

"He flew for 13 hours" – in the world of shared story, we can do anything! Bringing shared writing alive in the primary classroom: enthusing and inspiring young writers

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In primary classrooms, teaching writing often incorporates four main strategies which lead to independent writing; modelled, shared, interactive and guided writing. The focus of this article is 'shared writing', although the authors use this term openly, offering a 'brand' of shared writing which seamlessly draws upon aspects of the other teaching-of-writing strategies. Rather than seeking to define shared writing rigidly, as one distinctive practice, they draw upon all strategies in their 'shared writing times'.

Strategies for teaching writing

As stated above, in classrooms there are often four main teaching strategies used by teachers. Modelling of writing is defined as explicit instruction in writing (Graves; 1984, Calkins; 1986), where the teacher demonstrates and thinks aloud as she writes. Shared writing differs in that it is often defined as a joint composition between teacher and children where the teacher is scribe (Swartz, Klein and Shook; 2001). The main difference between shared and interactive writing is that in interactive writing: the teacher and children share the transcription of their shared compositions.

Pearson & Gallagher (1983) see these strategies on a continuum which lead to independent writing, where the children have been empowered to write through these strategies, but still need the encouragement of the teacher as they write independently. In schools across the UK, the route to independent writing may have been dominated by shared and guided writing for the last decade and a half; focus strategies of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS: 1998), in as much as both types of writing instruction were time-tabled into the 'Literacy Hour'.

Teachers working from the NLS (1998) and the proceeding Primary National Strategies (2003) and the Primary Framework (2006) widely drew upon the practices of shared writing, as defined above, which led into 'guided writing'. Guided writing was the strategy where teachers guided small, often differentiated groups of children through a passage of writing; the focus was often upon specific structures outlined in the NLS and as such guided writing is often viewed as a skills-based approach. It has been argued that the result of some teaching practices for writing force teachers into

becoming transmitters of information about writing rather than allowing them to be actively engaged in writing with their children (Burns & Myhill; 2004).

The ideas behind the type of shared writing described in this project

Graves's (1983) seminal work describes writing as a process in which planning, drafting, revising and editing happen recursively. Graves's notion of writing as a craft which focuses first on the shaping of meaning rather than the forced acquisition of forms and structures is the basis of the style of shared writing done in this project.

Strickland, Ganske and Monroe (2002) define a type of Process Writing where teachers support children to write using the same processes that writers use. For the authors of this article, the importance of teaching and learning to write lie in giving quality time for the processes of writing to happen.

The teaching-of-writing strategies reviewed in the previous paragraphs all have the capacity to encourage these processes. However, external pressures of accountability through test results seem sometimes to demean writing to becoming a product. As Grainger, Gooch and Lambirth (2003) showed, children often feel demoralised in class when instructed to write. In the preliminary findings of as yet unpublished research (Lambirth et al: 2014-15), children who spoke about 'good writing' were all weighed down with concerns about technical elements, using pseudo-technical classroom terms (Wow words, VCOP, SPaG, Handwriting Licence etc.) to define how to improve writing.

For teaching-of-writing strategies to truly encourage children to love writing, teachers need to use professional judgement and move in and out of the strategies in response to classroom interactions: the needs and feel of the moment. Our shared aim was that the 'teaching-of-writing' needed to enhance the pleasure that can be found in writing. The overarching aim of our project was to foster a love of writing and to encourage children's voice and flow and creativity.

Together, we were concerned that our teaching of writing should acknowledge the children's own voices, whilst simultaneously enabling children to develop their understanding of how written texts create meaning. Shared writing was therefore aimed at both 'creating and crafting': children had opportunities to express their ideas and had support in developing understanding of how best to shape their ideas (Myhill: 2003).

We sought to enable children to talk about writing in terms of what *they* wanted to say, to whom (developing a mindfulness towards their audience and their audience's needs), and how to make *their* writing sound like 'writing' and not like 'talking'. Therefore, the style of shared writing practiced in our classrooms drew upon the unique voices of the children as the way in to developing control of standard structures.

Participants and Project Details:

Here, we share the writing practices that we engaged in with our classes over the last year (September 2014- July 2015), whilst also implementing changes of the National Curriculum (September; 2013). Our brand of 'shared writing' was practised every day in the classroom. Our classes consisted of two parallel Year 4 classes of 32 children each and one Additionally Resourced Mainstream Setting (ARMS) for children with complex SEN (8 children).



Some of the children involved with the project

From September 2014, each teacher began a shared story writing project in their respective classrooms. The shared writing took place every morning and the duration of sessions was between 25- 40 minutes.

Other Literacy took place either immediately before or after (for example, reading, drama, group writing, independent writing). This article describes how the shared writing emerged over the year and how the children's engagement in the shared writing promoted their personal creative approaches to independent writing and enabled them to write authentic, imaginative texts where they reflected genuine mindfulness of their audience.

The authors' 'brand' of shared writing; a working definition

The 'shared writing' we practised, along with our classes, drew together the range of teaching-writing strategies (modelling, shared, interactive), so that they happened together. That is to say there was not a point where planning, or teaching and learning outlined any one strategy, but instead all strategies were merged. This merger happened in response to the writing interactions of the moment. Classroom practice was all aimed at increasing each individual child's desire to write, developing children's craft in writing, and children's love of composing. What follows is not a formula of how to share write, but a working definition of how shared writing has evolved this year with these children. As Sarah said, "I didn't go into the school like this, it happened over time and with the class I've got at the moment." Next year approaches will change dependent upon the children and the interactions of the moment. The shared writing projects ran concurrently and each impacted the others and the whole school community of writers.

The shared writing draws upon these aspects:

- Creating a context for writing and sense of audience
- Sharing an 'affective' text
- Children's talk; exploring ideas
- Using writing processes together; partner/ group/whole class writing
- Embedding the teaching of 'grammar' into the service of intriguing and hooking our readers
- Making explicit connections between writing, reading and reading aloud
- Capturing the shared writing in different forms: books, films, art, dance
- Sharing with each other and the wider school community

Creating a context for writing and a sense of audience

The context for the shared writing was a shared 'secret' story. As teachers, none of us formally introduced what we were doing: we wanted the end to be open and needed it to be led by the children. We were enablers, facilitating learning, yet being led by the learners themselves (Swann et al: 2012). To be enablers of the shared stories, teacher roles shifted during the sessions.

The Programmes of Study (NC: 2013) outlined what the children should learn, but we were committed to facilitating this learning through children exercising choice. Our roles included setting the 'context' for the daily writing sessions, listening to the partner/group talk and scripts children created daily and asking questions related to their ideas, scribing 'agreed' versions of daily writing, editing the shared text as suggested by the children, modelling our own thinking, and offering justifications for choices related to shaping the text.

Despite the fact that we scribed and edited, decisions were mutual, in tune with our role as enablers through the artistic event of writing a story. In the ARMS an additional role after scribing was to read through the passages created daily with the children using Makaton, and to record work for publication using text and symbols.

The story was 'secret' as all participants shared in the uncertainty of not knowing where the story would lead and the classes kept the plots completely secret during the weeks of writing, in order to surprise each other at the end when they shared them and showed each other the films they had made of the stories. The 'secret' had huge motivational effect upon all participants, and elaborate cover-stories were often invented by the children when working on the stories, engaging them in further layers of inventiveness and creativity.

Sharing an affective text

We held a shared conviction that affective literature (Cremin: 2010) enhances and inspires children's writing, specifically in terms of the shared voice children acquire when immersed in books they are living in (Goouch, Grainger and Lambirth: 2005). In Year 4, both classes were immersed in the secondary worlds created by Berlie Doherty's 'Daughter of the Sea' and Anne Holm's modern classic, 'I am David'. In the ARMS, the children were sharing Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' and the 'The Wizard of Oz'. The shared writing began from simple starting points (modelled initially by teachers). Story one began, "Ssssh," whispered (child's name) "What was that?". Starting point two was a countdown from 10. The ARMS story began similarly, "Crash...thunder!" All starting points reflected ideas from shared books.

Children's talk; exploring ideas

Shared writing floated on the 'sea of talk' (Britton: 1970). Children chose to discuss and draft their ideas daily with partners/groups; these groupings were hybrid; one day girls would pair with girls and boys would pair with boys. The next, whole clusters of tables would work together. Sometimes, individuals would be so engrossed in their own creations that they chose to work alone. What we discovered was that the organisation for group work took no time at all. We simply recapped on the previous day's writing and offered a learning point relevant to the shape the writing was taking and the children began. The transition between reviewing the shared text and

starting discussions and drafting was seamless; children, it often transpired, had already planned who they were going to work with next and what they intended to say. This also happened when it came to the transformation of the written texts into televisual texts every few weeks.

Using writing processes together

The processes of generating ideas, drafting and ongoing editing were recursive. Calkins (1986) says that children need explicit instruction in the skills they need to be good writers but they also need to practice writing itself. This type of shared writing addressed both these notions simultaneously. Both us and our classes engaged in writing together, as our modelling was used to reflect how writers need to consider their readers and how language, grammar and structural choices are made to this end; at the same time, the whole community of writers developed their craft through engagement in meaningful composing. For example, much of the contextual work in the classroom engaged the children in considering their senses whilst writing in order to inspire their composing. Process drama was frequently used as a means of exploring ideas and feelings and in the ARMS the children wore a bracelet with sense symbols which they used when engaged in multi-sensory story planning. They walked out part of their story journey across a roll of backing paper on the floor, describing settings and using a scale of 1 ('happy') – 5 ('about to explode') to help them describe character emotions. Their experiences generated ideas for writing and fuelled the different stages of the writing process.

Embedding the teaching of 'grammar' into the service of intriguing and hooking readers

The teaching of grammar was embedded within the need for composing meaningfully for readers. When the stories were finally revealed, participants discovered shared themes running through them, such as travel through time or space.

Concerned and shocked, the five children stared from one to the other in confused silence. The walkie-talkie continued to rumble but then they could all hear the rhythm of marching. Unbeknown to the team, earlier that day, Jack and Alex had stumbled across a piece of mosaic.

The miniature piece of mosaic had an unusual shimmer to it. "What is this?" Jack had pondered, beginning to rub his thumb across its surface. Alex had leant forward, peering at the remains of a symbol. He had touched it lightly with his forefinger.

Unsure of what they had heard, the five children began voicing their thoughts. "I'm not certain...but I have a feeling..." started Harley,

As time travel elements were written into one of the stories, clarity in the expression of 'time' was needed in order to differentiate between the 'first story-world past tense' and the 'second story-world past tense'.

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To do this precisely, the children used the pluperfect; they understood that they needed to change the tense to enable their reader to follow the complex timelines they were creating in their composing. The PoS (NC: 2013; 33) states that teaching children to 'develop as writers involves teaching them to enhance the effectiveness of what they write as well as increasing their competence'. This happened as part of the writing process and in the service of enabling children to develop their craft purposefully. Having a descriptive and meaningful use of the past perfect was a natural broadening of the Year 3 grammar statutory requirement that children should use the 'present perfect' (p. 76). The act of composing dictated the children's need to exercise their choices as language-users.

Making explicit connections between writing, reading and reading aloud

Part of the recursive nature of the shared writing was also the explicit notion that the writing creates a passage of reading. Daily, the children in each class read aloud together the passage that they had written the previous day and checked, whilst reading aloud, if it sounded like a piece of writing or a piece of speaking. The objective of this being for the writing to sound like writing and for the 'reading aloud' of it, to sound like a 'read aloud performance'.

In order to be engrossed in the 'drama' of their shared text (Chambers: 2010), reading aloud together and reviewing the story in this way enabled the children to gauge whether the writing flowed. Children commented on the need to change phrases or select words differently- their comments always reflected their awareness of audience, so they were embedded within statements which referred to what they needed to communicate to their reader, for example:

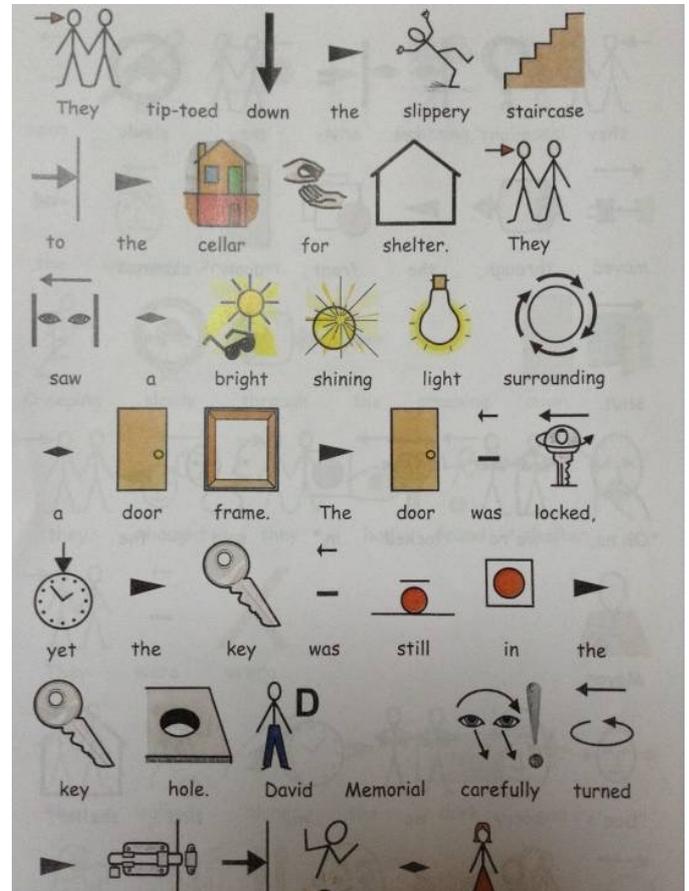
- "We need to hide that for longer..."
- "The reader will know who that is, so we only need to say..."
- "We've already explained / described x, so this time we need to tell the reader y."

This aspect of the shared writing demonstrated to us how the children in our classes had become 'authors' over the year.

Capturing the shared writing in different forms: books, films, art, dance

An important aspect of the shared story was that end 'products' included books and films. As well as writing, the children worked with partners to create a 'film' of each chapter. These televisual texts proved significant in developing each child's ability to communicate

messages diversely. Children took photographs/videos of scenes from the story and uploaded these with extracts of text on to 'Animoto'. Choosing appropriate text, images and a soundtrack was important in the children's development as authors, since they had to create different ways of telling their story. Children in the ARMS used iMovie to make their films.



Example of page in ARMS shared story: In the ARMS an additional role after scribing was to read through the passages created daily with the children using Makaton and to record work for publication using text and symbols.

To fully engage in the shared stories, children used dance, art, forest, school experiences, dressing up, school visits and topic learning: basically the story was all-encompassing. Multi-modal experiences (Kress: 2010) were central to the shared writing.

Sharing with each other and the wider school community – outcomes and impact

A main outcome from the shared writing has been the children's desire to write independently, or with partners, or in friendship groups. The teachers noted on many occasions that children would ask to write, including the forsaking of the football field by boys demanding extra turns in the reading corner so they could write together. Their writing mirrored the class shared stories, but was also in response to other class texts, invariably writing in role (for example, a letter from one character and another replying). The commitment, voice and excitement in these independent/partner or response

texts mirrored the expertise, craft and creativity the children exercised daily in the shared writing of their shared stories.



Dressing up and shared story images for film; children considered their senses whilst writing in order to inspire their composing; process drama was frequently used as a means of exploring ideas and feelings and drama happened outside of the classroom where children began exploring ideas spontaneously for the shared story

An unexpected outcome was the excitement the shared stories caused around the school. Sharing the books and films with each other and the wider school community caused a writing revolution! By summer, other teachers were beginning shared stories with their classes and there was a buzz of excitement from both children and teachers alike. As the next year approached, all the teachers in our school have decided that they will be writing shared stories as part of daily literacy. Such is the commitment to this within the school, the Head Teacher has reorganised the school timetable to facilitate this happening in every class at the start of the day.

The whole staff had an initial planning meeting for shared writing, in addition to a session where staff requested a 'staff shared write'; which they did; inspired by the book 'We're Going on a Bar Hunt – A Parody' (Lloyd & Rees: 2013). Since the shared writing session, staff have further decided that they want to continue the staff shared story during INSETs and begin their own staff shared story film to surprise the children with.

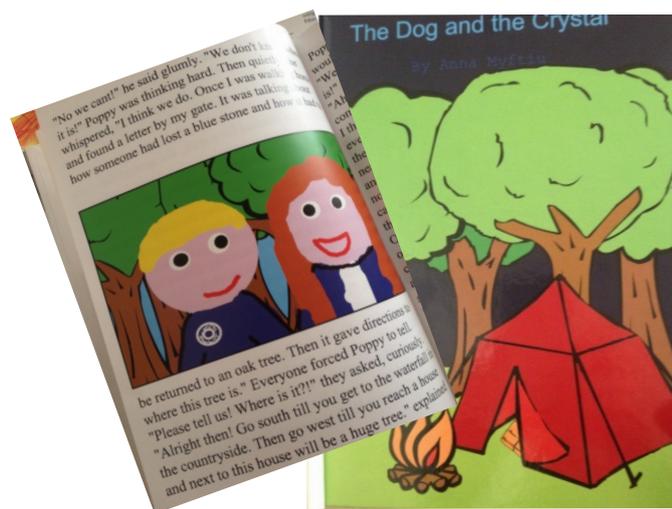
Another unexpected outcome was the complete absorption of the parents in the 'aftermath' of the project and their awareness of how their children are switched on to writing. They reported seeing differences in their children and commented how at the end of term, a big difference was related to the way the children treasured their school books. Instead of tossing them aside, children insisted that dinner was delayed while they read aloud their stories, often explaining which grammatical structures they had chosen to convey particular ideas, while others asked parents to engage in the kind of commentary they were used to in class. Parents claim to see a real difference in engagement, progress and

passion. Perhaps more importantly, children themselves talk about their writing with passion and commitment.

And from here...

In this school our experiences have come to symbolise a shift in thinking about children's learning and the curriculum. It's rare that when the end of term hits, children and teachers want to keep going...but that's how it's been for us – all thanks to the artistic event that is shared writing.

From our point of view, the children, including those with SEN from the ARMS provision and the two mainstream classes, loved the shared writing experience and were fully engaged by it. What we tended to find seemed to be that the children who often are extremely literal (for example, some of our children on the autistic spectrum), found that sharing in the writing enabled them to apply writing skills and use language more subtly. Their very distinctive voices, in particular, came across in the stories and they were proud during sharing and reading aloud times that their writing had an audience and was given a class voice. They also loved the transference of writing into film.



A main outcome from the shared writing has been the children's desire to write independently, or with partners, or in friendship groups. These images are from a book one of the pupils wrote independently and had published.

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