Why effective writing instruction requires a writer-teacher
By Ross Young & Benjamin Harris

Delivering effective writing instruction most effectively requires teachers to be writers. (Young & Ferguson 2021 p.200)

In our book *Writing For Pleasure: theory, research and practice*, we conclude that a writer-teacher is simultaneously a writer who knows how to teach writing and a teacher who identifies as a writer.

Being a writer-teacher involves teaching and demonstrating, from a position of expertise, the processes, procedures, craft knowledge, strategies, and techniques writers use to create successful and meaningful texts. It also involves crafting writing just for yourself. Finally, it’s about role-modelling for children the environment and behaviours of a writer and how to live the writer’s life.

I immersed myself in writing for pleasure, and I brought my pleasure into the classroom. The effect was palpable. (Kaufman cited in Young & Ferguson 2021 p.199)

Below is a table which summarizes what educational research and case studies from the world’s most exceptional teachers of writing conclude about the link between effective instruction and being a writer-teacher.

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<tr>
<th>Teaching and demonstrating</th>
<th>Crafting and role modelling</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers write to gain a better understanding of the processes, procedures, and craft knowledge children require if they are to produce meaningful and successful writing. <em>If you need more guidance, see our handbook Real-World Writers or our Class Writing Projects.</em></td>
<td>Teachers write to better understand how to build a community of writers in their classrooms – a community which reflects how writers live and work together. <em>For more insights into building a community of writers, see our handbook Real-World Writers.</em></td>
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<td>Teachers write to build up a repertoire of useful and responsive writing-study mini-lessons. <em>If you want more information, see the writing-study mini-lessons examples which accompany our Class Writing Projects.</em></td>
<td>Teachers write to ensure they can read, think, and talk authentically to children about writing and being a writer from a position of empathy and expertise. <em>For more, see our handbook Real-World Writers.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers write to produce excellent mentor texts which help students better understand the goals for a class writing project. In addition, they undertake their own writing within the class writing project and write alongside their pupils towards publication or performance. <em>If you need guidance on writing mentor texts, see our Class Writing Projects or our handbook Real-World Writers.</em></td>
<td>Teachers write to share their own writing goals and ambitions. They write to showcase the enjoyment and satisfaction they feel when writing beyond the purposes of school. <em>For more on personal writing projects, see our handbook Real-World Writers.</em></td>
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Teachers write in order to show how writers use their own reading as inspiration and mentor. To read more about the connection between reading and writing teaching, please see the writing-study mini-lessons in our Class Writing Projects or our handbook Real-World Writers.

This table is adapted from Young & Ferguson 2021 (p.199-200)

Practical advice from the research

Children do not just learn about writing from their teacher, they also learn about what it means to be a writer.

(Young & Ferguson 2020 p.70)

- Being a writer-teacher is more than simply demonstrating or undertaking ‘shared writing’. It’s about being a role-model and giving children an apprenticeship in how to live the writer’s life. For example, writer-teachers have their trusty writer’s notebook within touching distance at all times and find themselves in a constant state of composition.
- Don’t overload children by modelling multiple processes in a single writing session. For example, a writer-teacher will just model an idea generation technique and that will be it.
- Don’t model for long periods of time. Try to keep your mini-lessons to less than 15 minutes.
- Model one process, procedure, strategy, technique or literary feature before inviting your class to try it out for themselves during that day’s writing time. For example, showcase how you crafted some character-description in your short story before inviting children to try the same with their own stories.

There is no greater feeling than having children enter your classroom every day seeing themselves as a close-knit community of apprentice writers. They know that every day, when they enter the writing workshop that is your classroom, it’s going to start with you giving them a valuable writing lesson – a writing lesson from their very own writer-teacher.

(Young & Ferguson 2020, preface)

- Teach writing-study and functional grammar mini-lessons from your perspective as a writer. Show examples from your own writing journal. For example, show your class how you’ve usefully and genuinely used fronted adverbials in a piece you’ve written before inviting them to give it a try during that day’s writing time.
- Don’t focus disproportionately on modelling the drafting process. Model all aspects of a writer’s process including: generating ideas, planning, drafting, revising, proof-reading and publishing/performing. There are also processes such as: playing, abandoning, reimagining, returning, and updating which you should model too. For example, you might discuss how you’ve gone back to a piece of writing you started crafting months ago. Or you might explain how you’ve written a quick ‘discovery draft’ to use as a plan for a more formal first draft.
- You don’t have to be ‘the sage on the stage’ and only write live in front of your class. Instead, you can share your writing (at its different stages), and invite children to ask questions about your process and discuss what you’re trying to achieve. For example, you might write quietly at your desk before school and share what you’ve been working on with your class later that day.
Just as it would be difficult to teach children the tuba if you’ve never played one, so it is difficult to teach children to be writers if you never write. Become a writer-teacher who writes for and with pleasure and use your literate life as a learning tool in the classroom. Children gain from knowing that their teacher faces the same writing challenges that they do.  

(Young & Ferguson 2020 p.23)

- Write amongst your class with regularity. Choose a table to sit at and write with the children for five minutes at the beginning of writing time. Let the class know that you’re not to be disturbed during this time because it’s important to you. You might not always want to share what you’ve written but it’s good to regularly talk with the other young writers at your table and ask their opinion on your piece. You can offer to give them advice in exchange!
- Write mentor texts which match what children will be trying to achieve in their class writing project. Write mentor texts away from the pressure of writing live. For example, write them for pleasure at home or with colleagues after school in a writing group. You can then share these texts with your class and invite children to discuss their strengths and weaknesses. These sorts of discussions can be useful when devising your product goals/success criteria for a class writing project.
- Share what you’ve been working on outside of school in your personal time. This shows them how you live the writer’s life beyond school and children will see that they can too. Apart from enhancing your teaching practice, writing recreationally can improve your mental health and well-being and can become an intoxicating and pleasurable part of your life.
- Talk about your writing with children. Tell them a bit about your own writing struggles and ask your class for their advice and suggestions. Show that you are there to learn from them too. It’s important to discuss your own excitement, enjoyment and satisfaction when your writing is going well. This can promote what’s called situational motivation in the writing classroom. For example, tell children when you’ve been inspired to write because of something they’ve said or written themselves.
- Offer your own writerly advice and talk writer-to-writer with children when pupil conferencing. For example, when children run into difficulties, share how you solve those typical writing problems yourself and encourage them to try it out for themselves.
- Discuss with your class what everyone’s favoured writing processes might be. For example, use the processes shared in our book Real-World Writers: discoverer, planner, vomiter, paragraph piler and sentence stacker.
- Share with children the different routines and disciplines famous writers have. You might like to use this website to help you.
- Think about the relationship between your reading and writing and discuss with your class the concept of intertextuality. For example, make sure you have your writer’s notebook to hand when reading and write when you feel inspired to do so.
- Participate in writer-teacher groups to better understand how writers talk, share and craft socially. You can then reflect on whether this experience matches how you expect children to write in the community of writers that is your classroom. For example, you could join a NWPUK writing group.

(Young & Ferguson 2020 p.24)

Teachers who perceive themselves as writers offer richer classroom writing experiences and generate increased enjoyment, motivation and tenacity among their students than non-writers. (Cremin & Baker cited in Young & Ferguson 2020 p.133)
References:


Further reading:

- Alford, K., Early, JS. (2017) *Take time to write!: A teacher’s story of writing within a community of teacher writers* *English Leadership Quarterly* 40, 2-5
- Bean, B. (2020) *Tens minutes a day – a writer I’ll stay*
- Bean, B. (2020) *Alert to writing: I could write about that!*
- Dobson, T. (2016). *‘Just because I’m not a published author does not mean that I’m not a writer’: Primary trainee teachers’ identities as creative writers*. *Writing in Practice: The Journal of Creative Writing Research* 2
- Smith, J., and Wrigley, S. (2012) *What has writing ever done for us? The power of teachers’ writing groups* *English in Education*, 46(1), 69–84
- Vasques, M. (2020) *Writing like a writer in the classroom*
- Whittick, L. (2020) *Write a little - share a little*
- Young, R., Ferguson, F. (2020) *UKLA viewpoints: Writing* Leicester: UKLA
Further Reading

What we have provided you with here is just a quick guide to get you started with implementing our resources successfully. However, there is still a lot more to explore and learn! We call our approach the Real-World Writers approach, and it is based on our own research into evidence-based practice and case studies of world-class writing teachers. You can read about this research in our book Writing For Pleasure.
Class Writing Projects

All our class writing projects come with comprehensive teacher notes. There are suggestions for year group and whole school progression, advice on writing your own mentor texts, dozens of craft knowledge and functional grammar mini-lessons, and suggested books you can use to support the project. You also receive our highly-prized and popular pupil-facing Genre-Booklets which help children take a germ of an idea and see it through to publication or performance. This includes giving them idea generation techniques, exemplar texts, drafting advice, revision techniques, revision and editing checklists and our publishing and performance menu.

To read more about a project, you simply click on its icon.

Year 3

**Year 3**
Poetry: The Natural World

**Year 3**
Poetry: Animals & Pets

**Year 3**
Fables

**Year 3**
Fairy Tales

**Year 3**
Memoir

**Year 3**
Information

**Years 3-6**
Match Report

**Years 3-6**
Science Report
Year 4

Sensory Poetry

Character Driven Short Stories

Setting Focused Short Stories

Memoir

Information

Instructions

Persuasive Letter For Personal Gain

Match Report

Year 5

Inspired By... Poetry

Poetry That Hides In Things

Developed Short Stories

Graphic Novels

Memoir

Information

Advocacy Journalism

Biography

W: Writing4pleasure.com  T: @WRtingRocks_17  F: Search ‘Writing For Pleasure In Schools’
Year 6
Social & Political Poetry

Year 6
Flash-Fiction

Year 6
Autobiography

Year 6
Community Activism

Year 6
Explanation

Year 6
Discussion

Year 6
Historical Account
And finally...

- We are always looking to add extra exemplars to our Genre-Booklets. Please share your own writing with us or any good examples written by the children in your class. You can send any pieces to www.writing4pleasure.com/contact

- If this writing project or one of the mini-lessons has gone really well, please consider writing it up as an example of practice. You can find out more by visiting www.writing4pleasure.com/get-involved

- If you’re interested in developing your writing teaching further, we offer a wide-range of evidence-informed CPD including our popular school residency programme, teacher workshops and multi-day institutes. Find out more at www.writing4pleasure.com/training

Join us

Connect with other fantastic writer-teachers who use our approach on Facebook search ‘Writing For Pleasure in schools’ or on Twitter @WritingRocks_17