between levels 5 and 7, but that would not begin to do justice to the complexity of their writing stories. Instead, you can see that each of the pieces of writing arises from a series of interactions with peers and the teacher over time. The pupils have their own evolving and sometimes fragile identities and histories as individuals and writers – and teachers need to find out about and plan for them as part of the teaching and learning of writing. Here is Toby's teacher reflecting on his achievements:

Whilst Toby's poem about the tornado was indeed an important outcome of this particular lesson, I would suggest that the outcomes that were more meaningful, for example a newfound engagement with poetry, happened over the course of a series of lessons.

(Hannon, 2012)

One of the most important aspects of learning to write is learning to think of yourself as a serious and successful writer, and it is part of your responsibility as an English teacher to think creatively and sensitively about how you will contribute to this process for different pupils in your class. Toby's reading out his poem and discussing his language choices and later displaying it at home and at school is one example. The boys in 8T have all the work they write published online on their class blogs, so their writing is in the public domain and they are all routinely expected to exercise the responsibility that goes with being a public writer. This is not unproblematic, but does shift the status of their classroom writing and their own sense of themselves as writers in interesting and productive ways.

Now try Task 6.2.



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TASK 6.2 ■ A CASE STUDY OF A WRITER

Write a detailed case study of your own about a particular pupil and the story of a piece of writing they have done in a class you have taught or observed. Like Toby's teacher, you will want to reflect on the pupil's starting point, the sequence of interactions, lessons and learning that fed into the writing and the implications for your own future planning.

SPEAKING, LISTENING, READING AND WRITING

Writing cannot be taught meaningfully in isolation from talk and reading. Toby's poem developed out of his reading of Geography textbooks, Internet sources, two particular poems and out of many discussions with his peers and teacher that were open and flexible enough to encompass his own feelings about life experiences (his nan's cat), his interest in tornados and his fascination with the possibility of experiencing one in England, his and others' readings of poetic imagery (The Trinity) as well as philosophical reflection on the nature of reading itself! The poem could not have been written without all this – and this has strong implications for the way you organise your classroom, the kinds of talk and relationships you encourage and the ways of working you establish.

Wide reading of engaging texts and collaboration in imaginative activities around those is one of the surest routes to successful writing. One of the most helpful things you can read to prepare yourself for teaching writing is *The Reader in the Writer* (Barrs and Cork, 2001). This research shows how pupils learn about the sound and rhythm of texts through repeated performative readings. In part, this involves listening together as a class to strong readings of shared classroom texts, often revisiting passages many times in the course of working on them. Pupils might then go on to borrow and adapt the vocabulary, rhythms and cadences of these texts for their own expressive and personal purposes. In Toby's writing too, there are traces of the poems he read. Here is his teacher again,

... the influence of both Whitman and Heaney is clear. The line 'like a savig in the air' is a direct reference to both poems, which use the word 'savage' to describe the storms. Toby also makes reference to the tornado's voice in his poem; he refers to how it 'screams', 'roars' and 'demands', clearly echoing the 'shouts of demoniac



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laughter' from Whitman's poem which Toby found so intriguing. He also draws on the image of the spitting cat, but in his poem, it is the tornado that spits out what it has 'eaten' in its destruction.

(Hannon, 2012)

These literary 'models' stand behind Toby's writing but they have been passed through the crucible of his own interests and experiences. I would suggest that it is also important that he had opportunities to play creatively with the language of the poem in pre-reading activities (the 'crunched' poem), before he ever heard the published version for the first time and you may want to give more thought to this aspect of your own planning. All of this has given him a purchase on the language, rhythms and structures of the poems to use as a resource but it is certainly not as simple as setting out a checklist of poetic vocabulary or techniques for pupils to include in their writing.

Taking part in group drama also helps pupils to build the imaginative world of the text as well as to develop affective responses and can lead to rich, empathetic and expressive writing (see the example of teaching Sachar's *Holes* in Chapter 10, 'Drama in Teaching and Learning English'). Similarly, the complex and fluid way the boys in 8T shifted between different roles is important: as actors in a scenario (pupils in a school with an escaped bear), writers in role as members of a media empire and as themselves (but also journalists published on the class blogs) critiquing their own and other pupils' work. You will want to go on thinking about and experimenting with ways of using drama and role as a shared resource for pupils to draw on when they write.

AUDIENCES, PURPOSES AND GENRES

As suggested at the start of this chapter, problems can arise when writing is approached as a discrete, individual skill to be learned in school, primarily in order that it might be tested. This is because writing is a socio-cultural practice, or set of practices. It involves people making meaning and getting things done within a cultural context and using, adapting and changing a set of cultural resources that are already established including vocabulary, grammar and genres. If we want to complain about poor service, for instance, there are established ways we might set about doing this in writing. This view of writing needs to be recognised in writing pedagogy, if pupils' experiences of writing in the classroom are to be personally meaningful and socially and culturally significant *beyond* the classroom – not simply a set of tricks to be wheeled out to pass a school exam like the bank robbery story.



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One implication is that it will be important to consider who the audience is for any writing task. Not only can a clearly defined audience help pupils to imagine the reader at the point of writing, it can also motivate writing and make it purposeful. There are three aspects of audience worth considering when you are planning for classroom writing:

THE SELF AS AUDIENCE

In the 1970s and 1980s, James Britton argued that as teachers, we need to pay attention to the kind of writing that helps pupils *to think*, and to the stage of writing which is mainly 'a search for meaning that in its expression satisfies the writer' (Britton, 1982, p. 150). He called this 'Expressive Writing', which he characterised as writing that is close to the self, derived from speech and where the writer's attention is focused mainly on emerging meaning rather than on the words and structures used to communicate. You can probably think of examples where you have written extended notes or written loose 'abbreviated' prose to help you work out ideas in the early stages of planning and writing an essay. We can see something of this in Almaz's writing as she works between two languages, sometimes in note form, to negotiate her own experiences across cultures with the demands of the new school context and curriculum. Britton's powerful contention was, that if we do not give enough time and status to this kind of writing in the classroom (and in the context of a bilingual pupil, this may include writing in the first language alongside English) and instead rush too quickly to 'performing' in more elaborated public forms, we risk cutting writers off from their most important resource: themselves.

AUDIENCES WITHIN THE CLASSROOM

Britton also argued that the teacher has a special role in 'extending to the child a stable audience' (Britton, 1982, p. 97) and the case studies above suggest something of what that might look like. In each case, the teachers engage deeply and thoughtfully with pupils, their lives, identities, interests and their writing and these reflections shape their planning. Pupils can form important audiences for each other's writing, in role or as critical response partners, giving feedback *as readers* on what they enjoyed or thought was unclear, or as an audience to be entertained. Key Stage 4 pupils who have argued over issues of real importance to them, perhaps over several weeks or terms, will have each other in mind when they write and you will soon discover how much younger pupils enjoy including their friends in their stories or drawing on shared cultural references or 'in jokes'.



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AUDIENCES BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

What opportunities can you think of for making creative use of audiences beyond the classroom such as writing books for younger children (including bilingual books) or conducting oral history interviews in a local pensioners' club? *Love that Dog* by Sharon Creech is a lovely short book that can be used in many ways to inspire writing, including suggesting ways that pupils might be encouraged to write (on paper or online) to authors of texts they have read.

GENRE

If we accept that genre is an important cultural resource for writing, it follows that you will want to offer pupils opportunities to engage with a range of writing genres and to be very clear about your rationale and pedagogy in doing so. Have a look at the classroom activities in Task 6.3.

TASK 6.3 ■ IDEAS TO SUPPORT WRITING IN DIFFERENT GENRES

1. As a starting point for writing, give pupils a skeleton storyline or several ingredients to include, for example:

Write a story that includes all of the following – a monkey; a scarf; a bench; a key; an old woman.

- In groups, pupils write their story in a particular genre: romance, horror, fairy-tale, detective story, science fiction. Their first version should be written together and could be just the opening with a specified time limit.
- Each group should then read out their story and the class can say what they think the genre is and why. This can lead to wide-ranging discussion of their own experience of these genres that will be drawn from a complex web of sources including literary texts, film, advertising and computer games. Individuals within the class may well have areas of particular knowledge and experience that can be made available for everyone to draw on and this is also a valuable source of information for you about their cultural tastes and interests.

To extend the task:

- If the groups have only written the opening, they can complete the story individually.
- If they have completed the story, within the groups they can try re-writing



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the first paragraph in different styles: first person narration, unreliable narrator, stream of consciousness, opening with dialogue, opening with scene-setting. They can then compare and discuss how it changes the story and their responses in each case.

- Pupils can also be asked to edit their stories down to 100 words or 50 words and then explore what is left out of these versions – as another way of focusing critical attention on genre indicators.
2. Pupils can be asked in pairs or threes to consider three different versions of a text type. This works well using authentic texts and when pupils are positioned in roles that give them some authority such as the following:
 - Give pupils three letters written by teenagers applying for a part-time job, or three critical essays. They discuss them and put them in order of preference. For example, as employers, they consider how they would rank the letters for short-listing, or as examiners they discuss which grades they would award, then share their decisions with the whole class. They should defend their choices and then pool their ideas as a class about the criteria they developed to make these decisions. The point is not to get the order 'right', but to generate and evaluate the range of criteria at play.
 3. To support pupils in discursive writing, produce fifteen statement cards with a range of points on a topic.
 - Working in pairs, they should discard any they think are not relevant to their own argument and then arrange the cards in any way that makes sense to them to show how their argument will develop. They should then justify their arrangement in a larger group.
 - You can also ask them to produce a specific arrangement – a 'diamond nine' shape with a hierarchy of points, or an agree/disagree pile or continuum of descending order for each point.
 - A similar activity can be done with a 'statement line' on the floor of the classroom which can be made with string or an imagined line between two fixed points, to represent a statement of an argument or viewpoint. Pupils are asked to stand at a distance in relation to the line to show to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement and are then asked to explain their view. This gives opportunities to draw attention to the ideas at play, but also to practise and highlight language structures from the genre: 'to some extent', 'while I agree with... I also think that...'



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These activities allow pupils to engage together, with both content *and* aspects of language, form and structure. Importantly, they draw on what pupils already know about genre and do not assume they start from a blank sheet and need to be given a list of prescriptive conventions or criteria. They engage them with genres that may be more or less familiar, making explicit some of the features and expectations of each but, crucially, also *allowing for debate about the range, purpose and value of the conventions themselves*.

Now try the planning exercise in Task 6.4.

TASK 6.4 ■ PLANNING A SEQUENCE OF LESSONS

1. Discuss with your mentor the next opportunity you have to plan a sequence of lessons or unit of work. Whatever the focus of the unit, there will be occasions when pupils are required to write. Discuss how they can be supported in this, and how reading, speaking and listening activities might work together with writing.
2. Now plan the sequence and try to include collaborative interaction with inspiring texts, drama or role-play and a range of purposes, audiences and genres for writing.

DEBATES ABOUT THE TEACHING OF WRITING

In the last four decades there have been hotly contested debates about the teaching of writing in schools in the UK and internationally, resulting in a range of practices being developed by teachers as well as national policy frameworks being introduced by successive governments. The *Further Reading* section at the end of this chapter suggests ways of finding out more.

One of these debates centres on the extent to which the teaching of writing should focus on the text and its features or the writer and writing processes. This is sometimes represented rather simplistically as a debate about 'Process' versus 'Genre' models of writing and a straightforward account of these traditions can be found in *Teaching English* (Brindley, 1994, p. 186). Further complications have arisen from the fact that process and genre approaches (and there are many versions of each) have become associated with particular teaching strategies. Have a look at **Table 6.1** to see how these might be represented.



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TASK 6.1 ■ TWO SEQUENCES FOR TEACHING WRITING

1	Establish clear aims	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2007)
	Provide a relevant model	
	Explore the features of the text	
	Define the conventions	
	Demonstrate how it is written	
	Compose together	
	Scaffold the first attempts	
	Independent writing	
	Draw out learning	
2	Motivation to write	National Writing Project (1985)
	Brainstorming	
	Reflection	
	Making preliminary notes	
	Drafting	
	Revising	
	Editing	
	Writing final copy	
	Publishing/Display	
	Response from readers	

Having studied Table 6.1, do Task 6.5.

TASK 6.5 ■ INVESTIGATING SEQUENCES FOR THE TEACHING OF WRITING

1. Discuss the two sequences for the teaching of writing that are shown in Table 6.1. Which would you say best describes the teaching you have observed in your school experience?
2. Can you think of a particular lesson that clearly maps on to one or the other and what were the outcomes for pupils in terms of their experience of writing?
3. Have you seen lessons where elements of both are in operation?
4. What are your own views about the relationships, values and assumptions that underpin each sequence?



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RESPONDING TO WRITING

If teachers have a special role as readers of their pupils' writing, then this brings responsibilities with it. In the first instance, you should always try to respond to the *content* and to what the pupil *has* achieved. Consider how you will ensure the best qualities of the writing are visible and how you will avoid your response being *over-determined* by a particular set of narrow assessment criteria. Remind yourself of the quotation from the Cox Report at the beginning of this chapter and of the teacher's responses to Toby's writing earlier. It is very important indeed to be clear about the audiences for and purposes of your responses and one of the best ways of working towards this is to read a short booklet called *English inside the Black Box* (Marshall and Wiliam, 2006).

Drawing on key findings from their classroom research, some of the principled guidance they offer to English teachers includes:

- Avoid deficit models of pupils' writing. Start from what the pupil *can* do and in the first instance, respond to the *content* and what seems to have interested *them*.
- Think of your responses as part of a *dialogue*. What questions are raised for you as a reader by the writing and what would you like to ask the writer to help you better understand their purposes? Sometimes the most effective responses from a teacher come in the form of oral feedback at the point of writing or as part of a face-to-face discussion of a draft, when there is still some possibility of making changes. Written responses can form part of a dialogue too and many teachers find it effective to set aside class time for pupils to respond to written comments with further writing or with an answer, perhaps in a special journal dedicated to this purpose, or in a dialogue page at the back of their exercise book.
- Your responses as a teacher will provide a model for pupils to *assess their own writing* and to act as *peer response partners* for each other. Many of the activities described in this chapter, such as short-listing from application letters or debating the merits of a selection of critical essays, will help to build what can be described as 'guild knowledge' about what makes for interesting and effective writing (Marshall and Wiliam, 2006, p. 5). Helping pupils to build their own critical judgments about writing is one of the most important parts of your role.

SUMMARY AND KEY POINTS

This chapter has encouraged you to explore your own experiences as a writer in order to reflect upon the different purposes, challenges and rewards of writing and also the values that underpin the teaching of writing as part of the school curriculum.



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Classroom writing should build on pupils' interests and experiences and in turn build their writer identities and their sense of how writing can serve their own purposes, beyond as well as within the classroom. In terms of pedagogy, this means allowing pupils some choice and scope to negotiate the form and content of their writing but you will also want to consider what pupils draw on when they write. Some suggestions made in this chapter include: collaborative and inclusive approaches to working with rich literary texts, using drama and role-play, creative thinking about audience and a properly complicated view of genre that avoids reductive over-simplification but does scaffold early attempts with less familiar genres. Digital technologies can lead to collaboration in new kinds of multimodal text design and can lend purpose and seriousness to pupils' writing through new kinds of drafting processes, publication, audiences and responses. As time goes on, you will want to consider the benefits of writing alongside your pupils as part of the way you build a community of writers able to critically evaluate their own and others' work (see information about the National Writing Project included in the recommendations below).

Try to follow up the suggestions below to help you find out more about debates around writing. Doing so will enable you, over time, to become professional with views and values of your own to inform the decisions you make about your writing classroom.

FURTHER READING

Barrs, M. and Cork, V. (2001) *The Reader in the Writer*, London: Centre for Language in Primary Education.

Through a series of engaging, careful and detailed case studies, this research builds up a rich and fine-grained picture of how writing develops in classrooms and draws clear practical conclusions about what kinds of pedagogy support it.

Cremin, T. and Myhill, D. (2012) *Writing Voices: Creating Communities of Writers*, London: Routledge.

As well as looking at the subject of school writing from many angles and offering a wealth of ideas for classroom approaches, this excellent book also offers a clear overview of key debates including the role of grammar in improving writing, process and genre models and gender and writing.

Marshall, B. and Wiliam, D. (2006) *English inside the Black Box*, London: King's College, London.

Part of a larger research project into assessment, Marshall and Wiliam's excellent research on what formative assessment looks like in the English classroom and how you might go about doing it, repays careful reading.



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WEBSITE

National Writing Project (nwp.org.uk). This website explains the aims and findings of the *Teachers as Writers Project* which has been running in the UK since 2008. The project aims to encourage teachers' own writing but also to promote reflection on writing in classrooms and to help teachers consider ways of writing alongside their pupils. You can also read or download a short article here by Simon Wrigley and Jeni Smith on the history and development of the project, as well as information on how to join or set up a *Teachers as Writers* group near you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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