

An Idea of His Own

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Background:



I am a practising writer-teacher committed to developing a pedagogy that motivates, engages and commits children to writing, as well as enhancing their strategies for writing. I set up [The Writing Web](#), a safe online space where students are supported in writing for their own audiences and purposes. I deliver CPD to schools and am an associate trainer with the National Literacy Trust. Practising as a writer-teacher and managing the online writer-teacher community, [#WritersByNight](#), is developing both my craft knowledge and my understanding of a Writing For Pleasure pedagogy. By curating the monthly [#WritingRocks](#) Twitter chats in collaboration with other writer-teachers and researchers, I hope to share the theory behind the strategies for world-class writing teaching with the EduTwitter community.

Here follows an example of my practice from a newly established Year 6 writing intervention class at Gallions Mount, a wonderful 2 form entry primary school in Greenwich.

Principle(s) in focus:

- [Build a community of writers](#)
- [Treat every child as a writer](#)
- [Read, share, think and talk about writing](#)

Aims:

The aim of this online lesson was for children to begin generating their own ideas for writing. I wanted them to identify and describe something that caught their attention in their own environment that sparked their imaginations.

It was important to raise the children's levels of self-efficacy, so they would be more likely to engage in setting challenging learning goals and persist with their writing even when it became difficult. In order to achieve this, it was essential that every child had control over what they were going to write about and their own writing process; that every child had a sense of agency over their writing.

Description:

This was the first week of lockdown 2021, when schools moved to online learning for at least the next half-term. I was determined to continue modelling how to live the writer's life and to teach the children authentic writing processes. I set up a writing project where children used their local environment as inspiration for their own stories.

For me, going for a walk, observing closely and letting my mind wander, is an important part of my writing process. I also felt that it was important to emphasise getting out in the fresh air on the first day of lockdown schooling after the Christmas lockdown and recognised this as an opportunity for children to involve other family members in the Writing Challenge, if they wished.

30 Minute Writing Challenge!

But first you will need to go for a walk yourself. Wrap up warm, it's cold out there but it has stopped raining, following last night's storm.

You don't have to walk very far to help you complete this writing challenge, it may just be to the end of your road.

You may go by yourself or with someone else from your home. They may want to do the writing challenge, too! The important thing is that you really look closely at what's around you.



The majority of children were excited to get out of the house, go for a walk and engage with the project and off they went! Louis, however, was adamant that he was not going outside. He had hit a wall (sorry but I couldn't resist the pun). However, I was just as adamant that *he* was going to choose the focus for *his* description. Engaging in the writing process can be pleasurable and empowering, as you learn to express in writing 'what you meant to say or from achieving what you want your reader to feel' with increasing skill (Young & Ferguson 2020 p.9).

The empty page can be daunting and it can be tempting to rescue young writers by 'gifting' them ideas for their writing and scaffolds such as sentence starters. However, 'gifts' such as these, bestowed too early in the writing process, impact negatively on children's motivation to draft and redraft their writing. Simply because it is not *their* writing, instead they are being asked to fulfil a task to please the teacher. This is why the recipient of such 'gifts' are so quick to declare their writing is 'finished'.

I fired prompts at Louis: **"What's important in your home?"**

- Is there a drawer / cupboard that you don't usually / are not allowed to look in?
- Is there anything really old? Even older than Mum or Dad?
- Is there something only some people are allowed to use?
- Does someone else have something you would like?
- Is there something that was a present from someone important?

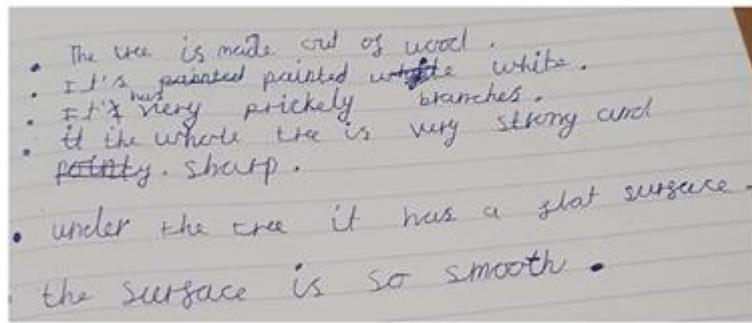
His eyes lit up as he identified: "The little tree," talking animatedly about an ornament in his living room. I was surprised to learn that this is what he had chosen but his enthusiasm was genuine and a joy to witness.

"I can tell that tree is really important to you. Would you like to write about it?" I asked.

And he was off.

Impact:

Louis's writing



As you can see, Louis did not choose to follow the model of writing a descriptive paragraph or two, where children described what captured their imaginations. Instead, he bullet-pointed surface level descriptions of the tree, giving no indication of its significance. However, he had clearly examined the tree in detail and talked animatedly about how the ornament was a gift from his grandmother. He decided that he would write a story about a boy whose friend stayed over and broke the tree out of spite. This would offer him the opportunity to draw on how he would feel and respond if his grandmother's gift was damaged.

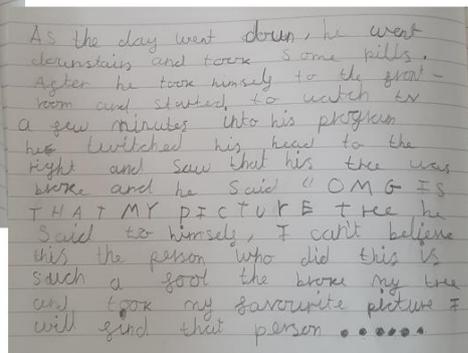
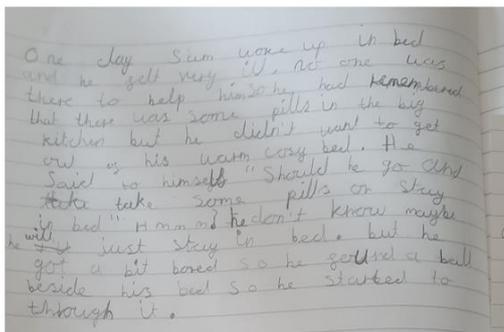
Choosing his own idea for writing has certainly raised Louis's levels of self-efficacy. He submitted his first two paragraphs that afternoon, accompanied by this comment:



im really looking forward for u to read my work

The other children reacted positively to Louis's first draft using the chat function. I love the way they responded authentically as readers to his characters and emerging plotline and so did Louis. He had clearly engaged his audience and this was highly motivating for him.

Louis's 30 Minute Writing Challenge



The others said:

How angry he was

I like how Louis described where they met

I like the way he changed the shouting in capital letters

I liked about Louis's story was that how he decided Sam's friends when they was mad

is it a tree house or are they living in the tree?

Casper and Joe might be SUSPECTS

they live in a house

Sleepover or both Casper and Joe's mom went on holiday so they had to go to Sam's house

What Louis need to improve in his writing what will happen to Sam if he takes the pills?

And how will he feel

Yes Louis! This is the true spirit of the 30 minute writing challenge! How do you feel?

Next Steps:

You need to think about who broke the tree and how Sam will find out.

Can you surprise us? Describe why Joe and Caspar are there in past tense story language.

Additional responses in chat from his classmates.



I think Louis worked really hard work



thx x



How will the pills help him?



How angry is he What sickness is he suffering?



How was the tree broken?

Unprompted, Louis turned on his microphone and was inundated with more praise and even more questions from the other children. It was wonderful to see how their enthusiasm for something he has created from his own imagination boosted Louis's confidence. He continued to commit throughout the writing process, producing multiple redrafts and is proud to share his writing with YOU in this example of practice.

Reflection:

The following week, I didn't see Louis for a couple of lessons and had all of the usual human and teacherly concerns. I'm sure you can appreciate my joy when he did reappear with this comment accompanying his latest redraft!



miss izibili i have redrafted it and changed some points is that ok with u i hope u enjoy reading it



Louis, you are a writer and it makes my heart sing!

In the subsequent sessions, I enjoyed conferencing with Louis about character development and challenging him about plot holes, because his ownership of the idea was robust and he was eager to develop it. He is also more willing to be honest about not having completed writing and to engage in the redrafting process. In short, he is operating as a writer.

Louis is one of the children who prefers the reassurance of staying online during the session whilst he writes independently. As we return to school, I am determined to continue providing opportunities for all of the children to develop as self-regulated learners and experience the pleasure of crafting their own pieces of writing.