

Finding The Diamond Moment

The Writing For Pleasure Centre – Ross Young

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Principle(s) in focus:

1. Teach daily mini lessons
2. Balancing composition and transcription
3. Reading, sharing and talking about writing

At the beginning of the year, I noticed that many of the children, whilst great at coming up with universal topics for writing, were unable to zoom in on the quality of the topic. It was often too 'universal'. Too large. Too general. When I gave this mini-lesson – a lesson on finding the moment – the briefest of moments in a topic that are most significant to write about – the children's writing transformed. It became part of our class meta-language and I hope something the children will keep as a lesson for a lifetime. It allows me to teach an important compositional strategy that writers often use (Atwell 2014; Calkins 1998) but, more than that, it gave children a language in which to discuss each other's work. They were able to share with their peers what they felt was the diamond moment within their pieces of writing.

Aims:

To help increase children's self-regulation and self-efficacy. I felt that this type of lesson gave children a language they could use to discuss aspects of their writing. It also helped them know what writers do as they compose. Additionally, I felt that if children could identify their 'diamond moment' they would feel a great sense of success. Finally, it may give children a greater sense of motivation as they themselves know why they are writing what they are writing.

Description:



It was in our class writing project on memoir (personal narrative) that the lesson was first taught. It was an attempt to focus the children on the personal and poetic significance of the experience they wished to retell. In many ways, children took what would otherwise be the most ordinary of events and made them sound and read as extraordinary. It worked beautifully. It was about writing more than a 'recount of a past event'. Where was the significance – where was the poetry? Where were the details? Where was the storytelling? The analogy is that within

the mine of all your writing ideas, in all the rubble, you can find the diamond part of your writing. This is the writing that needs to be cared for, looked at carefully and polished up beautifully.

To explain the concept, I first shared an exemplar of one of my own memoirs. I then asked the children what they thought I had decided to focus on most – what did they believe I saw as the most important part of my personal narrative? It was fascinating that whilst I knew, the children gave a variety of answers. I then explained that I wanted to focus most on being at the top of the hill with my friends, staring up at the sun and ripping a sugar cola bottle with my teeth. I then simply invited the children during that day's writing time to consider what they thought their diamond moment was in their memoirs. During class sharing, children were able to discuss amongst one another what they decided to focus on or asked their peers to guess.

Impact:

What I and the children realised was that actually – you don't need to have been to Disneyland or a Caribbean island to have something memorable to write about. What surprised me most was how the concept of searching for that diamond moment could be translated to all other genres. The idea of a 'diamond moment' began to be used in the children's story writing and non-fiction projects. Children were able to turn massive epic sagas into short, snappy and wholly entertaining flash-fictions. Their non-fiction texts all of a sudden had a new sharper focus – explaining and sharing personally significant things – things that they truly cared about – to their readers.

Reflection:

I hope to focus on other compositional strategies we use but maybe take for granted and try to make these visible to the children in my class. This way, I think I can improve their feelings of self-regulation – the concept that they know what to do and how to do it when they are writing. I hope they can see writing as a craft and not a mystery.

References:

- Atwell, N., (2014)(3rd Ed), *In the middle USA*: Heinemann
- Calkins, L. (1998) *The art of teaching writing USA*: Heinemann