

Opening The Door To *Writing For Pleasure*



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Background:

I work as a literacy pedagogy officer, supporting developments in literacy across a cluster of schools in West Lothian. This example of practice took place in the P6 and P7 classes of Toronto Primary School in Livingston.

Principle(s) in focus:

4. [Pursue purposeful and authentic class writing projects](#)
5. [Teach the writing processes](#)
7. [Be reassuringly consistent](#)

Aims:

The aim of our enquiry was to explore how aspects of *Writing For Pleasure* pedagogy could improve learners' experience of writing. In particular, we hoped to develop children's motivation for writing and build their self-efficacy as writers.

Description:

Over an 8 week period, during which classes were working on two genres of writing (explanation texts and then poetry), we introduced several elements of *Writing For Pleasure* pedagogy into our writing lessons. We adopted the "Writer's Workshop" lesson structure. Each workshop started with a mini-lesson, focussing for example on a feature of the genre, an aspect of the writer's craft or discussion of a mentor text (Young et al. [2021](#)). During writing time, children were invited to apply the learning from our mini-lessons while teachers took on a "teacher-writer" role or supported writers through pupil conferencing (Ferguson & Young [2021](#)). At the end of each workshop, there was an opportunity for children to share and discuss their work. We really liked the "Author's Chair" approach for this (Harris [2020](#))!

Some of this work took place during a period of covid-related school closure and remote learning. One unanticipated outcome was the way class spaces on MS Teams came to support the community of writers. We started to see drafts and works-in-progress being shared online, pupils posting feedback and encouragement for each other, and writing taking place beyond the physical and temporal boundaries of the class writing lesson (Hayden & Vasques [2020](#))!

We taught the writing processes, with a particular focus on revising and editing to get our compositions “publication ready”. We liked the ARMS (add, remove, move, substitute) and CUPS (capitals, understanding, punctuation, spelling) approaches to revising and editing. We also found some digital tools really helpful: for example, the “editor” function in MS Word online was really useful for pupils, especially during online learning.

During our work on poetry, we developed an authentic writing project: we decided to write, design and publish a collection of poetry in each class. We used the online “bookcreator” app to collaborate on this process - an excellent resource! Here are the front covers of the two finished collections:



During poetry, the use of mentor texts was really important to us (Young & Ferguson [2021](#)). We had been reading Kate Clanchy’s “How to Grow Your Own Poem” and using some of her ideas to help us write our own poems in response to existing texts. Some of the examples we used were “The Door” by Miroslav Holub, “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon and “Hope” by Emily Dickinson. This project also coincided with the US Presidential inauguration, and one class read and responded to Amanda Gorman’s inaugural poem, “The Hill We Climb”. It was great to see poetry in that “real world” context!

Impact:

We gathered data in a range of forms throughout the enquiry. This included baseline and endpoint surveys of pupil and staff (Young et al. [2021](#); Young & Ferguson [2020](#), Young & Ferguson [2021](#)), focus groups of learners, classroom observation and of course the children’s writing. The experience had a significant positive impact for staff and pupils. The team of teachers felt our writing pedagogy was really enhanced by the *Writing For Pleasure* approach, and we will continue to use aspects such as the Writer’s Workshop lesson structure.

For our learners, the impact on motivation and enjoyment was huge. Children were really motivated by having a real publication goal, and this was enhanced by their involvement not just in the writing but in the creative process of designing the books: selecting the poems, deciding on a title and cover art, designing layout and typography, and finally publishing. The launch of the final products with readings for the school community was a really special moment too.

We felt the teaching and modelling of strategies to use throughout the writing processes really boosted self-efficacy as pupils were able to use these to move their writing forward with increasing independence (Young et al. [2021](#)). As noted above, the use of mentor texts, especially in poetry, was really effective. They helped to provide a model and boost self-efficacy by helping pupils overcome any sense that they couldn’t write a poem. Poems with a strong structure or those that used techniques like anaphora (the repetition of words or phrases) were especially helpful in this sense.

We found the use of pupil-conferencing to support live, dialogic feedback during the writing process to be really powerful (Ferguson & Young [2021](#)). Compared to written feedback after writing, there was more of a sense of developing ideas and finding solutions together with learners. We were lucky in this that we were often team teaching during this project, so were able to pupil conference with more individuals than would normally have been the case.

Quotes from staff:

“The learners have really found a love for writing through this change of pedagogy. They have really seen the importance of revising and editing their writing in order to publish it and they have felt such pride in sharing and publishing their writing.”

“I have felt really inspired as a teacher throughout the project and so have my learners - thank you!”

Quotes from pupils:

“Sharing and publishing feels good. I feel like I wouldn’t have read my work to the class last year but now I have done it. I even recorded my reading and published it in a book.”

“I used to hate writing and thought it was boring but now I feel I can do it instantly – there’s nothing I can’t do. I love poetry.”

“Feedback and talking about my writing really helped me get better - I kept improving it every time. Quite a few drafts but I’m really happy with my final one that is in the book.”

“It helps to see other people’s work - we see books that older adults might write but we don’t see books by kids but now we know we can publish them to the world.”

“My mum bought me a book for my work that I’ve never used before but now I’m using it for the finished drafts of my poems and now I want to publish poetry when I grow up. I want to be a writer.”

Reflection:

The increased sense of enjoyment, motivation and self-efficacy we saw in our children was matched by some really impressive writing. Reflecting back on the experience, it is more clear to me than ever that, if our writing pedagogy supports children’s affective needs, the quality of pupil writing will be boosted. We’ll continue to explore the principles of *Writing for Pleasure*. For me personally, I’d like to focus on developing agency through personal writing projects (Young & Ferguson [2021](#)).

References:

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