

Creating Our Own Publishing Houses!

The Writing For Pleasure Centre – Ross Young

@WritingRocks_17

Principle(s) in focus:

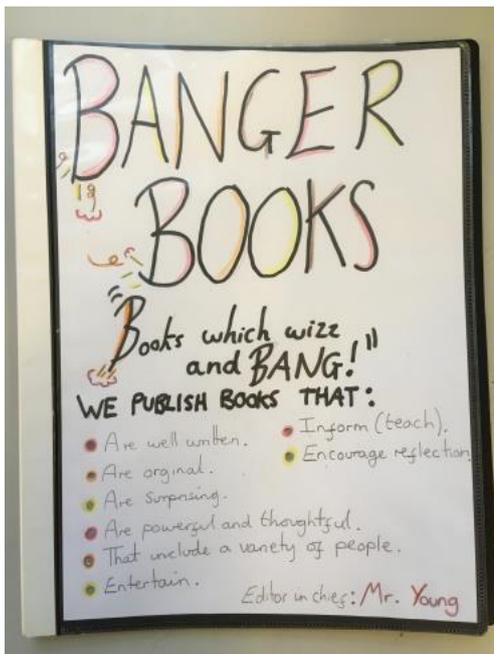
1. Building a community of writers.
2. Reading, sharing and talking about writing.
3. Personal writing projects.

By discussing and producing our own publishing houses, it was my belief that children's sense of writer-community would be enhanced. It created a platform and a publishing outlet for children's personal writing projects. Finally, by giving children responsibility for their own publishing houses, they were encouraged to read, share and talk like writers.

Aims:

The dominant aim on this occasion was to improve children's identities as writers. I wanted children to feel like genuine writers who go through the genuine processes to be published authors. Additionally, I wanted to give children ownership over the themes for their publishing houses and, to a certain extent, over their class library. Finally, by encouraging cooperative learning, I wanted to increase children's sense of self-regulation and self-efficacy as they would need to work with and use one another to be successful.

Description:



Having read *Back & Forth: Using An Editor's Mindset To Improve Student Writing* by Lee Heffernan, I was inspired to create a class publishing house in my own classroom.

We are now about half way through the academic year and the children are settling into the idea that they can publish personal writing projects, including writing being undertaken at home, into the class library. Children are increasingly talking about writing and are writing collaboratively too. Confidence has been built and a sense of writer-identity has been established. The children are beginning to believe they are writers and that they have many things to say and share with each other.

At the time, I was fortunate enough to have accepted a publishing deal and so took the opportunity to explain the process I was going through and the relationship I was building with the publishing house and my 'editor'. What I've come to realise is that a *compositional* editor is a very critical friend. They look to push your ideas and your writing to its maximum potential. They support and

champion you but they also tell you when things need untangling.

A publishing house, I've also discovered, has a certain identity, a certain statement of intent and a certain reputation for producing certain types of books. I decided to talk about it a little with my class.

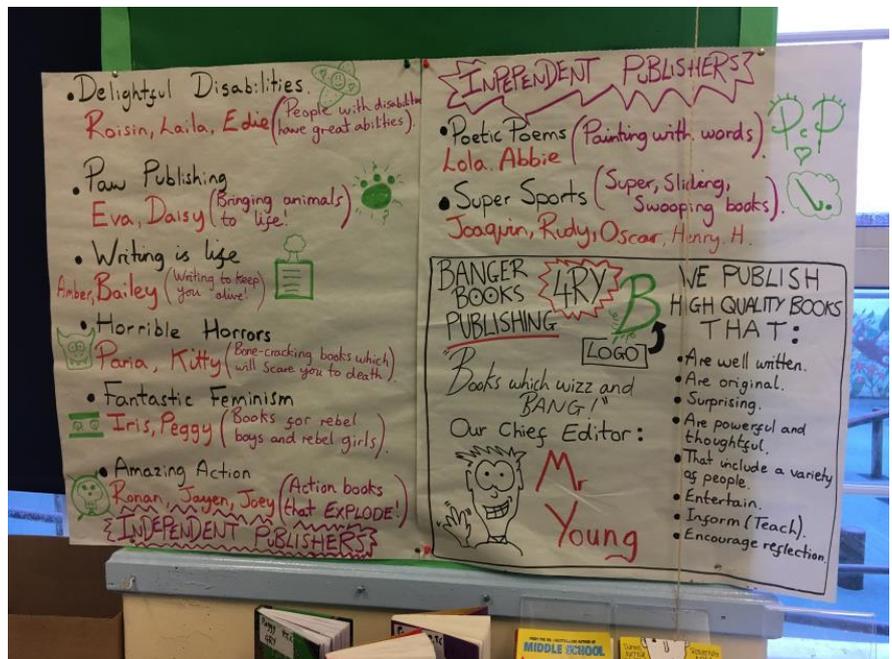
We discussed which publishing houses were publishing our favourite books in the class library and we decided that, in many ways, I was the children's chief editor and, as a writer-teacher, the children were often mine too! But we didn't have publishing house. We publish into the class library but what does our library stand for? What sort of texts do we want to publish for each other? Importantly, what sort of texts do we *need* to publish for each other? What's our mission? We discussed this and created our own mission statement for our newly forming publishing house...now we needed a name and a logo.

The children got together and came up with a variety of ideas. We took a vote and agreed on 'Banger Books Publishing: Books With Wizz And A Bang!' Alongside it was a logo which we felt everyone would be able to draw and add to their published pieces easily.

However, there was some disappointment in the class. Some of the children became attached to their particular vision for *their* publishing house and felt that maybe their idiosyncrasies weren't visible in our whole class mission statement. So with that, we decided that we could also have smaller, independent houses and that these would need mission statements, brand names and logos too. It was also agreed that these independents would have to be unique enough to not encroach on Banger Books Publishing.

The result was this poster showcasing the independents and what sorts of books they were looking to publish on their label. Children met and conferred with the editors when they felt they had something to publish with them. They shared any revision or editorial ideas for the manuscript before it went to press. I was also around to offer advice and an independent voice too.

Here is our initial list of independent publishing houses which make up our community of writers at present:



Delightful Disabilities *People with disabilities have great abilities* We are looking to publish: stories, poems, fiction, memoirs and lots of other things about disabilities.

Paw Publishing *Bring animals to life* We are looking to publish high-quality texts which have strong animal characters and have a strong environmental message.

Writing Is Life *Writing that keeps you alive* We are looking for memoirs that entertain, are well written and include lots of people and loads of info.

Horrible Horrors *Bone-cracking books that will scare you to death* We publish high-quality books that are well written, powerful, have a meaning, are scary, entertaining or surprising.

Fantastic Feminism *Books for rebel boys and rebel girls* We want our books to include an amazing girl! Something that the girl does to save the day, to be thoughtful, to have a moral.

Amazing Action *Books that explode* We publish high-quality texts that are scary with lots of action and are well written.

Poetic Poems *Painting with words* We publish high quality books that are well written, very artistic, entertain readers, not boring, poems about the things you like.

Super Sports *Super sliding swooping books* We publish high-quality books that are well written, about sport, are funny and are adventurous.

4RY Book Review *Sharing the book love* We publish high-quality reviews which inspire you to pick up a book and read.

Impact:

Creating a community of writers – children felt empowered to create and maintain their own inclusive writing community.

Every child a writer – all children could access the publishing houses and feel they had something to say and an identity within the class library.

Reading, sharing and talking about writing – This is where I saw the biggest changes. It's been wonderful watching children gather around a text and discuss what its strengths are and what it might need before it can be published. Hearing children be both critical and supportive friends has been inspiring.

Explicitly teach the writing processes – it helped children better understand the recursive nature of the writing processes and what manuscripts have to go through before they are published.

Personal writing projects – It has given a high status and created high expectations for personal writing projects.

Balancing composition with transcription – it has ensured that children attend to both the composition and the transcription of their pieces before publishing. Revision and editing were taken very seriously and were done to a much higher standard than I usually saw.

Pupil conferencing: meeting children where they are – This process helped me as a writer-teacher understand my role as a *compositional* editor and editor-in-chief of Banger Books Publishing. The way I spoke with the children about their projects changed dramatically. We were talking about the quality of their manuscripts on a much deeper level and I was giving genuine writerly advice and sharing my craft knowledge.

Reflection:

I hope that eventually these publishing houses can be placed in the whole school library and so shared across the school. I'm also interested in what would be the impact on children's writing if they regularly read pieces from the year above.

References:

- Heffernan, L., (2017) *Back and Forth: Using an editor's mindset to improve student writing USA*: Heinemann