



# Writing Realities

First Edition





# First Edition Authors

## Ross Young and Felicity Ferguson

Ross and Felicity are the founders of The Writing For Pleasure Centre and co-author of *Real-World Writers: A Handbook For Teaching Writing With 7-11 Year Olds* and *Writing For Pleasure: Theory, Research & Practice*. They both hold master degrees in applied linguistics in education. As passionate writer-teachers, they now work around the UK and abroad helping teachers and schools develop extraordinary young writers. They both convene The United Kingdom Literacy Association's international Teaching Writing Special Interest Group and also help run their Teachers' Writing Group. Ross was the lead researcher on 'What is it Writing For Pleasure teachers do that makes the difference?' Their work continues to focus on the learning and teaching of young writers and is informed by their ongoing work with classroom teachers and early years educators.

## Douglas Kaufman

Douglas is Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education and a University of Connecticut Teaching Fellow. He received his doctorate from the University of New Hampshire, where he worked with distinguished literacy educators Donald Graves, Donald Murray, and Jane Hansen. His publications include *Conferences & Conversations: Listening to the Literate Classroom*; *Beyond the Boundaries: A Transdisciplinary Approach to Learning and Teaching*; and several articles and chapters examining the characteristics of exemplary writing teachers and effective writing classrooms. His upcoming book looks at how teachers can move past formulaic instruction and be responsive to young writers. He has served as Co-Lead Editor of the *Journal of Literacy Research*, and he currently directs an international education program through which students teach and learn in Cape Town, South Africa. His recent work examines connections between writing education and issues of equity and social justice.

## Navan Govender

Navan is a lecturer in Applied Language & Literacy Education at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, UK. Their research interests include critical literacies (i.e. the relationship between language, literacy, and power), multimodality (i.e. how meaning making traverses multiple sign systems), and identity (taken from an intersectional perspective, particularly in relation to (a)gender and (a)sexual diversity, race/ethnicity, and language variety).

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>Why Writing Realities?</b>	<b>05</b>
<b>What's involved in Writing Realities</b>	<b>06</b>
• Writer-Identity	<b>07</b>
• Writing ourselves into our learning	<b>10</b>
• Critical literacies	<b>11</b>
• Culturally sustaining pedagogy	<b>12</b>
• Multiliteracies	<b>13</b>
• Translanguaging	<b>14</b>
• Intertextuality	<b>15</b>
<b>What can Writing Realities look like? Examples from the classroom</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>How can I do it?: A framework for teachers and schools</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Frequently asked questions</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>References and further reading</b>	<b>67</b>

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# Introduction

**Writing Realities is a framework which we hope teachers and schools will use to help their pupils feel they can present themselves and others in the writing classroom successfully and meaningfully.**

After a brief explanation as to why we believe a Writing Realities framework is necessary, we explain how it is currently split into six key principles.

These principles include: writer-identity, critical literacies, culturally sustaining pedagogy, multiliteracies, translanguaging and intertextuality.

We then provide a whole variety of examples of how principles of Writing Realities have been used and applied in classrooms around the world. Finally, we share the framework in the hope that it will help you or your school develop your own ways of Writing Realities.



## Why Writing Realities?

All young people deserve an opportunity to share what they know, think, and care about, demonstrating who they are through their writing. We must see them not only as readers but also as writers who wish to share their meaning with others. With the renewed interest in ensuring that classroom libraries reflect the realities of school children's lives (Huyck et al. 2019; Ramdarshan Bold 2019; Best et al. 2020), it's also time to examine the role that we as teachers play in honouring, valuing, and sustaining the realities of children's lives through writing. It could be said that the objectives of Reflecting Realities (CLPE 2021) cannot and will not be truly realised until we simultaneously attend to the objectives of Writing Realities set forth in this document.

One reason we still do not see many authors from a variety of social positions, including those from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, entering classroom libraries is because young people do not typically receive an apprenticeship in how to be autonomous and confident writers who carry with them a strong personal and collective writer-identity once they leave school. However, if schools can instil the principles laid out in this Writing Realities framework into their writing curriculum, young people will

have a chance to take on personal responsibility for their writing and be taught how to harness their own authorial agency. They will also learn how to live, work and represent others within an inclusive, outwardly loving community of writers. At present, we often ask our pupils to leave their own identities, cultural capital, thoughts, opinions and knowledge outside the writing classroom door. Through rigid interpretation of curriculums and published schemes, they are required to take on a monocultural identity that doesn't honour or take advantage of the richness of their minds or lives.

However, we also see many teachers who are applying innovative practices to support their pupils as they write their realities. In their classrooms, not only does the writing matter, the writers matter, too. This framework will share examples of such exciting practices later in the document and we thank these teachers for the important work they carry out in their classrooms every day.

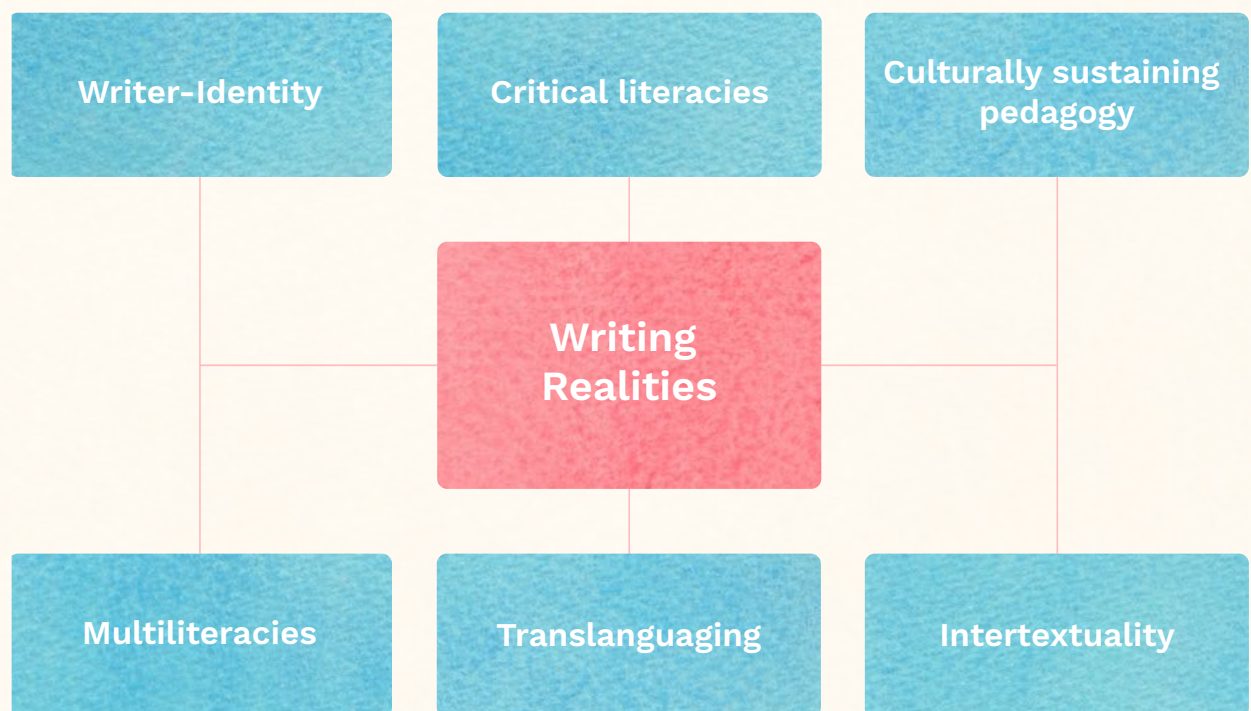


# What's involved in Writing Realities?

## Here is our working definition of Writing Realities:

Writing Realities is a framework for teaching writing that values and nurtures an individual's writer-identity, whilst at the same time establishing a strong collective identity by creating a community of writers. This community works hard to sustain the identities of people who are not present in their classroom, and to drive social change. In this way, all children and young people can receive an apprenticeship in how to be independent, socially responsible and life-long writers.

Our definition is based on six key principles of writing teaching. These include: writer-identity, critical literacies, culturally sustaining pedagogy, multiliteracies, translanguaging and intertextuality. Here, we briefly describe these sometimes overlapping concepts so you can better understand how our definition was realised.





# Writer-Identity

When children write, they lay out part of their identity on the paper or screen with the hope that it will be accepted by their readership. It's an offering made to the world. This is what makes teaching writing such an honour and privilege for us. It's also a massive responsibility. Children are trusting us to give them the tools to find their places in the world. As Gee (2015) illustrates, when we write, we draw upon 'who we are' and 'what we are doing'. Good writing, therefore, enacts our identities.

The problem is that young people are often alienated from writing, and this means that their identities are not developed or may even be refused. In order to develop their writer-identities, young writers need to be moved to write in personally and socially important ways. Young writers must feel the need, the will, the urge to write something, and there are many reasons why this happens.

In their book *Real-World Writers*, Young & Ferguson (2020) consider how being moved to write should drive children's writing in school. Children may, for example, be moved to teach others by sharing their experience or particular knowledge of something. Perhaps they are moved by the desire to persuade or influence others, sharing

their thoughts and opinions about a topic and sometimes hoping to bring about change. They will sometimes be moved to entertain through the telling and writing of stories, both real and imagined, or simply be moved to 'paint with words', showing their artistry and creating images in their readers' minds to help them see things differently. Possibly they will be moved to reflect on something from their own lives, or something recently learned, in order to better understand it. Or they may be moved to make a record of something which should not be forgotten by themselves or others.

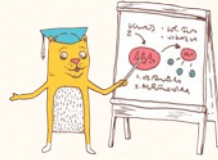
Writing because you are moved to do it presupposes that you are interested in your subject and have some kind of investment in it, and that you have in mind a clear and real purpose and an anticipated audience for your writing. Having agency over your writing topic is therefore of huge importance.



### Writers who entertain



### Writers who teach Writers who learn then teach others



### Writers who share their thoughts and reflections



### Writers who record information



### Writers who influence and give their opinion



### Writers who paint with words

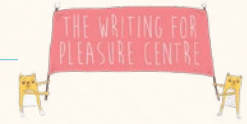


*(Figures from Young & Ferguson 2020 p.5-7)*

Writer-identity, then, is about feeling a sense of social belonging and having ownership over your writer's voice. It's about having a clear sense of self while also working well within a community of writers. A young writer can have multiple writer-identities; these are in a continuous state of transformation as the writer undertakes their writing apprenticeship. Influenced by the work of Moje & Luke (2009), we share eight metaphors of identity within literacy contexts, which we can usefully reconceptualize to reflect children's own writing identities. These include:

1. Sharing what makes us broadly different, such as our national, ethnic and cultural identities.
2. Writing and sharing together to realise what we have in common.
3. Seeking to find out who we are as individuals through writing.
4. Seeking to know more about the world and reflecting on what we find.
5. Sharing our thoughts and knowledge with others.
6. Writing about the experiences we've had, and sharing stories.
7. Revealing the opinions and the positions we adopt or resist through our writing.
8. Writing imaginatively as a conscious or subconscious extension of our identities.





Whilst young people begin their journey towards being writers at home even before they attend school, their writing identities are largely constructed through engagement in the writing events, behaviours and projects that take place in the classroom. The more children write in a sympathetic, celebratory environment, the more likely they are to join 'the literacy club', writing outside of school and showing greater investment in their compositions. Through crafting and publishing texts, children 'develop a sense of self, find meaning in the world and impose themselves upon it' (Young & Ferguson 2020 p.7). We conclude that a person's writing cannot be separated from their identity; the two are deeply intertwined. This has clear implications for us, as teachers, as we try to find ways of reflecting children's realities in our writing classrooms. Young & Ferguson (2021), suggest that writer-identities are influenced by many factors, including school pedagogy, reader-identity, home literacy, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, culture, disability, social-economic circumstances, multilingualism and second language learning. They show that teachers who promote children's 'funds of knowledge' and 'funds of identity' in the writing classroom give children opportunities to use their outside school learning experiences, cultural capital, life-style, interests, passions, hobbies, objects, artefacts, activities, talents, popular cultures and knowledge, powerfully connecting

them with what they are learning about the craft of writing and being a writer in school.

Too often we see teachers or scheme writers taking cognitive and emotional responsibility for this part of the writing process, and, as a result, children fail to receive a complete writerly apprenticeship. Teachers or scheme writers who formulate writing ideas on children's behalf are making a serious instructional mistake. One of the problems is that children don't have equal access to writing topics. For example, when teachers or scheme writers choose topics for writing derived from their own personal interests and cultures, they are only ever helping children who are most 'like them'. Writing on a topic chosen by someone else also makes the task of writing more cognitively difficult. In contrast, when children are allowed to choose and access a topic they are familiar with and emotionally connected to, their writing performance improves and they produce higher quality texts (Young & Ferguson 2021).



## Writing Ourselves Into Our Learning

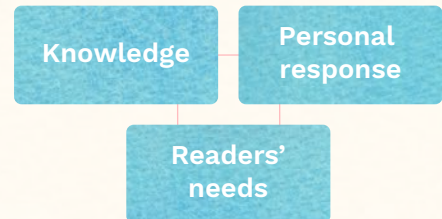
### Knowledge-telling



### Knowledge-transforming



### Knowledge-crafting



A common practice when initiating writing across the curriculum is to ask children to recite what they have just learnt as a way to evaluate whether they have retained knowledge transmitted during lessons. This practice is largely ineffective in its aims (Bangert-Drowns et al 2004). In contrast, Young & Ferguson (2021) suggest that if children are allowed to write in personal response to what they have read, watched, heard, experienced or learnt, they can move from ‘knowledge-telling’ to ‘knowledge-crafting’ (see figure). They suggest that in knowledge-telling, the writer is at the centre, stating and making a record of all they know, remember or interpret about a topic; this is typically what early writers do (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1987). However, the writer’s presence is not overtly visible. In the transition from knowledge-telling to knowledge-transforming, the writer writes in their own voice and style, mixing knowledge with a personal response and transforming it into something new, valuable and personally

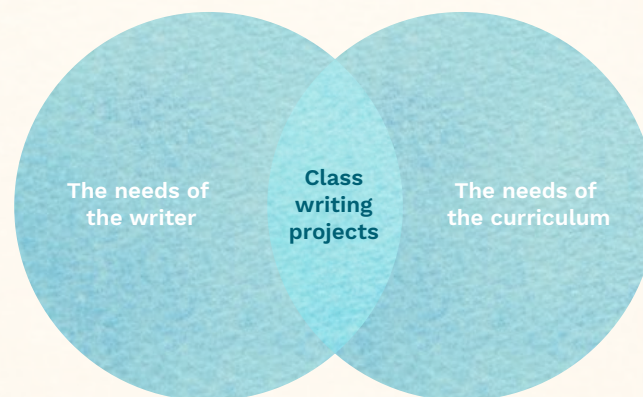
meaningful. Finally, when writers craft their knowledge with readers’ needs in mind, they contribute to the building of their readers’ knowledge and understanding as well. This is what Scardamalia & Bereiter (2003) rightly call creating community knowledge. A common example of knowledge telling is asking your class to write thirty plus summaries of Queen Victoria’s biography. In contrast, a knowledge-crafting project might invite each child to write a historical account on an aspect of Victorian life that’s interested them most. Once written, this ‘anthology of learning’ could be shared and read by the rest of the class (including the teacher) and so contribute to the class’ community knowledge.



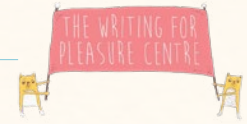
# Critical Literacies

By critical literacy we mean: the practice of reading and writing with a view to considering how texts are socially constructed and represent a certain view of the world. It's also about reflecting on where the power resides within a text read or created. For example, how are money, class, family, age, sexuality, gender, ethnicity or cultural heritage represented in the texts we create and read? Writing is a powerful activity for social action and can involve the following:

- 1. Critical text production** - Young writers have opportunities to reflect on the decisions they are making as they write. For example, they share their compositions to see how their audience is interpreting their writing, and they consider the possible social effects their texts might have on others.
- 2. Critical imagination** - Young writers are invited to use imaginative storytelling to share possible alternative and more socially just futures. Learners can also write alternatives to the dominant narratives they receive, retelling these existing stories from their own perspectives and in their own modes of expression.
- 3. Multimodality** - Young writers are invited to reconsider and expand upon the more traditional ways in which they are asked to publish or perform their writing. These modes could include using new and emerging technologies.
- 4. Reflective (life) writing** - Young writers are given opportunities to relate classroom content to their own lives.



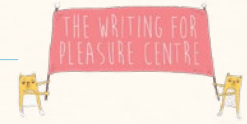
*Figure from Young & Ferguson (2021) shows what the authors call 'a sincere writing curriculum' where whole class writing projects are driven by the knowledge, identities, interests and needs of young writers. These needs are then naturally supported by the needs of the curriculum. In a Writing Realities classroom, we want these two circles to overlap completely, becoming one.*



# Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Part of Writing Realities is adopting a culturally sustaining pedagogy (also known as a culturally responsive pedagogy or an asset-based approach) (Ladson-Billings 1995; Alim & Paris 2014; Paris & Alim 2017). This means inviting, sustaining and nourishing everyone's identity in the writing classroom. This is important because young writers' stories, experiences, identities, cultures, languages, practises and beliefs from outside of school are strengths that add great value to the larger writing community within your classroom.

However, it is also important that young writers look to sustain, through their writing, the lives and cultures of people who might not be present in the classroom itself. They can do this, for example, by writing people's life histories, biography, memoirs, poetry, graphic novels, realistic fiction, and imaginative non-fiction (Young & Ferguson 2020). By valuing difference in the writing classroom it becomes possible to garner empathy and sensitivity. Where learners might write about others, a Writing Realities framework asks that research and care become part of the writing process. Children should have access to diverse stories, genres and voices so that they can build up their knowledge of people who are not like them, or like them in different ways. Only then can they represent them truthfully.

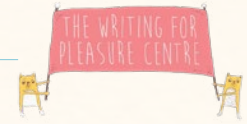


# Multiliteracies

Writing is one of many ways we can make and share meaning. Others include speaking, reading, viewing, seeing, acting and drawing. Cope & Kalantzis (2000: 35) outline four main components necessary for multiliteracies to work in the classroom:

- 1. Situated practice:** being a member of a community of writers and doing the things writers do when they are together. The idea is that children and teachers together should live a 'writer's life' full of social communication and interaction with other apprentice writers in the classroom every day.
- 2. Overt instruction:** receiving systematic, continuous and responsive instruction so as to learn specific practises and processes involved in writing and other ways of making and sharing meaning.
- 3. Critical framing:** understanding the social and cultural context of publishing and performing using different media. It also involves reflecting on what you're trying to achieve through your writing.
- 4. Transformed practice:** transforming your writing into something new so that it can enter other contexts or be understood in different languages.

Through multiliteracies, learners develop a critical eye for the social, psychological and emotional effects that their writing can have. This means that the community of writers in your classroom becomes more socially and culturally conscious, and young writers are able not only to represent themselves and their world, but also to represent and ally with other folk in socially just and sensitive ways.



# Translanguaging

Translanguaging is about giving students choice over how they decide to use language according to different circumstances and in response to the purpose they have for their writing and their intended audience (García & Li 2014; Makalela 2019; Garcia 2020). It allows children to be their 'full linguistic selves' or use what Ferguson & Young (2022) call their 'funds of language'. For example, pupils may wish or find it necessary to write in:

- Multiple languages.
- Different dialects and language varieties.
- Different registers.

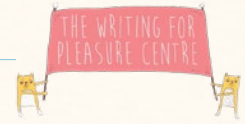
By valuing the different words and ways of using language that students bring to a classroom, writing becomes more interesting and creative. They might discuss how their purpose and audience influences the register choices they make (e.g. an everyday casual tone or a more formal and authoritative voice). They also might consider the ways in which they might want to use youth varieties of English to create relatable characters in their narratives or to express their identities in non-fiction. Put simply, they draw authentically on their own 'funds of language' to say what it is they want to say.



# Intertextuality

Intertextuality is the idea that what we write is influenced by our reading, our play, the things we watch and listen to, the video games we play and our various life experiences. These texts not only affect what we write but how we write it and who we are as writers (Parry & Taylor 2018; Dobson & Stephenson 2019; Rosen 2019; Taylor & Clarke 2020; Young & Ferguson 2020, 2021). Intertextuality requires classroom libraries to be full of diverse texts, and young people must be able to respond with agency to the texts they read, in both individual and collective ways. Through this process of intertextuality, children can create new texts and push the boundaries of genre in novel ways. This is because, as writers, the texts we read often inspire us to write our own texts in response. In the process, we make new meaning not only for ourselves but, through publication or performance, for others, too. Here we can see links to creating community knowledge, as we explained earlier.

For example, a teacher could invite children to create picture books, short stories or poems in response to the picture books, short stories or poems they most like to read. Alternatively, children could each write short stories in personal response to a short story shared as a whole class. Older learners (such as those in secondary schools) might also write for younger learners (such as those in primary schools) in their community, connecting children across age groups and schools as well as across genres. This would result in thirty plus stories being crafted and then shared, and so children would extend their understanding of the original text studied in a deeply personal and collective way.



# What can Writing Realities look like? Examples from the classroom

**You'll see from the examples that a recurring theme is teachers promoting children's independent decision making, and showing them how to use their agency responsibly.**

## **My Hair Has A Lot Of Stories!**

**Laman, Davis & Henderson (2018)**

In this research study, teacher candidates learnt 'what is possible rather than what is typical' in an economically-deprived urban school. The teachers were able to reflect on their own deficit perspectives and assumptions about race, class and the lives of children and their families within the local school community. By the end of the study, the pre-service teachers felt better able to encourage children to use their own existing social, cultural and linguistic resources.

As part of the study, a class of 7-8 year old majority African-American children were invited to write in personal response to the book *Hair Dance* by Dinah Johnson. The children were quickly able to identify themselves and their local community within the pages of the book. Children used intertextuality to connect the

book's theme to their own identities, cultures and lives. For example, some boys wrote about visits to the local barbershop, whilst many girls considered the ritual of having their hair done by aunts, grandmothers and mothers.

**Laman, T., Davis, T., Henderson, J., (2018) "My Hair has a Lot of Stories!": Unpacking Culturally Sustaining Writing Pedagogies in an Elementary Mediated Field Experience for Teacher Candidates Action in Teacher Education, 40:4, 374-390**





## Writing Their Worlds: Young English Language learners

### Flint & Fisher (2014)

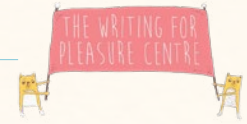
In this longitudinal study, the researchers observed two 8-9 year old multilingual classrooms where a contemporary writing workshop approach was used. The teachers created a learning environment that was responsive and personally relevant, and which enabled learners from many parts of the world, including Mexico, Honduras, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Korea, to share about their lives, beliefs and interests. The teachers provided children with a writer's notebook, and they were afforded daily time in which to talk with others and write notebook entries. The writing produced included traditional narrative, expository texts, persuasive texts, collaborative writing, scripts and song lyrics. The children wrote on topics like:

- Past friendships.
- Working with parents to prepare their walls for painting.

- Going to mosque.
- Learning stories of the prophets.
- Expert lists.
- Family journeys from one country to another.
- Sibling rivalries.

The teachers' subtractive views were challenged by the project, and they came to understand that children's funds of knowledge and identities were not only invaluable cognitive writing resources, but also made a rich contribution to the learning of others in the classroom and local community. This included putting on an 'Author's Celebration' event for family and friends within the local community.

**Flint, A. S., Fisher, T., (2014) Writing Their Worlds: Young English Language Learners Navigate Writing Workshop In Writing & Pedagogy 1756-5839**



## Writing In The 'Third Space'

### Gutiérrez (2008)

In this case study, learners from nondominant, poor and immigrant communities were invited to write using their socio-historical lives, utilising play and their imaginations to write about their futures. The project brought high school learners from migrant-farmworker backgrounds to the University of California to participate in a four-week summer writing school. The participants worked together to write their own autobiographies and crafted 'testimonio' memoir texts which shared socially significant stories and

vignettes from their lives. In addition, they were invited to write about the chapters in their life that were yet to come and to 'socially dream' a better collective future. Gutiérrez concludes that creating such an environment where young people could write in what she terms the 'third space' was profitable for both educators and learners. She encourages teachers to consider how young people's cultural capital can successfully intersect with the content and needs of the curriculum for the benefit of both.

**Gutiérrez, K. (2008) Developing a sociocritical literacy in the Third Space, Reading Research Quarterly, vol. 43, no. 2, pp. 148–64**



## Let's Have An Ideas Party!

### Young & Kettle (2022)

This action research project shares how one Year Four teacher in Stratford London used the principles of Writing Realities to change her approach to teaching fiction writing projects. Rather than use predetermined writing ideas from the internet or from published schemes, Ms Kettle invited her class to generate their own stories as part of a dynamic 'Ideas Party'.

Prior to the lesson, Ms Kettle put some flipchart paper out on each desk and wrote some story 'themes' we thought the children might enjoy thinking about. These were: superheroes, mystery, sci-fi, love and friendship, fan-fiction, and spooky. In their groups, the children spent around twenty

minutes coming up with as many story ideas as they could.

\* The children were asked to weigh up the merits of their different ideas by considering what their audience would like them to write about.

\* The teacher took what she called a Writing Register to help each child decide on their final writing idea for the project.

Ms Kettle concluded that her pupils ended up with literally hundreds of story ideas. More than they could ever write about for the project.

**Young, R., Kettle, A. (2022) Having An Ideas Party & Taking A Writing Register With Year Four [Available at: <https://writing4pleasure.com/2022/02/10/8310/>]**



## Writing To Create Better Lives

### Lankshear & Knobel (2009)

This study examines the work of one teacher as he serves his local working-class community and teaches children to write as a way to improve their lives and the lives of others. Part of this process, the authors claim, involved the teacher ensuring that 'learning and literacy are as directly and concretely as possible situated and grounded in the lived experiences of children's lives as members of communities and participants in worldly practices' (p.63). The researchers were able to identify eight key principles of the teacher's approach:

- Promoting and harnessing the imagination of children.
- The promotion of language pride and the use of their 'established languages'.
- Teaching learners to be proficient users of standard varieties of English.
- Writing to the highest levels of transcriptional accuracy that they can.
- Being able to legitimately participate in society using discourses and genres that allow them to write with confidence, power and influence.
- Ensuring that writing connects with children's identities, the local community, and their self-development.
- Using writing as a tool for action and for bringing about change.
- Seeing writing as a social practice and building the writing community on the precepts of cooperation, collective responsibility and mutual learning.

According to this teacher, 'even reluctant readers and writers will engage in projects that have direct bearing on their interests, concerns and lives' (p.63). In this way, according to the researchers, learning cannot and should not be separated from participation in the very real writing practices which are occurring outside of school. Some of the class writing projects the teacher undertook with his pupils included:

- Producing a people's history by interviewing and writing about the lives of women in the local area. This included translating their mother tongue into English. The published content included writings on civil war, resistance movements, migration, racism and the struggles and opportunities experienced through living in an adopted country.



- Writing and professionally publishing poetry and memoirs about the pride, aspirations, interests, concerns and struggles of working-class life.
- Starting a community action group to help protect their local docklands site.
- Discussing local papers and recorded interviews; reading the memoirs and biographies of others; analysing and discussing historical documents; watching movies and documentaries and, after listening to guest speakers and performers, writing narratives, poems and diary entries as a way of showing respectful connection, 'imaginative empathy' and human solidarity with the subject or people being studied.

**Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2009)  
More than words: Chris Searle's  
approach to critical literacy as  
cultural action Race & Class 51(2)  
pp.59-78**



## Do I Have To Have A Princess In My Story? I Want A Rap Singer!

Hoewisch (2001)

This collaborative case-study involved a teacher educator working alongside three preservice teachers. Children who are viewed as ‘linguistically lacking’ by their teachers face additional hurdles to writing. Topics that culturally and linguistically diverse children select may be considered less worthy by teachers who are more familiar and comfortable with white middle-class values.

As part of the project, children were read a number of fairy-tales before engaging in conversations about the similarities and differences between the tales and their own lives. They were invited to draw in personal response to the fairy-tales. They also received regular responsive mini-lessons on various writing processes, skills and strategies. When the children subsequently wrote their own fairy-tales, they used intertextuality to a high degree of sophistication and produced better texts. The children also used personally meaningful experiences not often broached in their school writing to build their own fairy-tales. For example they wove into their tales:

- Famous singers they admired.
- Doing magic with friends.
- Going to parties.

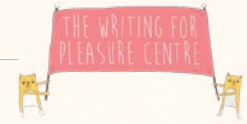
- Divorce.
- The death of a relative.
- Separation from parents.
- Gang violence, police raids and drug deals.

According to Hoewisch, giving children the responsibility to choose their own topics ‘led to some uncomfortable moments’ for the teachers. They stated that some children brainstormed characters and events that they felt were ‘violent or just plain gross’, and wondered what to do when a child decided that the police or their teachers were the bad guys. The teachers found themselves in a difficult situation of privately criticising the lived experiences or interests of their pupils. However, they knew they must give feedback that did not devalue children’s ‘ideas, lives, interests and writing decisions’. In this case, of course, they were able to reflect on the fact that traditional fairy-tales incorporate their own brutality, and that the children were simply upholding these traditional textual features using contemporary life. Furthermore, they felt that acknowledging and accepting children’s writing choices led them towards new understandings about their students. They concluded that the children were able to successfully combine their newly-acquired knowledge of the genre with content they were interested in writing about and were knowledgeable of, which



served the purpose and audience of the writing project.

**Hoewisch, A., (2001) “Do I have to have a princess in my story?”: Supporting children’s writing of fairytales, Reading and Writing Quarterly, 17 pp.249–277**



## When Writing Prompts Go Wrong

### Dutro (2010)

This qualitative analysis looked to understand 8-9 year olds' experiences of a commercial literacy curriculum which, according to the researcher, revealed class-privileged assumptions and so failed to offer children time or space to discuss and craft their personal connections with texts. Dutro concluded that:

- The published scheme being used was written from a middle-class perspective. It treated this perspective as being the norm and carried potentially offensive assumptions about the lives of families living in poverty.
- The curriculum failed to honour or hold any regard for children who live in poverty. Instead, children were required to interpret and write about the studied text in the same way the published scheme writer interpreted it.
- When children did write about their own lives, they were held in disdain and relegated to the margins of the literacy classroom. Their lives had no place because they were seen by the scheme to hold no value.

Dutro shares how commercial publishers must honour 'children's

sophisticated and deeply felt connections to text' and allow them to craft their own personal response. However, to do so, they must first recognise and then hold in high regard the lives of children living in poverty. Only then will children be able to use their lived knowledge from outside the school gates to support their learning inside the classroom. By inviting children to bring their own ideas and interpretations to class writing projects, we ensure pupils from different cultural and social backgrounds can write from a position of strength and expertise. They are, perhaps for the first time in their young lives, allowed to write their realities.

**Dutro, E., (2010) What 'hard times' means: Mandated curricula, class-privileged assumptions, and the lives of poor children, Research in the Teaching of English, 44(3) pp.255-291**





## I Want To Discuss This! Children Writing Their Own Discussion Texts

**Creighton, Vann & Shepherd (2022)**

Discussion is an exchange of knowledge

– Robert Quillen

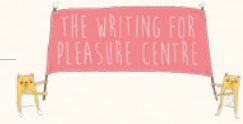
This example of practice shows how three Year Six teachers in Stratford London used the principles of Writing Realities to change their approach to teaching a non-fiction writing project. Rather than use predetermined writing ideas from the internet or from published schemes, the teachers taught children how to ‘mine’ their own lives and interests for valuable writing ideas.

- The teachers taught children an idea generation technique called I’m An Expert In.
- The children were invited to weigh up the merits of their different ideas by considering their interest and knowledge levels.
- They thought about the interests of their audience. They spoke with their peers and asked: will people want to read this text?
- The teachers took what they call a Writing Register to help children decide on their final writing idea.

The teachers concluded that the project allowed children to get to know each other a lot better and they learnt about what was important to their classmates. This, they claimed, created an empathy and sensitivity not felt in their writing classrooms before.

The teachers also reported that because the children were writing on subjects they were already knowledgeable about, and motivated by, they had more cognitive space to focus on what matters: the quality of their writing.

**Creighton, S., Vann, I., Sheppard, A. (2022) I Want To Discuss This! Children Writing Their Own Discussion Texts [Available at: <https://writing4pleasure.com/i-want-to-discuss-this>]**

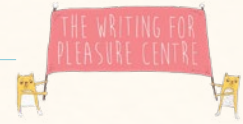


## **Cultivating Hybrid Texts In Multicultural Classrooms**

**Solsken, Willett & Wilson-Keenan (2000)**

This ethnographic study explores the ability of 6-8 year old children to transform knowledge, texts, and 'schooled' identity into new hybridised texts which bring together school learning and their own existing cultural capital. Families were invited to visit classrooms to share their own funds of knowledge and funds of identity. According to the authors, 'Children whose lifeworlds involve cultural and linguistic practises that may not be familiar...may not be valued by conventional school norms'. The study shows that, when children are given the opportunity to interweave the lifeworlds of home and school, they can create hybrid texts that are not only appropriate to the writing situation, but are more sophisticated than the sorts of texts usually required by teachers and schools.

**Solsken, J., Willett, J., Wilson-Keenan, J., (2000) Cultivating Hybrid Texts in Multicultural Classrooms: "Promise and Challenge," National Council of Teachers of English, pp.179-212**

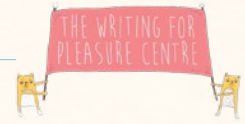


## **Safe Spaces For Disruptive Stories**

### **Lewison & Heffernan (2008)**

This case-study explores a teacher of 8-9 year olds' use of a critical writing pedagogy to encourage students' exploration of issues that were important in their lives from personal as well as social perspectives. Pupils read, discussed and then wrote personal responses to picture books carrying social and political themes such as racism, classism and ageism. By writing in personal response, the class was able to create a collective response and, in the process, become 'a writing collective'. Many children explored the theme of bullying and used their writing to call for social action against the dominant school culture.

**Lewison, M., Heffernan, L., (2008)  
Rewriting Writers Workshop:  
Creating Safe Spaces for Disruptive  
Stories Research in the Teaching of  
English 42(4) pp.435-465**



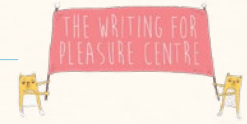
## **Children's Holistic Engagements With Texts**

**Parry & Taylor (2018)**

This paper looks at the relationship between reading and writing for pleasure. Children read a wide range of media texts as well as books, and they develop strong affective relationships with these artefacts. These relationships affected the children's writing craft. By allowing volitional reading time to move directly into volitional writing time, children profitably and naturally remixed the texts they read with their own lives, popular culture, interests, knowledge, thoughts and experiences (their cultural resources) to create something new. Through their own cultural contexts and identities, children are able to learn the language conventions and techniques of schooled literacy, and are able to hybrid genres at a high level of sophistication. Children were choosing themes that included:

- Vampires, werewolves, zombies.
- Star Wars.
- The Percy Jackson series.
- The Hunger Games.
- Pokemon.

**Parry, B. & Taylor, L., (2018) Readers in the round: children's holistic engagements with texts In Literacy 52 (2): 103-110**



## Creating Our Own Publishing Houses

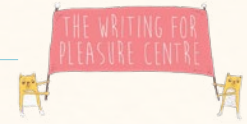
### Young (2019)

In this action research project, a teacher shows how they were able to honour the writing identities of individual pupils, develop a sense of collective identity in the community of writers and ask children to consider people who were not present in their classroom. This was achieved by setting up a class-based publishing house: Banger Books: books which wizz and bang. Children were asked to consider what their publishing house stood for and the type of writing it would publish into the classroom library. This involved children reflecting on the breadth of their existing library and what they felt was missing. They were also asked to consider how they could add personal value to the library, too. This led to children setting up smaller independent publishing houses and working in clusters to produce texts with themes or characters they felt were under-represented. For example, they published texts on their 'Fantastic Feminism,' 'Writing Is Life,' and 'Delightful Disabilities' publishing houses for everyone to read.

By using intertextuality, their funds of knowledge and their funds of identity, children were able to have their writing identities honoured. They also took part in critical literacy practices and began to learn about writing and

writers through a culturally sustaining pedagogy.

**Young (2019) Creating our own publishing houses [Available at: <https://writing4pleasure.com/creating-our-own-publishing-houses/>]**

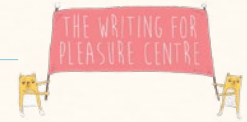


## Everyone's An Expert

### Young (2019)

This action research project shows how a teacher was able to teach his class how to mine their existing 'funds of knowledge' and to share their expertise with others within the classroom community of writers. Children were taught how to mine their lives outside of the classroom for rich information they could share for the benefit of others. Children were able to take their funds of knowledge and translate it into information texts which met the expectations of the school curriculum. Children crafted from a position of strength by independently choosing writing topics which included: art, Minecraft, football, sleeping, coding, animals, environmental protection, gymnastics, singing, horse riding, maths, boxing, computer games, Youtube, witchcraft and wizardry, baking, toys and cars. What the teacher noted was that, freed from the shackles of having to write on a topic with limited knowledge, the children were able to produce texts which not only informed their readers, but also looked to discuss, entertain, promote and persuade. Through the writing project, children learnt how writers can 'find their tribe' by writing amongst other interested peers but also how to share their passions and knowledge with others for the benefit of creating a collective community knowledge.

Young (2019) Everyone's an expert [Available at: <https://writing4pleasure.com/everyones-an-expert>]



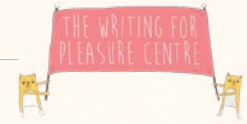
## **The Meaning Of A Life: Authentic Biography Writing At Home**

### **Hayden & Vasques (2020)**

This action research project shows how two teachers in a diverse and economically disadvantaged London primary school invited their pupils to write with their families at home. To combat what they saw as limiting and ineffectual ‘jug and mug’ writing projects where, for example, thirty children are routinely asked to deliver thirty copies of a biography of Queen Victoria, these teachers asked their pupils to discuss with their families who they could write a biography about. The children also had to consider where they wanted their finished biographies to go and who was going to read them at the project’s end. The children were given instruction on how to write meaningful and successful biographies and how to conduct a successful interview with their subject. The teachers as writers also participated in the project, writing their own biographies for their pupils to read, discuss and learn from. As part of their research the teachers attach a biography written by Amira and her family, in which Amira writes lovingly about the life and untimely death of her father. The teachers also shared interview responses from Amira and her mother when they expressed the profound and positive impact the project has had on them

as a family. Finally, the teachers reflected on the effectiveness and challenges of such a project.

**Hayden, T., Vasques, M. (2020)  
The meaning of a life: Authentic  
biography writing at home [Available  
at: [https://writing4pleasure.com/  
the-meaning-of-a-life-authentic-  
biography-writing-at-home/](https://writing4pleasure.com/the-meaning-of-a-life-authentic-biography-writing-at-home/)]**



## Using Our Critical Imaginations

### Mendelowitz (2016)

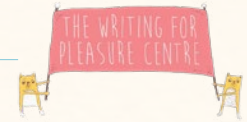
This article explores how the ‘critical’ in critical literacies has often been positioned as a binary opposite to imaginative work in the classroom and in research. Mendelowitz provides a conceptual framework for critical imagination before illustrating its possibilities for critical writing pedagogies in initial teacher education in South Africa. In this example, student teachers were asked to write up a conversation or dialogue between a selection of characters that they had developed. The scene could be written in youth varieties of English (which included rich moments of using different languages and language varieties) as well as be set in recognisable and contextually relevant spaces (such as at home or at a tavern). The writing that students produced worked both to represent their own understandings of gender politics in isiZulu cultural contexts and to speak back to issues of gender-based violence using the creative dialogue genre. Some of the strategies used to enact this approach to teaching and doing writing included:

- **Writing collaboratively** - Students worked in groups to generate ideas about the scene they wanted to construct, and examine how this would translate into a dialogue. They discussed

and made decisions about what local space the scene would take place in, what characters would contribute to the conversation, the topic of their conversation and the language variety they would each use.

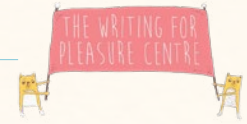
- **Writing in local youth varieties of English** - Students were encouraged to construct the dialogue in local youth varieties of English. This signals two critical moves: one, that their ways of speaking could be positioned as valuable funds of knowledge, and two, that their dialogue would represent a more authentic interaction between recognisable characters. Students, then, could play with language and genre convention rather than be constrained by them.
- **Drawing on local contexts and people** - In a similar way to the use of local youth varieties of English, students could draw on their own funds of knowledge and their experiences of language-in-use to build authentic scenes, conversations and characters that spoke to real-world issues.
- **Analysing imaginative writing** - Once complete, the students worked independently to analyse their collaborative writing. By turning their imaginative writing into an object for analysis, students could then unpack





the relationships they had constructed, analyse the social and interpersonal dynamics at play and reflect on their own writerly decisions about how they chose to construct a version of reality through their writing.

**Mendelowitz, B. (2016)**  
**Conceptualising and enacting the critical imagination through a critical writing pedagogy, *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, 16(2) pp.178-193.**



## Reflective Writing

### Govender (2019)

Janks' (2002) work in *Beyond Reason* explores how affect is tied to issues of power and identity. Janks argues that attending only to the rational, analytical practices of critical literacy does not account for how teachers and learners may actually take up or resist certain issues in the classroom, even if they are able to perform the act of critical analysis. Using this as a starting point, Govender explores how a space for reflective writing might be used by student teachers, and possibly even school-going learners, to engage with sensitive topics in the classroom. In a course on critical literacy and gender and sexual diversity, the student teachers were asked to write short vignettes about a moment in their lives where they learned to 'do gender'. For example, one student teacher reflected on their experiences of serving food to the men in their family and how this positioned them as female, feminine, and, most painfully, as subordinate. Set within a patriarchal Southern African family dynamic, the moment enabled the student to speak back to how their sexed and gendered identities were constructed. The findings suggest that the student teachers who participated used their reflective writing piece to situate themselves in, or out of, the power relationships being discussed in class.

The vignettes became a space for participants to:

- Explore their identities.
- Project and interrogate their own positions and biases.
- Resist the classroom content in personal ways.

Writing, then, became a practice of negotiating, navigating and forming identities.

**Govender, N. (2019). Critical literacy & Critically Reflective Writing: Navigating Gender & Sexual Diversity. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, 18(3), 351-364. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-09-2018-0082>**



## Writing And Social Action

### Comber, Thomson, & Wells (2001)

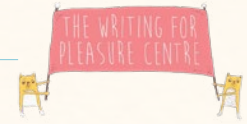
In this study, Comber, Thomson & Wells present the work of a teacher and their grade 2-3 class in a low-income Australian community. The class became involved in a 'local urban renewal project' and used writing as a means to engage with both personal and local issues. They use this example of practice to argue that 'school children can acquire literate practices that combine production, design, and communication in a variety of modes, through a range of media, and further, that such practices can connect them with community members about matters of immediate significance' (p. 453). By doing this, the authors illustrate how children's identities, experiences and concerns are intrinsically linked to their 'place' in the world - locally and globally, geographically and socially. Furthermore, they advocate for the critical text production by children as a means for them to build their agency, social consciousness and civic participation. One example includes the series of prompts provided to learners that 'invited the children to move from the personal, to the local, to the global' (p.455):

- The best things in their lives.
- What made them really happy, worried or angry.

- What they would wish for if they could have three wishes.
- What they would change about their neighbourhood, school and world.
- Whether they thought young people had the power to change things.

These prompts therefore served as a teaching tool that could draw learners' opinions, feelings, experiences and ideas out and into the learning space.

**Comber, B., Thomson, P., & Wells, M. (2001). Critical literacy finds a "place": Writing & social action in a low-income Australian grade 2/3 classroom. *The Elementary School Journal*, 101(4) pp.451-464. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/1002132>**



## Writing The Self

### Johnson (2017)

In this article, “participants constructed identities through the experience of writing and not the extent to which the content or form of their writing conformed to convention or what was ‘acceptable’ in school spaces” (p. 13) by using writing as a safe space for negotiating and constructing their own identities. These participants read their school environment as heteronormative and then used this as a springboard for speaking back to that issue of power. By focusing on voice and the social issues that mattered to the participating learners, they were able to explore writing as a resource for meaning-making rather than only as a formal practice for engaging with ‘school knowledge’. As such, the young women used and shared “their stories, poetry, and journal writing” (p. 23) to describe, interpret, explain and transform their experiences of pain, a lack of power and feelings of being marginalised in relation to their gendered identities, sexual identities and racial identities. The participants used “dialogue, writing, and rewriting [to participate] in the sophisticated act of taking on dominant discourses, refracting them in their writing, and rewriting themselves as empowered and powerful” (p. 28).

Johnson, L. P. (2017). Writing the self: Black queer youth challenge heteronormative ways of being in an after-school writing club. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 52(1), 13-33.



## Identities Going In And Out Of School

### Subero, Vujasinović, Esteban-Guitart (2016)

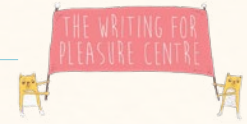
This article, using examples from classroom practice, makes the claim that children and young people need to become a generation of knowledge creators and not simply knowledge acquirers if they are to succeed as writers in our globalised 21st century life. Learners spend 81% of their time in informal learning situations. However, the learning that takes place in these situations is rarely utilised by teachers or, particularly, by teachers of ethnic minority pupils or pupils who come from low-income backgrounds, despite what we know about the major educational and affective benefits of inviting children's funds of knowledge and identities to meet the school curriculum. Subero and his colleagues share how teachers investigated the knowledge, skills and resources of families and the local community in order to bridge the gap between writing in school and learners' lives. Teachers also investigated their students' talents, passions, cultures, local heroes and interests as sources for writing material. They did this by:

- Setting up a home-school knowledge exchange project, which involved 'all about me' shoeboxes being sent home and filled with artefacts, drawings and symbols that were

significant to them, for example: photos, objects, trinkets, toys, postcards, books and magazines.

- Producing identity texts. Learners were invited to create a written, spoken, visual or musical piece which had part of their identity invested in it. They wrote on themes such as: the history of their family, documentaries and interviews with people from their neighbourhoods and dual-language texts discussing their migration story.
- Publishing a fairy-tale anthology. Learners were asked to gather folk and fairy-tales from their countries of origin and to use them to create an anthology of dual-language tales for the school and public library.
- Creating video documentaries. Learners were given recording equipment to take home and create documentaries detailing aspects of their home lives and activities.
- Crafting autobiographies. Pupils took part in open-ended interviews with their peers, and were asked to write diary entries, bring in family artefacts, create maps and timelines, collect photographs and paint self-portraits before producing an autobiography of their lives so far.

**Subero, D., Vujasinović E., Esteban-Guitart, M., (2016) Mobilising funds of identity in and out of school Cambridge Journal of Education 47(2) pp.247-263**



## From Superman Play to Singing the Blues

### Dyson (2018)

In this article, Anne Haas Dyson synthesises her decades of research to highlight practices that welcome children's social lives and their knowledge of popular culture into the writing classroom. Her aim is to "illustrate interconnections between children's participation in popular culture and their participation in composing practices" (p. 37), recognizing their work as being immersed in, and influenced by, their local cultures and environments. Noting that children naturally incorporate popular culture into their own writing when given the opportunity, she also shows how they begin to engage in critical reflection about both popular culture and their own lives to create wholly original stories that affirm and evolve their identities.

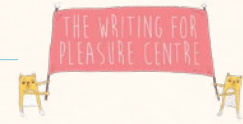
Dyson's studies show young children independently:

- Adopting conventions of cartooning to explore graphic genre forms and make sophisticated visual puns.
- Crafting original song music and lyrics.
- Creating scripts based on their love of superheroes and directing other children to perform them.

- Using a passion for music to write about famous blues musicians and adopt a strong identity as a budding musician.

Independent exploration of more complex and varied forms of writing led to more complex thinking and richer composition practices. This research demonstrates the power of allowing the "permeable curriculum" of children's social lives to revise and transform the "official curriculum" of schools, and Dyson also highlights the damage that a prescribed curriculum, beholden only to skills testing and improving test scores, can do to writing growth.

**Dyson, A.H. (2018). "From Superman Playing to Singing the Blues": On the Trail of Child Writing and Popular Culture. *Language Arts*, 96:1, 37-46**



## Using Process Drama to Promote Agentic Writing

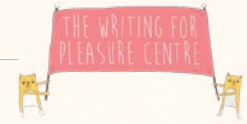
### Dobson & Stephenson (2019)

This two-term action research project explored what happened when 7-11 year olds wrote in response to participating in process drama sessions. Teachers, drama specialists and university researchers used process drama as a pedagogy across the curriculum to engage children in their learning. The workshops showed children how they could use themselves and their identities to inhabit and explore fictional worlds as an act of intertextual play. For example:

- After learning about a Roman wall, groups of children were invited to play and act in response. These varied acts of play were then written as stories for others to read.
- After watching a historical play involving two seafarers, children were invited to act out what they would do on their own sea journeys. The next day, children translated their acts of play into text.
- After acting out living in a Victorian village, children were invited to write about their experience as a diary entry.

The young writers talked about how engaged they had been in the act of writing, and the analysis of their compositions demonstrated high levels of authenticity and sophistication. The research team concluded that process drama can be used by other teachers to promote young writers' "agentic writing" and help them produce texts which represented who they were in new and creative ways.

**Dobson, T. and Stephenson, L. (2019). "I think it fits in": Using Process Drama to Promote Agentic Writing with Primary School Children. *Literacy*. 53:2, pp.69-76**



## Language, Race, and Critical Conversations

### Hartman & Machado (2019)

This action research study explores 7-8 year old writers' incorporation of African American English (AAE) into their writing. The children in this racially diverse classroom were initially reluctant to talk about issues of race and language because of the traditional school marginalisation of non-dominant vernaculars. However, when the teacher encouraged them to use language forms from their own lives, saying, "It would really show who you are," they began to deeply examine the sophisticated grammar structures, phonology, and vocabulary that many used in their everyday talk. They then incorporated it into their independently produced texts. Their experiences upended false notions of 'correctness', expanded the repertoire of their language use, taught them how to examine language in new ways, and strengthened and celebrated their racial identities and the language that supported it.

The authors suggest that teachers who want to broaden explorations of language and affirm the diverse lives of their children through writing:

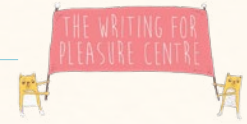
- Understand and leverage the language practises of students: learn about their communities, listen to them talk outside of

class, and create relationships with families.

- Carefully consider text selection: bring writing into the classroom library that uses diverse languages and dialects and celebrates children's rich cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- Lean into critical conversations about race: Instead of ignoring or shutting down topics that children naturally bring up, follow their lead and affirm the value of their topics.
- Encourage writing for many purposes and audiences: offer them opportunities to use the full range of their growing linguistic repertoires.

**Hartman, P., & Machado, E. (2019)**  
**"Language, Race, and Critical Conversations in a Primary-Grade Writers' Workshop." *The Reading Teacher*, 73:3, 313-323**





## Reclaiming Power In The Writers' Workshop

### Kissel & Miller (2015)

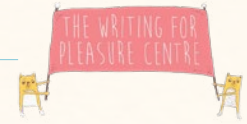
This study illustrates successful Writing Realities practice with our youngest learners. The researchers offer three short cases in which teachers and students reclaim agency over their workshop decision-making in the face of “legislative agendas, prescribed curricula, and mandated testing requirements” designed to diminish their power and silence their voices. Described is a workshop environment in which children have clear routines, draw on early language experiences to share self-chosen stories, write during play, learn craft elements, receive rich responses from teachers and learn how to reflect and respond to one another as authors. We witness a first-year teacher posting children’s work on a hallway bulletin board to counter administrators’ concerns about her workshop’s effectiveness; a young boy writing about a sensitive topic that would traditionally be censored by the school system, thus revealing a more comprehensive life story and gaining an author’s identity; and two girls using newly-learned writing skills to teach their classmates through self-initiated peer conferences. These illustrations suggest practices that we can implement:

- Expand the range of ‘acceptable’ topics to allow children to reveal

their individual voices and help teachers respond to their specific interests and needs.

- Have students choose their own topics, genres, writing partners and places to write in order to empower them and improve their work.
- Teach children —through modelling, instruction and practice—how to become teachers themselves: conferring independently with their peers, offering unique insights and sharing their personal discoveries.
- Create public venues for publishing texts in the school so that others learn from children’s practices and works.

**Kissel, B.T., & Miller, E.T. (2015). “Reclaiming Power in the Writers’ Workshop: Defending Curricula, Countering Narratives, and Changing Identities in Prekindergarten Classrooms.” *The Reading Teacher* 69:1, 77-86.**



## Showing Our Beautiful Languages

### Zapata & Laman (2016)

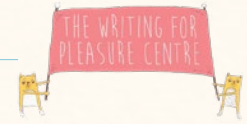
In this study, the researchers reveal the benefits of a translingual approach to classroom writing, in which bilingual or multilingual children are able to take full advantage of their primary languages in classrooms that are often English-dominant. The study frames different languages as complementary and interconnected, and when teachers create translingual classrooms they see the benefits of children using other languages and “non-standard” English to express themselves in powerful ways. Studying teachers who taught within writing workshop structures to discover how they supported students’ uses of multiple languages, they discovered that the teachers operated on three principles of instruction:

- They welcomed in their local communities, inviting community members to share their lives, histories, heritages, and languages, both inside and outside of traditional curricular settings;
- They shared their own language histories and repertoires, modelling diverse and integrated language practises that sometimes ran counter to traditional school notions of “correctness”;

- They shared “linguistically diverse literature as models of writing.”
- They expanded their classroom libraries to include books written in languages other than English and bilingual books; used these books consistently in their writing instruction; invited children to explore the full range of their libraries; and had discussions about the languages, cultures, and identities that the literature revealed.

Ultimately, the researchers suggest that working in these ways helps children build metalinguistic awareness, helps them to value their own rich language backgrounds, and gives them an increased sense of agency.

**Zapata, A., & Laman, T.T. (2016). “I Write to Show You How Beautiful My Languages Are: Translingual Writing Instruction in English Dominant Classrooms.” *Language Arts*, 93:5, 366-378.**



## Culturally Sustaining Poetry

### Machado, Vaughan, Coppola & Woodard (2017)

Three case studies highlight how the teaching, learning, and practice of poetry writing can be crafted as “culturally sustaining pedagogy” that invites students to explore their cultural affiliations, helping them to gain a voice in the curriculum and power in their writing. The researchers tell the story of three writers in a multi-racial, multicultural classroom who took advantage of their freedom to write in multiple genres, explore and share their own cultural identities through writing, play with literary devices in original ways, and extend their poetry’s meaning and emotional resonance. They also provide the results of the students’ work, sharing and analysing their poetry to give us the specific evidence of its power and of the writers’ learning.

After analysing their findings, the researchers provide three recommendations for teachers:

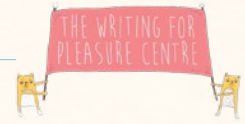
- Encourage linguistic play and hybridity, giving children licence to explore and use writing forms from their own socio-cultural vernaculars rather than insisting on “correctness” as narrowly defined by school traditions.
- Help students position themselves as cultural insiders, inviting them to share their cultural expertise as

revealed through their outside-of-school interests, language usage, passions and activities.

- Privilege alternative forms of cultural capital. Learn, recognize, and celebrate the wide array of cultural and linguistic knowledge that children bring with them, which they can then use to “hybridise” the language of the “official” curriculum.

The students’ stories, the researchers conclude, “show us the power of poetry rooted in students’ cultural affiliations, and the way that it can help us to see the world, ourselves, and each other through multiple lenses.”

**Machado, E., Vaughan, A., Coppola, R., & Woodard, R. (2017) ‘Lived Life through a Colored Lens’: Culturally Sustaining Poetry in an Urban Literacy Classroom,” *Language Arts*, 94:6, 367-380**



## **Re-engaging Students Disengaged With English**

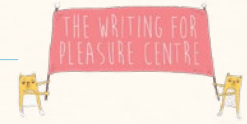
### **Knight (2009)**

This teacher's narrative research is set in an Australian secondary school with over 50 nationalities. It highlights how disengaged students can have their attitudes transformed when they are allowed to connect a variety of texts and reading with their own realities. This project was in contrast to what the students were typically required to do - notably, being asked to write in response to how their teacher or a published scheme writer saw a single text. The teacher provided their class with a variety of 'texts'. These included:

- Emotive images and words.
- News articles.
- Fictional texts.
- Pupil - produced reports and manuscripts from interviews with one another.
- A variety of photographs taken by pupils.

Once these different texts were explored, the students were invited to design their own writing projects. A variety of outcomes were produced, including: stories for younger children, young adult fiction, autobiographies, personal narratives, letters, and editorials.

**Knight, A. (2009) Re-engaging students disengaged with English: A unit of work on Othering, English Teaching: Practice & Critique, 8(1) pp.112-124**



## The 'Zit Fit' Story And How Peer Culture Influences The Classroom Writing Community

### Lensmire (1993)

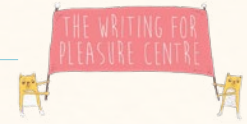
In this paper, teacher-researcher Timothy Lensmire investigates the social life of his writing workshop classroom. He discusses his desire to create a writing community which allows for personal ownership and individual exploration of writing topics whilst at the same time promoting a sense of public participation and responsibility towards others. He observes that giving children agency over their writing topics isn't without risk, as children grow up in a sexist, racist and classist society and they can bring this into the writing classroom. Lensmire discusses how his young writing community began to fracture into gender and social-class lines, with boys working with boys, girls working with girls and children from the local trailer park finding themselves at the bottom of peer writing hierarchies. The core of the paper details a particularly difficult occasion for teacher response: a popular child wanted to publish a fictional narrative that the teacher read as an attack on an unpopular classmate.

Lensmire reflects on the fact that children's writing choices must, at times, be questioned if they run the risk of upholding offensive

stereotypes or alienating their peers. He argues that learners must engage in discussion about the moral and political aspects of their texts and that they can't accept the authorial rights of writing workshop without also accepting their responsibilities to the rest of their writing community.

The paper exposes the importance of teachers supporting and questioning children's texts through a critically pragmatic approach. The essential nature of teachers promoting a loving writing community based on friendship, engagement and social energy is also discussed.

**Lensmire, T. (1993) Following the Child, Socioanalysis, and Threats to Community: Teacher Response to Children's Texts, Curriculum Inquiry, 23:3, 265-299**



## Writing Personal, Inherited And Secondary Narratives

### Gardner (2014)

'...we write to understand and be understood..' - C. Day-Lewis

#### Writing involves:

Writing to better understand ourselves.  
Writing to better understand others.

In his article, writer-teacher-researcher Paul Gardner suggests we can use our personal experiences in three types of ways:

Personal narratives. For example, Paul shares a poem about his childhood to better understand himself. It is a brief retrospective of childhood, and it uses intertextuality to accentuate connection to family, particularly the mother. Students can do this, too. They can be invited to write from their personal experience—writing about what they know and are familiar with.

Inherited narratives. These are the stories handed down from one generation to another. They are situated in family history, but can equally be located in community and place. Alongside personal narratives, inherited narratives provide young people with an opportunity to express their funds of identity.

Secondary narratives. These are stories we write based on other

people's experiences. We write them because we feel a connection with them. The second poem Paul shares is based on the voice of an enslaved man from the past. He begins with a searching question, 'Where did the voice of a man of a different time; a different 'race'; and lived experience, so different from his own, come to be in his head, designing the language, imagery and cadences of the poem?' The answer to that question was found in a variety of texts and documentaries he had read and seen over two decades. These texts merged into a single voice at the particular moment when writing his poem. For this to happen, there had to be a respectful connection, imaginative empathy and a sense of human solidarity, which occurs only when the writer feels an emotional parallel with the life of someone else.

What Paul has shown us is that by learning about and writing personal narrative, learners can use their experiences to join with the identities, cultures and experiences of people who are not present in their classroom to create secondary narratives. '...We write to understand and be understood..'

**Gardner, P. (2014) Who Am I? Compositions of the self: an autoethnographic, rhizotextual analysis of two poetic texts, *English in Education*, 48(3) pp.230-249**



## Writing Personal Narrative As Fiction

### Furman (2017)

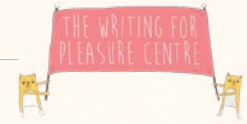
In this paper, the writer draws on her experience of teaching writing to 6-8 year olds in a socially and ethnically diverse classroom. She describes how a group of children, all of whom she knew, faced significant challenges at home, struggled with writing, or actively refused to write when the genre in focus was that of personal narrative. In response to this situation, and on the basis of her general observation that all the children enjoyed writing fiction, she decided to give them the freedom to write fiction once they had finished their personal narratives.

She found that all the children readily participated in writing fictional stories, and she was struck by the extent to which they included elements of themselves and their lives in the narratives. Crucially, she observed that those particular children who had resisted writing their personal history now wrote themselves willingly into their fantasies as key characters in positions of influence. The stories were akin to 'social dreaming'. Fiction appeared to be a mode of self-expression which offered them many rewards, including the possibility of visualising different worlds and providing them with a more empowering way of describing their realities. It appeared that the

children were taking 'a seed of truth' - something about themselves - and growing out of it a fictional story. The implication for teachers is that they can:

- Offer children more freedom to write about themselves in ways they feel most comfortable with.
- Enjoy and celebrate the fact that children may choose to write personal narrative in a fictional mode and in the process feel themselves to be more empowered and agentic.

**Furman, C. (2017) Ways of knowing: Implications of writing curriculum in an early childhood classroom, Curriculum Inquiry, 47:3 pp.246-262**



## This I Believe - Digital Storytelling

### Schoenborn (2021)

This action research project shows how middle school teacher Andy Schoenborn invited his students to share their beliefs and personal stories through a 'This I Believe' poetic story essay structure. The students published their pieces as Youtube 'digital stories'. In the process, they had to consider multimodality, vocal performance, point of view, soundtracks and images.

Having looked at mentor texts and videos, and having seen and reflected on Andy's own digital story, the pupils devised their own criteria for what will make for a successful and meaningful piece. The students noted that this was an opportunity to talk 'in their own voice' after having been conditioned to write using only their academic voice. Their other criteria for success included:

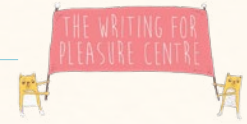
- Uses a conversational style throughout.
- Contains music that stirs a rich emotional response that matches the story line well.
- Reaches a length of presentation that is between 3-4 minutes.

- Includes images to create a distinct atmosphere or tone that matches different parts of the story.
- Establishes a purpose early on while maintaining a clear focus throughout.

Andy concludes at the conclusion of the project that students had an emotional investment in their writing which saw them write with care, passion, and attention.

**Schoenborn, A. (2021) This I believe - Digital storytelling [Available at: <https://writing4pleasure.com/this-i-believe-digital-storytelling/>]**





## Building Inclusivity and Empathy Through Writers' Workshop

### Beschorner & Hall (2021)

In this paper, we learn about how Mr. Jackson, a first grade (6-7 year olds) teacher, uses a 'writing workshop' approach to create a writing environment which supports children to be inclusive and empathic. Through daily writing workshop, children:

- Build self-awareness.
- Experience different points of view and develop empathy.
- See how their writing affects others.
- Explore important social issues that matter to their peers.

According to Beschorner & Hall 'all children have the right to experience a safe and inclusive classroom, which engages students in learning and advances equity'. Mr. Jackson does this by:

- Inviting children to write on topics of their own choice within the parameters of the type of writing being studied. This way, children can listen to the ideas and experiences of others and engage in perspective taking.

- Writing his own mentor texts for children to discuss and study. He is careful to ensure that the mentor texts that he writes reflect varying languages, genders, cultures, family structures and races. For Mr. Jackson, it's important that children see themselves, and others, reflected in the mentor texts that he writes and shares with them.
- Encouraging children to write multilingual books. Children were shown mentor texts where the author writes in both their first language and in English.
- Looking for commonalities, shared experiences and shared expertise in his students' texts.
- Providing time for children to talk and share their writing with their peers.

**Beschorner, B., Hall, A. (2021) Building Inclusivity and Empathy Through Writers' Workshop, The Reading Teacher, 74(5), 631– 634**



## **“It Took Us a Long Time to Go Here”: Creating Space for Young Children’s Transnationalism in an Early Writers’ Workshop**

**Beschorner & Hall (2021)**

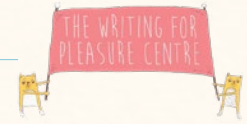
In this article, we learn about how Mr. Hartman, a second grade (7-8 year olds) teacher, uses a ‘writing workshop’ approach to create a writing environment which supports children to write about their transnationalism. Transnationalism, in this context, relates to children who repeatedly move across national borders, regularly converse with family members living in other countries, and/or consume and produce media that travels through the internet. The authors note that many ‘approaches ask students to assume a monolingual, monocultural audience for their writing, with a preference for text-based literacies’.

Mr. Hartman encouraged children to write transnational poetry by:

- Sharing bilingual poetry with the children in his class.
- Modelling how children could write in dual language.
- Using mentor texts with his class which focused on child culture, migration, language and family.

- Inviting members of the local community to come into the classroom and share about their lives and history.
- Encouraging children to conduct oral history interviews with parents, grandparents and siblings.
- Encouraging children to write in the language(s) of their choosing.

**Machado, E., Hartman, P. (2020) “It Took Us a Long Time to Go Here”: Creating Space for Young Children’s Transnationalism in an Early Writers’ Workshop’, Reading Research Quarterly, 56(4), pp. 693–714**



## Translanguaging In An English Dominant Classroom

### Salmerón & Kamphaus (2021)

In this article, we learn about how Ms. Kamphaus, a fourth grade (9-10 year olds) teacher, encouraged her bi- and multilingual pupils to engage in translanguaging. Translanguaging, put simply, is about using different languages together. Ms. Kamphaus fostered an environment where students produced translingual writing and consistently challenged negative deficit perspectives of bi- and multilingual children. Ms. Kamphaus was able to encourage her students to engage in translanguaging by:

- Challenging the assumption that 'standard English' is the right and only way to speak English. In this class, children discussed the different styles and standards of English they used in different contexts.
- Asking children to write and share their 'language autobiographies'.
- Providing them with multiple audiences who required them to write in multiple languages. (e.g., writing a family journal in dual language, performing translanguaged poetry for the local community, writing bilingual picture books for younger children and producing and publishing

information e-books on the web in dual languages).

- Using mentor texts which showcased authors translanguaging.
- Using children's translanguaged writing when teaching an aspect of writers' craft to the rest of the class.
- Asking children to strike up translanguaging 'writing partnerships' during which they would work together to produce multilingual and translated texts.
- Allowing children to mix their writing with other visual media such as art, music and technology.

**Salmerón, C., Kamphaus, J. (2021) Fostering Critical Translingual Writing in an Elementary English Dominant Classroom, Language Arts, 99 (2), pp.87-98**



## **Nadie Más Puede Contar Tu Historia: No One Else Can Tell Your Story**

### **Harvey-Torres & Valdez (2021)**

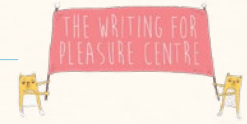
“Teachers should love students, their languages, and their cultures”

Harvey-Torres & Valdez (2021) show how writing curricula and schemes of work often mirror the white, monolingual, middle-class experiences of the teachers or providers who write them. As a consequence, students from non-dominant backgrounds can often be positioned as deficient. Thankfully, Ms. Valdez, a first grade (6-7 year olds) teacher, shows how this need not be the case. She uses a personally relevant ‘writing workshop’ approach to help her bilingual students write. By inviting children to use their home languages and to write about what they know best—their lives—Ms. Valdez values children’s linguistic, racial, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds, and, in the process, teaches them much about writing and being a writer.

The article shares how Ms. Valdez and her students use writing as a tool for positioning themselves in the world and righting any wrongs and assumptions people might have about their realities and identities. Ms. Valdez:

- Delivered her daily writing instruction in both English and Spanish.
- Chose mentor texts which reflected her students’ races, cultural backgrounds and experiences.
- Undertook ‘picture walks’ with her class using bilingual picture books.
- Invited children to choose their own topics to write about within the parameters of whole-class writing projects.
- Asked children to teach the rest of the class about their home languages through their writings, drawings and picture book making.
- Invited children to write letters to people they care about.
- Positively compared her students’ writing with commercially published authors. Children’s writing held the same status and regard.

**Harvey-Torres, R., Valdez, C. (2021)**  
**Nadie más puede contar tu historia: Rewriting Whose Stories Matter through an Antiracist Bilingual Writer’s Workshop, Language Arts, 99 (1), pp.37-47**



## The Unnormal Sisterhood Writing Club

### Player (2021)

With their writer-teacher Grace Player, eight girls took part in an after-school writing club called 'The Unnormal Sisterhood'. The after-school club, in response to the girls' needs and desires, studied, discussed and wrote about identity, self-love, sisterhood and social change. The club provided the students with an opportunity to reflect on their identities and better understand 'their strengths, brilliances, and uniqueness, as well as the oppressive structures they faced and how they might fight them'. They wrote for connection and healing. A typical session at the club:

- Started with a period of informal conversation about the goings-on of their lives, which usually lasted about 10 minutes but, when necessary, lasted longer.
- Gave the girls an opportunity to interact with text written by other girls and women of colour. This included poems, quotes, essays, videos, paintings and music.
- Included invitations to write in response to the texts studied or conversations they had that day.
- Included feedback as an act of celebration that helped the girls

build on the strengths of their developing pieces.

- Included invitations for the girls to share their writing with one another.

In addition to the actual club meetings, the girls interacted in between meetings via a co-owned Instagram account.

According to Player, the girls in The Unnormal Sisterhood club, 'practiced critical celebration of themselves. By studying their writing and related conversations they celebrated the knowledge of girls of colour, their ways of knowing, and their ways of being. They discussed the joys and vulnerabilities of being girls of colour and a sisterhood was established which accepted and appreciated differences.' Player points out the importance of centering girls of colour as the storytellers of their own lives.

**Player, G.D, (2021) "My Color of My Name": Composing Critical Self-Celebration with Girls of Color through a Feminist of Color Writing Pedagogy," Research in the Teaching of English, 55(3) pp.216-240**



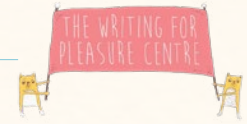
## Making Multilingual Books In Kindergarten

McClain & Schrodtt (2021)

This article shares how Katie, a kindergarten teacher, invited her class of five year olds to make multilingual books. She did this by:

- Sharing multilingual picture books with her class as mentor texts to learn from.
- Despite her limited proficiency in languages other than English, teaching children how to write multilingual texts by modelling how she went about making her own.
- Inviting children to make the same kinds of texts.
- Having parents and other members of the community come and help her and the children in their book making.

**McClain, J.B. and Schrodtt, K. (2021)  
Making Space for Multilingualism:  
Using Translanguaging Pedagogies  
to Disrupt Monolingual Language  
Ideologies within a Culturally  
Responsive Kindergarten Curriculum,  
The Reading Teacher, p.1-4**



## Responsive Teaching In The Writer's Workshop

Helsel, Kelly & Wong (2021)

This article shares how a class of 8-9 year olds became a community of independent and collaborative writers who flourish through a responsive and culturally sustaining approach to writers' workshop. This includes:

- Providing daily and dedicated time for writing.
- Honouring children's writing choices.
- Providing daily writing instruction which is responsive to what the class needs instruction in most.
- Providing children with additional instruction and feedback through pupil conferences.

The authors then share four ways in which teachers can be responsive to the needs of their students. These include:

- Academic responsiveness: Ensuring that skills and content align with students' abilities and curriculum goals.
- Linguistic responsiveness: Valuing the languages and dialects of students.

- Cultural responsiveness: Valuing the social and cultural identities and cultural capital of students
- Social-emotional responsiveness: Providing a safe and loving environment for children to take risks, write and be writers.

**Helsel, L., Kelly, K., Wong, K. (2021) Responsive Teaching in the Writer's Workshop, The Reading Teacher, doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2074**

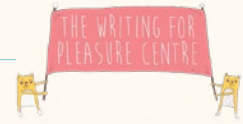
# How Can I Do It?: A Framework For Teachers and Schools

**Now you've had a chance to read about how other teachers have used and applied the principles of Writing Realities, it is time to consider how you and your school can uphold these principles too.**

At this point, think about:

- What do you already do?
- What could you make even better?
- What would you like to introduce or try out?





## Build a community of writers

### **Do the members of your community of writers represent themselves and their experiences, knowledge and identities through writing?**

- To what extent do all of you write about aspects of your own lives through personal narrative (memoir), autobiography, people's life history and poetry writing projects?
- Do you invite your class to write about their existing knowledge and to share their expertise with others, or are they always required to write using knowledge given by their teacher or a scheme developer?
- Do you learn more about one another by reading and discussing one another's crafted texts?
- Is your class invited to write opinion and persuasion pieces on issues they are personally or collectively affected by, and on local community issues? Or must they write in response to what the teacher or published scheme deems to be socially important?

## Reflect on the texts you craft

### **Do you, as a community of writers, critically reflect on the texts you are crafting?**

- Are you all reflecting on who you typically choose to represent in the texts you craft?
- Do you all consider how others are represented in the texts you craft?
- Do you all discuss the possible social impact your writing will have once published or performed?
- Do you consider how inclusive and accessible your texts are for people to read?
- Do your young writers only write for people in positions of power (the teacher, the creators of curriculum objectives) or do they have an opportunity to be the empowered ones in the relationship?



## Respectfully represent those who are already present in the classroom as well as those who are not

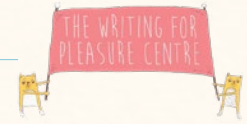
### **Does your community of writers ensure they represent the identities, cultures, and experiences of people who are not present in their classroom?**

- Are you all auditing your classroom library to ensure it is reflective and representative?
- Are you also crafting your own texts to fulfil this need?
- Are your young writers allowed to bring texts in from home and so make their own contributions to the class' library?
- Does your community of writers learn about people they may never have met by discussing news articles and recorded interviews; reading their memoirs and biographies; analysing and discussing historical documents; watching movies and documentaries and listening to guest speakers and performers?
- When learning about people whom they may never have met, are young writers using their reactions and personal responses to create texts which show they have made a respectful connection?
- Are learners developing and engaging in a culture of sharing where they give and receive feedback and responses to their texts?

## Connect with your reading

### **Does your community of writers get to connect with their reading?**

- Does the whole class come together to devise their own ideas for class writing projects, or are they required to write in response to their teacher's or a scheme's predefined ideas?
- Through intertextuality, do you all craft texts which connect your reading to your own thoughts, identity, knowledge, experiences and culture?

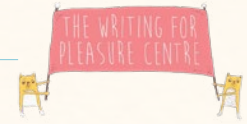


- Are these personal responses shared so as to represent a 'collective response'?
- By crafting texts that represent members' identities, does your writing community gain a better understanding of how a personal identity cannot be separated from a writer-identity? As a result, are you better able to reflect on the authorial decisions a writer has made when reading and discussing their texts?

## Encourage variety

### **Does your community of writers subvert typical textual conventions and publish and perform their writing in a variety of ways?**

- Are learners able to perform, illustrate, record and film a variety of their written texts?
- Are your apprentice writers regularly participating in intertextuality, textual redesign, multiliteracies and genre subversion?
- Do you invite your community of writers to transform or re-craft the knowledge they learn across the curriculum in a personalised way?
- Are you providing opportunities to write using non-standard English varieties and in languages other than English?
- Are there multilingual texts in the class library? If not, are you all crafting texts to fulfil or supplement this need?



# Frequently asked questions

## **Isn't the point of school for children to learn about new things, not to write about what they already know?**

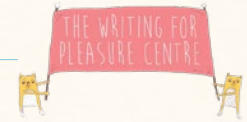
If children only ever wrote about their existing cultures, experiences or knowledge, they would become hedonistic writers. However, children shouldn't just write about newly acquired or school-based knowledge, either. This is simply not what writers do, and research tells us that people learn by constructing new knowledge, connecting and processing new information with knowledge they already have. Young & Ferguson (2021) suggest that when children do write about new experiences and information, they should be afforded the opportunity not only to 'knowledge tell,' by writing down everything they've learnt, but also to 'knowledge transform' and 'knowledge craft' what they've learnt by mixing it with their own imaginative ideas, lived experiences, understandings, opinions and thoughts, so as to better understand the knowledge that's been shared and move beyond it into even richer meaning-making.

## **Why are we encouraging children to write about being poor? What happened to 'poverty proofing' schools?**

It's simply wrong to believe that children and young people who live in poverty have nothing to offer the writing classroom, or that poverty is, in itself, a taboo subject. To deny children the opportunity to write about their actual lives is to deny them an essential part of a writer's education (Rosen 2017). Our writing classrooms must reflect the children within them and the reasons they would want to write if we are to give them a genuine apprenticeship in authorship. Part of that apprenticeship is teaching them how writers draw on their own lives and cultures. While working-class children's cultures, knowledge and identities are not perfect in some kind of romantic way, they contain rich lived experiences that deserve representation and acknowledgement from their writing community, and they portray realities that can make a powerful contribution to the classroom.

## **What happens if a child writes about a sensitive issue?**

Take teaching young children about racism as one example. It's a sensitive issue for some educators. However, many social justice educators argue that if young people are strong enough to experience it, they are strong enough to learn about



it. Just because we ignore sensitive issues in the classroom doesn't remove them from children's lives, and sometimes writing about them can open up important conversations and help teachers to support them more effectively. When they feel safe and supported, young people might occasionally decide to bring sadder or more sensitive moments from their lives into the classroom. You will need to be attuned when writers make the decision to put these thoughts on paper or screen. Young writers should never be pressured to pursue such topics, but neither should they be actively discouraged. Remember, writing can sometimes be the only way children feel they can reach out about their problems. An outwardly loving community of writers acts as a safe space for those who don't always feel comfortable talking. Writing Realities is an opportunity to teach young writers this valuable life lesson.

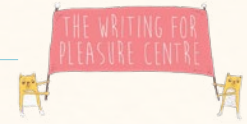
### **Isn't this cultural intrusion and voyeurism on the part of the teacher?**

One can frame this the other way: when learners get to make the decisions about what to write, it is cultural empowerment on their part. Under such an approach, teachers and schools will have to give up some of their power and authority over what children write about and allow their traditional practices to be 'intruded' upon by the children's lived realities outside their classroom. This is what Young & Ferguson (2021) term a 'sincere writing curriculum'. And, as we have seen in the examples of practice shared within this document, when teachers welcome young people's lives and cultures to meet the curriculum, both benefit tremendously.

### **But what if a child writes something offensive?**

This is often a blessing. If a pupil says something offensive, it is discussed and dealt with. The same should occur in the writing classroom. Writing functions as speech on paper, and it's much healthier for young people to feel they can write what is on their minds than for these thoughts and ideas to remain unheard and discussed with others. At the same time, a Writing Realities approach is proactive, teaching young writers to be aware of, and sensitive to, their audiences. "Offensive" writing can sometimes challenge readers to think in different ways, and sometimes it is just meant to provoke or scandalise. Writing Realities teachers and children examine together what the differences between the two are.

Writing as a social justice practice also requires it to be messy at times, and controversial material will inevitably emerge. Navigating our own identities, contexts, experiences and cultures, as well as those of others, means there will



be some learning, unlearning, and relearning to be done. This is not easy, so providing safe classroom spaces, supportive environments for sharing, and a growing capacity for peers to provide constructive feedback is necessary. These supportive, safe spaces should include some community guidelines for how to tackle sensitive topics in safe and productive ways.

### **If adult writers sometimes find it hard to write respectfully about people beyond themselves, how can we expect children to do it?**

This is the very reason why we need to start teaching it in the writing classroom. We have seen a number of high-profile cases where contemporary writers have failed to always be sensitive and respectful when writing about others (Sands-O'Connor & Chetty 2021). Therefore, if we want to achieve the intentions of both Reflecting Realities (CLPE 2021) and Writing Realities, then we need to educate the next generation of writers on how to develop characters and write about people beyond themselves in respectful and celebratory ways.

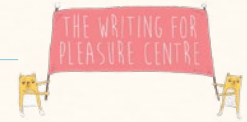
Sunny Singh, writer and teacher of creative writing at London Metropolitan University, provides some useful questions which can help. For example:

- Why do you want to write this? What is your motivation?
- What is your personal emotional, psychological, ethical investment in writing it?
- Can someone else tell this story better? Is it someone else's story to tell?
- What does YOUR telling of the story do? Does it replicate prior violence, oppression/injustice? Does it provide new understanding or insight?
- What is your power balance/imbalance as a writer to the subject matter?
- Should you write/publish this at all? As with most ethical questions, the key is not can one but should one?

You can adapt these questions to suit your class and discuss them accordingly.

### **How can my class have an understanding and write well about people they've never met?**

They might not, at first. They may well begin to write using clumsy stereotypes



and clichés, but these can be discussed and critically reflected on. However, it is entirely possible for young writers to show respectful connection, ‘imaginative empathy’ and human solidarity when learning about people they haven’t met if they all write and read their personal responses to this learning. Alternatively, they can write as a single collective response. This could be done by writing social and political poetry, community activism pieces, advocacy journalism, people’s histories or by well-researched biographies (Young & Ferguson 2020).

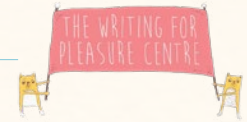
### **Isn’t asking students to be critical of one another’s writing going to alienate them and make them fearful of composing texts? Do students really need to be ‘sensitivity readers’ for each other’s manuscripts all the time?**

What do you do as a teacher when a child feels alienated on the playground? You support them. It’s essential that as teachers we nurture our classrooms in such a way that they become genuine and sympathetic communities of writers. We can also encourage children by modelling and taking risks in our own writing, discussions, and critical examinations. Critical reading is sometimes misinterpreted as criticising. Instead, it is a deeper and more thoughtful engagement with the text that leads to richer and more powerful feedback to the author. Good critical reading leads to a response that is helpful and affirming, not negative and humiliating.

### **Isn’t there a tension between children expressing themselves and teachers having to evaluate the outcomes?**

Given our current assessment systems, yes, it is easy to see where tensions exist. However, Writing Realities hinges on complex issues of identity, context, power, and agency and so compels us to reconsider more traditional, simplistic standardised assessment tools. We provide the following suggestions on approaching assessment:

- Create assessment goals collaboratively with your young writers, focusing first on what they believe they need to do to craft meaningful and successful texts for their anticipated audience. This means aspects of their self-expression are being treated with respect, and the needs of any mandated assessment framework must be able to meet the goals the young writers have identified. Indeed, the two align quite naturally when children are writing for real purposes and genuine audiences (Young & Ferguson 2020, 2021).



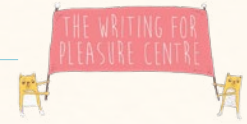
- Ensure that 95% of our assessment is taking place whilst children are engaged in crafting and shaping their writing. This means we provide feedback on how their composition is developing whilst they are at the early stages of their process. In doing so, our assessment leads to response that helps children make their writing more powerful and meaningful through time, rather than serving as a summative judgement that may not help them write better in the future (We can shift our focus towards giving feedback about transcriptional accuracy when children are preparing their manuscripts for publication).
- Give yourselves permission to assess things beyond what's mandated on an assessment framework. For example, consider the success of learners' writing by looking at the social, emotional, and intellectual impact it's had on its intended audience, or at the writing growth the author demonstrated in the process of crafting their text (Meehan & Sorum 2021).
- Help children become critical readers of their own and others' texts. Who said only the teacher gets to evaluate outcomes and growth? The writers themselves can evaluate their own development, they can receive reactions from their friends and peers and they can invite responses from their audiences beyond the classroom.

### **How much understanding of history, politics, or of socially controversial issues, do children require to take part in such an approach and when am I meant to teach it?**

No text a child writes is neutral. When learners write, they make choices about what to write, who they write about and how they write it. The texts they craft share their world views. Through their writing, children reveal their knowledge of politics and society. So, yes, we should discuss politics, social controversies and the ways that people interact with one another from the very beginning. Part of Writing Realities is about reflecting on the texts we craft. It's also about trying to acknowledge, represent and celebrate in our texts those who are not routinely present and to encourage a variety of responses, including those that address complex issues.

It might be easier to start with the politics of the everyday –the daily issues that young children experience and care about. Some children may value writing personal narratives about owning expensive items while others focus their memoirs on the quality of a relational experience. This can be interesting. Their authorial decisions carry social and political messages that are worthy of examination. For instance, what happens to the male and female characters in





their stories will be informed by their dominant understandings of sex and gender in their contexts. We can then help them to ask questions like, “What does this writing say about who I am and what I value? What ideas haven’t I thought about that I can explore?” In all cases, what children write about can teach us how they think and allow us to respond to them and their writing more effectively.

We can also encourage children to represent in their texts those who are not routinely present. For example, we might examine whom they choose to be the superheroes in their graphic novels and why. Together, we can ask: Who is included and excluded in my writing? Who gets to speak? What stereotypes am I reproducing, resisting, or transforming in my writing? How can I represent people who are not regularly portrayed? How can I do this in a way that shows respectful connection and increases my understanding? To do this, we must also discuss issues of cultural appropriation—learning how not to adopt the lived experiences of others as our own or portray ourselves as experts when we are not. Instead, we help children understand and portray themselves—and acknowledge others—within a more diverse, complex and accurate depiction of their worlds. As learners get older, larger issues of - for example - racism, misogyny, or environmental issues can be addressed in even more depth, as is developmentally appropriate.

As teachers address historical, political, and socially controversial topics from an early age and invite their students to write and share their personal responses, they have access to one another’s diverse ways of thinking about the world. As a result, the writing community gains much wider perspectives.

Ultimately, through this Writing Realities orientation, learners become accustomed to asking critical questions about their everyday lives and how, through their writing, they can contribute positively to addressing larger social, cultural, and political events. By researching—asking questions and then seeking out answers together—learners gain a much deeper understanding of the society in which they live, how they can sustain the lives of others and how to appreciate their own unique place in it.



## Conclusion

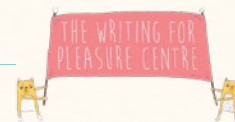
Whilst it's promising to see that people are recognizing the need for multiple cultures to be reflected and sustained through a greater variety of books in classroom libraries (Huyck et al. 2019; Ramdarshan Bold 2019; CLPE 2021), we are not always seeing these same cultures leave the classroom through children's writing. Children don't typically see themselves as writers in the here and now (Young 2019).

By using our Writing Realities framework, teachers and schools can ensure that written language becomes an instrument for meaning-making and meaning-sharing, rather than just a documentation of traditional, dominant ways of thinking, being and doing. In the words of Gutiérrez, we can create classrooms which promote 'shared humanity, a profound obligation to others, boundary crossing and intercultural exchange through which difference is celebrated without being romanticised' (2008 p.149).

## What Next?

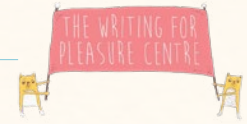
We need your help. We urge students, teachers, researchers, publishers and teacher-educators to consider what's laid down in our framework and begin to explore the possibilities of Writing Realities. We then need you to share your thoughts and action research with us. We need you to provide blog posts and examples of practice to our dedicated website so we can all learn from one another.

Let's not just make writing matter, let's make sure the writers matter, too.



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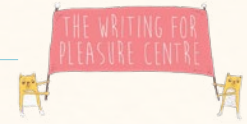
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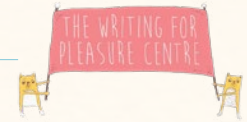
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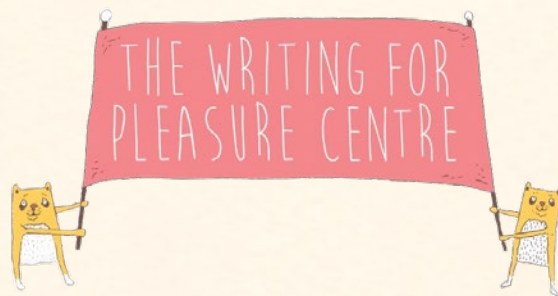


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