

Creating a *Writing for Pleasure* pedagogy: one teacher's practice

This article describes a classroom where a *Writing for Pleasure* approach enables children to gain personal satisfaction and enjoyment in their writing whilst making exceptional academic progress.

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A Writing For Pleasure pedagogy works best when there is a dialogic, democratic space created and routinely promoted by the teacher, but it cannot happen by accident. Mr Tobias Hayden (classteacher)

This article is based on a one-year research project entitled *What Is It Writing For Pleasure Teachers Do That Makes The Difference?* (Young 2019) The project investigated how *Writing For Pleasure* teachers achieve writing teaching which is highly effective (resulting in greater than average progress) and also *affective* (pertaining to positive dispositions and feelings). This research comes at a time where we are seeing profound underachievement in writing (Ofsted 2012, DfE 2012, 2017) coupled with an increase in young people's indifference or dislike for writing (Clark, 2016, 2017).

Writing for Pleasure is a pedagogical approach recently developed in response to a wealth of research which shows that the most *effective* writing teaching emphasises *affective* aspects of being a writer. Using classroom observations and interviews the research project explored what it is that *Writing for Pleasure* teachers do to enable their pupils to achieve accelerated progress and also to have a strong sense of enjoyment and satisfaction in writing and being writers.

The teachers selected to take part in the project had all self-identified as *Writing for Pleasure* teachers through an online audit of practice. It was a requirement for selection that their practices be based on what the studies have told us is the most effective writing teaching, associated with high levels of pupil motivation, self-efficacy, agency, self-regulation, volition, writer-identity and pleasure in writing. They were also required to provide evidence of exceptional or above expected academic progress among their pupils. The teachers taught children in Key Stage Two (7-11 year olds)

and were working in a variety of settings in England.

The following account describes the practices of one of these teachers, Mr Hayden, as observed and recorded by the researchers. His class were achieving outstanding progress in writing, as testified by his school data. Our observations together with quotes from the children interviewed demonstrate the expertise with which Mr Hayden was enacting each of the principles of a *Writing for Pleasure* pedagogy, seeing them as highly and significantly interconnected. In this article the quotes (in blue font) are from children unless otherwise stated.

Creating a community of writers

Mr Hayden teaches a Year 4 class in a large primary school with a diverse cultural and economic background in London. His young apprentice writers see him as positive, caring and interested in their lives and this undoubtedly contributes to his class' engagement in writing at a high level of achievement.

They are a community of writers in which their teacher teaches and writes alongside his class and shares his own writing practices. The community of writers take part in meaningful practices and in writing projects they can identify with. For example, during the research observation week children were engaged in writing a memoir of something from their own lives, to be shared with peers and published into the class library for all to read. Mr Hayden. has shown them how to talk and present their writing to others in an outstandingly positive and constructive way. Importantly, children are involved in actions, discussions and reflections that make a difference to how they are taught and undertake their writing. It is a shared and democratic space which feels so much like a writing workshop - industrious, purposeful, social and often collaborative.

Tobias: *A Writing For Pleasure pedagogy requires a carefully designed, considered and structured environment, which can only really create a space for writing to thrive if the teacher really believes that a community approach is desirable. I was given a piece of advice by one of my tutors when I was training to be a teacher which has stuck with me: when someone walks into your classroom, they should be able to tell fairly quickly what kind of teacher you are and what you believe teaching to be.*

Every child a writer

I like to write something that is really strong.

When Mr. Hayden says 'time for writing,' I don't go errrr, I go 'ooo writing!'

In his writing workshop, Mr Hayden holds high achievement expectations for all members of his class. He sees all children as writers and, from the first, teaches strategies that lead to greater independence and ensures that everyone remains part of the writing community. He teaches what writing can do and models and promotes the social aspects of writing and peer support, through his manner around the class and in his mini-lessons.

Reading, sharing and talking about writing



I try to like draw and entertain with my writing. I normally share my writing and I want it to be reader-ready and really good for them.

In Mr Hayden's writing workshop, children are given ample opportunity to share and discuss with others (including him) their own and others' writing in order to give and receive constructive criticism

and celebrate achievement. The sophistication, maturity and commitment children showed in these discussions was striking. The writing community had developed their own ways of talking and thinking as writers and this was a beautiful thing to observe.

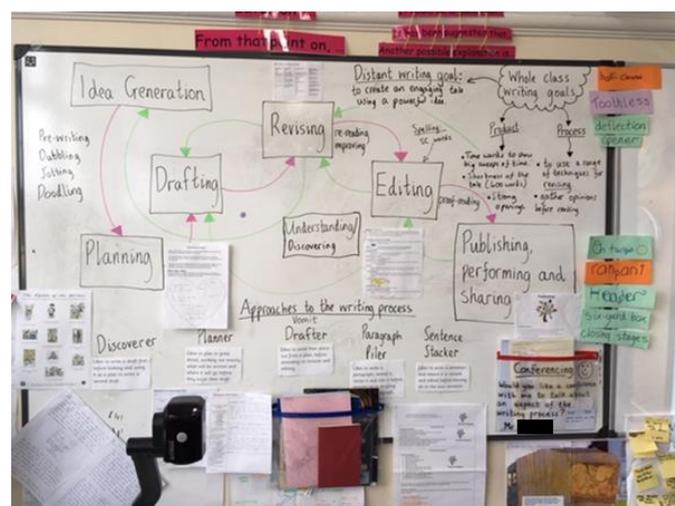
Purposeful & authentic writing projects

There is a day where we do idea generation and we think of loads of ideas and then we pick one we want to write about. It's not really strict that you have to write about that one. You can choose.

He doesn't really rush you. He helps. He makes it slow. Take your time with it and it will go smoothly.

The class writing projects Mr. Hayden introduces are seen as meaningful by his class. This is because children are first taught about a particular genre and are then given the opportunity to generate their own subject and purpose, write at their own pace, in their own way, and with a clear sense of a real reader. Given these circumstances, his writers remain focused on a task, maintain a strong personal agency over and commitment to their writing, and so produce something significant for themselves and in keeping with his expectations. In short, his class care about their writing and want it to do well.

Explicitly teaching the writing processes



Mr Hayden. gives direct instruction in the different components of the writing process (how to generate an idea, plan/dabble, draft, revise, edit, publish). He supports children's understanding of these processes through demonstration, discussion, modelling and sharing exemplars which he has written himself. As a result, his class respect him as someone worth listening to, and he has earned their

surprisingly, Mr Hayden sees this as a social justice issue and therefore holds equally high expectations for both class and personal writing projects. He is aware, too, that personal writing projects are advantageous to him as their teacher, because they offer an insight into children's personalities and help build relationships. He also appreciates their value in contributing to the assessment of children's development as independent writers.

Balancing composition with transcription

He actually gives us fun tricks and tips of things you can do and how to do it.

The children in Mr Hayden's class know that transcriptional issues can be attended to after the act of drafting and during the revision and editing stages. Spelling and punctuation are largely self-monitored; as they write, they mark their texts for items to be checked and corrected later. He promotes the idea that children's handwriting skills are best practised when publishing their completed pieces; children are motivated to attend to handwriting in the knowledge that their text must be 'reader-ready'.

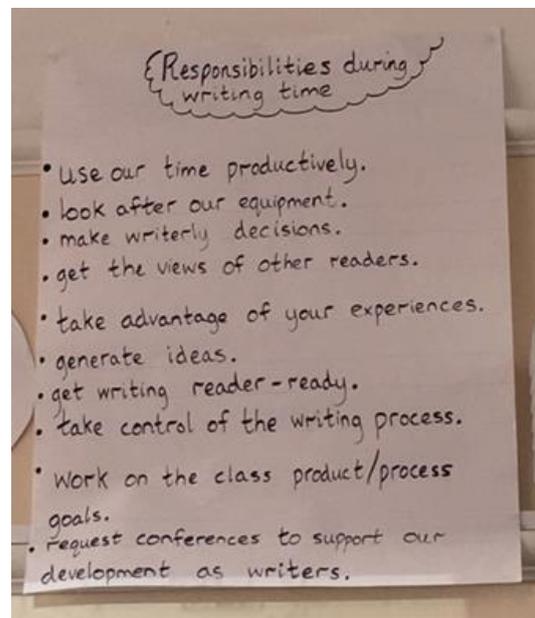
Mr Hayden knows that if grammar is to be understood in a meaningful way, it must be taught functionally and examined and applied in the context of real composition. He teaches grammar through mini-lessons and invites the children to try and use a particular grammatical feature in their writing that day. Decontextualised grammar exercises do not feature in his classroom.

Teach self-regulation strategies

If I say yes 'I can do this' it means I have a plan. I know what to do and I feel like that most of the time.

When we are writing, he sometimes puts something up on the board about it and how to do it and how we know we are doing it.

I've shown it to Mr Hayden. and he's shown me so much other things I could do and I'm like oh yeah... I think I will do that maybe tomorrow.



While Mr Hayden appreciates that children will often need guidance and advice, he also believes in the importance of self-regulation strategies and how these allow his class to write with confidence and independence. He has taught them techniques on how to generate ideas, use story maps, planners and checklists and writing 'tricks and tips' for revising their compositions. His class also have easy access to resources for editing and publishing. Impressively, Mr Hayden discusses with the community their rights and also responsibilities when producing their texts.

Being a Writer-Teacher

It is impossible to underestimate just how much Mr. H's class gain from knowing that their teacher faces the same writing challenges that they do. He writes in and out of the classroom and shares his writing regularly with the children in the spirit of seeking constructive criticism. He shares his own pieces in relation to the projects he is asking the children to engage in. The researchers felt that the sorts of conversations they observed taking place during this sharing were inspirational. He maintains genuine reciprocal relations when discussing and modelling his own writing processes and the exemplar texts he is in the process of writing. He shares the 'tricks, tips and secret strategies' that he genuinely employs in his writing and invites the children to give them a try too.

Pupil conferencing: meeting children where they are

Sometimes he comes and prompts us and he gives us advice to pick and it's really fun.

Mr. Hayden's rich response to children's writing is crucial. During the planning and composition stages he gives conferences and provides

immediate, relevant and non-judgmental feedback to individuals, drawing on his own experiences as a writer. He allows them time to reflect on his suggestions and to attend to learning points while they are still engaged in their writing. Because he is a writer-teacher, he is seen by his class to be well-placed to advise and give feedback; they know he understands the issues they encounter when he writes himself. Children feel that they can talk to him as writer to writer and that he reciprocates this feeling.

Mr Hayden: *I had one girl who was struggling to get going with a piece as she was stuck on the characters. I asked her to focus on what she wanted the characters to say rather than who they were initially and that seemed to do the trick... When I started out this year, I did not expect to be offering this kind of advice to one of the 8 year-old children in my class, but, I have discovered that this is the power of pupil-conferencing.*

This timely analogy is kind of how I see teacher-pupil conference, as a symbiotic relationship, a live, context-centred discussion where advice can flow in either direction; where the teacher and the child can respond to each other's writing and provide solutions where previously there had been none. I have learned a great deal this year about how the different writers in my class work and how best to respond to their needs.

Conclusion

I feel like if I never wrote – life would be a bit boring wouldn't it - having loads of thoughts but never being able to show it.

'When I know what to do and when I can write about what I feel inside kind of, I know I can write and I want to write.'

These are heartening, happy and confident words which sum up the child's experience of writing and becoming a writer during that year, gaining autonomy, skill, self-belief, desire to write, and of course pleasure. Every child deserves the same.

Mr Hayden: *My pedagogical stance is best exemplified by a Writing for Pleasure pedagogy which is why I pursue it faithfully.*

One of the unexpected benefits of implementing this approach is that it has reignited my passion for learning about writing and the teaching of it and I am now a voracious reader of the literature which underpins the approach. From Ralph Fletcher to Lucy Calkins; from Donald Graves to Michael Rosen, I now have a small library's worth of wisdom to work my way through knowing that next year's teaching will surely be even better than this year's.

The researchers were in no doubt that Mr Hayden's class wrote for pleasure and genuinely felt themselves to be writers and not simply producers of text - a rare thing in the current climate of children's writing at school. That he was able so successfully to create a *Writing For Pleasure* community together with the achievement of exceptionally high progress data in a very diverse class of children suggests that *Writing For Pleasure* as a pedagogy has huge potential. You can read more about the research project at www.writing4pleasure.com

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