Writing is not a subject; it is part of reading, of speaking, and of listening. Being a writer means being a reader, articulating stories and characters, listening to tales, presenting and finding information, persuading and being persuaded and learning from other writers.

Inspiring Writing in Primary Schools helps you to teach writing and to know what a good writing lesson looks and feels like. Packed with accessible advice, engaging examples of research-informed practice and new ideas for ways to involve and support young writers in your classroom.

It provides you with the background theory you need to encourage purposeful writing across the curriculum. It includes exemplar lessons and offers them alongside a detailed exploration of what makes them good, and the theory behind them. Research suggests that from the earliest years, young children’s writing interests and identities as writers are shaped by influential others, including their parents, peers and teachers.

The authors take a real-world view of writing and recognise and respect each child as a writer and each teacher as a professional – a potentially creative pedagogue. This text will help you to seize the opportunity of the Australian Curriculum: English and inspire fabulous writing in your classroom.

Liz Chamberlain is a Senior Lecturer in Education at The Open University (UK) in the Faculty of Education and Language Studies and specialises in the teaching of Primary English.

The Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA), founded in 1972, is a national professional association that supports primary school educators to focus on the teaching and learning of English and literacies across the curriculum.

For more information about PETAA, membership and to view professional learning resources, visit the website.

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Inspiring Writing in Primary Schools

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The authors

Liz Chamberlain is a Senior Lecturer in Primary Education at the Open University and is a former primary teacher, leading literacy teacher and Assistant Headteacher. Her main area of expertise is linked to the field of English and, in particular, children’s home writing practices. Her interests focus on the ways in which children are positioned, and position themselves, as writers both at home and in school. She continues to work with children as co-researchers through the capture of on-going writing practices through the use of video and photographs. For four years she was the Strategic Consultant for the Everybody Writes national writing project and continues to use this work to reflect on effective literacy practices. She regularly runs after-school writing clubs in local schools.

Having been a teacher for almost 20 years, Emma Kerrigan-Draper is currently a headteacher in a small city primary school. Her main area of expertise is in mentoring and coaching teachers, both in her own school and across the authority, to improve teachers’ practice, especially in the field of English. Prior to being a headteacher, Emma was an Advanced Skills Teacher with a focus on Primary English. She has a passion for using high-quality children’s literature to inspire and motivate teachers to plan exciting lessons, which fuels children’s appetites for reading and writing.

Australian Edition Editor

Penny Hutton has been a classroom and EAL/D teacher in primary schools. She has extensive experience as a senior education officer in the fields of literacy, middle years pedagogy and assessment. She has previously managed the English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) and the literacy components of the Basic Skills Test (BST) for NSW DET, and was Senior Manager, Assessment and Research for Educational Assessment Australia. She currently teaches in the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Sydney and is the Professional Development Consultant to PETAA where she presents courses on a range of topics including literature, language, writing, grammar and literacy.

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So many teachers and students have inspired this book. Teachers continue to ask about ways to inspire young writers in their classes, while students brought back new and creative ideas from school and reminded us of the importance of keeping writing on everyone’s agenda. In turn, we have been inspired by Teresa Cremin, Prue Goodwin, Eve Bearne and Debra Myhill, who have all written extensively on the importance of audience, purpose, form, and the fact that any act of writing is an act of creativity.

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Emily Harper inspired the chapter on story writing based on her story stones lesson plans. Despite our dreadful descriptions, she managed to devise wonderful images, which appear throughout the book.

Emma’s voice, as a practising headteacher, is heard throughout this book, as is her message that all teachers need to adopt creative approaches to the teaching of writing, underpinned by excellent subject knowledge.

As the beginning of this book will highlight, listening to the voices of children as developing young writers is crucial for all teachers, and we have been lucky enough to watch and learn from Sid, Emily, Esther, Jack, Siobhan, Dylan, Lucia, Daniel, Johnny, Dominic, Jonas (and Emma), George, Millie and Sam. However, they won’t thank us when they’re older and we pull out the numerous scrapbooks we’ve kept of their thank you cards, get well soon letters, and random annotated drawings.

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Foreword
by Teresa Cremin

What counts as writing?

What counts as writing in school? What should count as writing? Who defines this? Who has the right to define it?

As educated professionals teachers should surely be in the driving seat. They are responsible for framing what it means to be a writer in their classrooms and in best practice contexts they do so responsively. When teachers find out about their children’s writing practices beyond the school gates, they tend to take a broader view of writing and of writers. If they are also aware of their own practices and preferences as writers, they are likely to be more sensitive to children’s identities as young writers, and to recognise writing as an important form of identity work (Cremin and Myhill 2012). Young people, like adults, write to communicate, to make meaning, to sustain and negotiate relationships and to get things done. In the process they portray themselves in specific ways. As Ryan (2014: 130) observes ‘writing is a social performance’, a way of both exploring and enacting one’s identity, whether in a text message, a Facebook entry, a diary or any other mode or medium.

Research suggests that from the earliest years, young children’s writing interests and identities as writers are shaped by influential others, including their parents, peers and teachers (Dyson, 2009; Rowe, 2008). In particular, teachers’ conceptions of writing and their classroom practice frame and mould the identity positions offered to young writers in school (Bourne, 2002; Bernstein, 2014). However in exploring what primary teachers understand composition to be, Yeo (2007) found that their conceptualisations were not connected to what they had been taught during teacher education, nor to the kinds of composition and literacy that operate in the 21st century. Rather their conceptions reflected their own childhood experiences of writing, and significantly their later ‘induction into school literacy and classroom composition’, which was very specific in nature and clearly influenced by wider policy contexts (Yeo, 2007:125).

Teachers are under pressure to ensure the young achieve the highest possible standards in national ‘writing’ assessments and this can (and often does) constrain what counts as writing in the classroom. In the last decade, the accountability agenda and the high profile afforded the apparent ‘basics’ in writing have created a considerable degree of compliance and conformity on the part of the profession, both in England and elsewhere. We have all seen
teachers ‘delivering’ decontextualised stand-alone SPAG sessions (Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar); parcelling up aspects of grammar that are introduced, practiced and reinforced without reference to an author’s intentions or to the audience, purpose or meaning of the text. Handing out greasy black and white worksheets downloaded from dubious commercial sites, which require the young to underline the modal verbs, conjunctions or adverbial phrases, does nothing to engage young writers. Furthermore, as research evidence demonstrates unequivocally, such practice is ineffective; there is no transfer of the skills ‘taught’ in this way to other contexts (Jones, Myhill and Bailey, 2012).

Yet the schooled version of writing is so persistently repeated and reinforced through curriculum requirements, assessment, training and teaching materials that it can become ‘the norm’, an almost unrecognised norm that is ‘delivered’ to young writers in order to help them reach ‘the expected standard’ of the day. This can seriously limit children’s development as writers and restrict their opportunities to engage in meaningful writing in the real world. A balanced approach is needed to ensure that young writers develop the skills they need and the desire to write, and that they are supported in taking risks as writers, and use writing to make sense of their lives and their learning.

That is where this book comes in. Packed with accessible advice, engaging examples of research-informed practice and new ideas for ways to involve and support young writers, it offers primary teachers a breath of fresh air. Emerging from the memorable work of Book Trust’s Everybody Writes initiative, which was co-led by Liz Chamberlain, and drawing on her own doctoral research, which involved exploring three young writers’ practices at home and at school, the resultant mix of practice and theory - theory and practice is very energising. The authors take a real world view of writing and recognise and respect each child as a writer and each teacher as a professional – a potentially creative pedagogue.

Fully cognisant of the structures and strictures of the Australian Curriculum and assessment, the authors offer teachers ways forward that are both engaging and evidenced as successful. The children’s voices as writers and as learners ring out loud and clear, attesting to the passion and playful engagement of their teachers who make creative use of drama, storytelling, literature and multiple media to inspire them. Significantly the work is not confined to English, but draws on rich practice right across the curriculum. Examples from science, history and geography show how to integrate writing in meaningful ways that also link to literature and children’s lives and interests beyond school.

The principles of teaching writing effectively are innovatively shared and use is made of engaging new metaphors to support young writers on their journeys. Liz Chamberlain, as lead author, recognises the need for children to unpack their backpacks of practice shaped by life experience, offers teachers a number of tools for navigating ways forward and highlights the significance of the destination. In the process both authors prompt us to reconsider writing and what counts as writing and challenge us to remain open to the ways this will shift over time.
References


Introduction

Key words
Mastery, purpose, audience, choice, creativity, engagement, motivation, developing confident and flexible writers.

Tools for inspiring writing
The aim of this book is to provide a practical and useful resource for teachers with ideas that might be likened to tools for inspiring writing. The book hopes to provide a theoretical basis for understanding and articulating pedagogy in a way that is accessible, yet challenging for teachers. The aspiration for the book is that it finds its way into the hands of student teachers, but also into the hands of the early career teacher as well as the more experienced old hand. The underlying principle of the book is that teachers need to be confident teachers of writing, as much as they need to be writing teachers. They need to write, as Eve Bearne insists, in the presence of their classes (2002:30) and while for some teachers this presents a challenge, for others it provides an opportunity to share what they love about the writing process.

Writing does things to people: it makes them anxious, excited, concerned, confused or even appreciative of a time and space to reflect and transform thoughts into text. Reading has the same effect, but to a lesser degree, and this is mostly because for much of the time it is easy to appear to be a reader. Go to the library, pop a book under your arm and during quiet reading or DEAR, open it up and stare at the letters on the page. No-one really knows that reading is a struggle, or that the words appear mixed up or can even guess that the sheer effort of decoding the words leads to a burden on the cognitive load. However, with writing
it is all too clear that you find it tricky. The second the pen hits the page your secret is out: the way you form your letters, your choice of vocabulary or the empty white page broadcasts to anyone passing your table that writing for you is hard. You can see the good writers. Their heads are down, their ideas appear to be flowing and they can probably spell and have the neatest of handwriting. Maybe you recognise yourself in those two descriptions and maybe that was how you felt as a child, or even as an adult. The point is a simple one. You will meet those two writers in your classrooms and every possible combination in between. You have to plan for them, motivate them, enthuse them, plan their learning against the *Australian Curriculum: English* (ACARA 2017), assess them and view them as developing and improving writers. This book aims to provide you with a framework for being successful in both teaching writing and talking about it, both in the initial chapters which focus on the theoretical elements of writing and the subsequent more practical chapters based on writing sessions that will inspire quality written outcomes.

The book is divided into two main sections:

- **What it means to be a developing writer** – an overview of writing research, including attitudes and perceptions framed within the *Australian Curriculum: English*;
- **Creating spaces and places for writing** – an exploration of the opportunities for writing within subjects, other than English. Exemplar planning is presented for writing across subjects and through out-of-school projects that may bridge the gap across home and school.

### What it means to be a developing writer

The first four chapters provide an overview of what it means to be a developing writer both in and out of school. That, coupled with the way in which writing is defined, is reflected in the attitudes of teachers and children. Chapters 1 and 2 challenge the reader to reflect on their own pedagogy and to consider the messages communicated to children through the ways in which writing is framed in their own classes. In addition, the importance of writing conversations and the need for text-rich classrooms will be championed as effective ways in nurturing developing writers.

Chapter 3 encourages the reader to look beyond their current practice by seeking out additional writing opportunities. Recent research into teachers as readers and writers highlights the importance of early career teachers becoming the role models for readers and writers in their own classrooms. Embedded throughout this section will be a focus on the drivers which determine the book choices we make and the impact these have on the children in our classes. In addition, the aims and purpose for writing, as laid out in the *Australian Curriculum: English* (ACARA 2017), will be unpicked together with a discussion of how teachers need to adapt their current pedagogy in order to embrace the shift in focus. The emphasis will be on supporting students and teachers in preparing and teaching writing that...
supports the growth of flexible writers; those who are able to adapt to a range of writing scenarios fuelled by a rich foundation of spoken language, quality texts and experiences.

Creating places and spaces for writing at home and at school

In Chapters 5 to 10, there is a focus on reflecting the previously discussed pedagogy for writing through practical suggestions as to what writing activities might look like in your classroom. The exemplars in Chapters 5 and 6 are based on subjects that will be familiar to you in the *Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences* (History and Geography strands). They have been chosen to illustrate how particular subjects offer the writer a chance to practise particular elements of writing and are supported by a teacher’s toolkit for writing. For example, in Geography the bridge between narrative descriptions and visual representations is suggested through the use of specific and technical vocabulary, while in history the emphasis is at word level through time-related connectives and the use of a chronological framework. However, these examples should always be viewed as a snapshot of what writing might typically look like in your classroom, rather than being taken out of context as a one-off lesson.

Having challenged the reader to think about writing within subjects, the exemplars in the next four chapters illustrate how different experiences can motivate and enthuse young writers. In order to do this, a range of stimuli will be suggested, including using storytelling, drama, children’s literature and poetry as starting points, which hopefully all feel like familiar good practice. However, also included are examples that use popular culture and technology as key components in inspiring young writers. In each of the chapters, children’s writing examples are included to illustrate how purposeful writing activities can and do lead to high quality written outcomes.

The final two chapters of the book consider the places and spaces for writing beyond classroom walls and into the home. Two innovative approaches to writing within the community are explored: Writers Workshop and the use of a Storysack© www.storysack.com. These approaches have a long history in primary classrooms but they have been chosen to best represent the ways in which the shared spaces they offer can form a writing bridge between home and school.

An interactive experience

This book also practises what it preaches in promoting the fact that reading, writing and speaking and listening are interdependent, as we know *reading and writing float on a sea of talk* (Britton, 1983:11). Therefore, as you read, look out for the four different tasks required of you as the reader: Over to you, No Excuses, Jottings and Ta Dah!. These tasks may require you to reflect, to discuss, to write, to record, to think, or to practise, but all require you to challenge your thinking and consider making changes to your practice.
OVER TO YOU

Take an idea and make it your own.

NO EXCUSES

These are the non-negotiables of your classroom.

JOTTINGS

Something for you to write or record to capture first thoughts, or to reflect on.

TA DAH!

A piece of child’s work or a comment designed to illustrate or demonstrate the point being discussed.

Exploring the world that is writing

This book suggests that developing writers need to be explorers and pioneers setting out on a journey that explores the new world of writing. Writing provides possibilities, and this is a recurrent theme throughout the book. With your pen or pencil or even with a keyboard, you can make things happen, find your voice and communicate. The aim of writing is to connect; your words may reach out to an audience, known or otherwise, through diary entries or creative words strategically placed on a page. Writing can also transform how you think; you may have experienced rereading something you’ve written and been surprised at its fluency or clarity. We also know, through what published authors tell us (Cremin and Myhill, 2015), that writing pushes at the boundaries; the writer navigates through unknown territories ready to follow new plotlines, or discovers a symbiotic relationship between a piece of text and an illustration or that through the pattern and order of a few simple words they have created poetry that stops the reader in her tracks.

The book suggests that the children we teach are travellers across the writing process; they travel across home and school and build on and develop their familiar and newly-learned practices (Chamberlain, 2015). Across this exploration they develop new and transformative writing practices (Dyson, 2008) and create cultural bridges across home experiences into an imagined life mirrored in school writing lessons. In particular, the book suggests that as children embark on their writing expedition to becoming confident and flexible writers, they develop a mastery over their writing that can be likened to the creation of a backpack of practice, where skills and practices are selected dependent on the task.
References


Introduction

"Writing is among the greatest inventions, perhaps the greatest invention, since it made history possible."

(Robinson, 2009:7)

The most fascinating thing in the history of writing is that, although it has been a tool used for over 6,000 years, it is only in the last 150 years that writing has been a skill within reach of most of the population. The first writing systems were based on pictures and hieroglyphs before they moved into alphabets and syllabic structures that matched sounds and syllables with corresponding letters and shapes. Writing also originally concerned money, with a primary function to record financial transactions, so it feels rather disappointing that its roots are not more connected with creativity or self-discovery. Some of its other functions included predicting the future or the setting down in writing of laws and decrees, for which archaeologists and historians are grateful, as this was the key to understanding early writing systems. It was the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in the early nineteenth century that led to a modern understanding and subsequent translation of Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, a system far more sophisticated and complex than merely pictures representing words or ideas. The Stone was written by a group of priests in three languages: Greek (the language of the rulers), hieroglyphic (used for official Egyptian documents) and demotic (the common script of the day) and it listed all the good things that the pharaoh Ptolemy V had achieved for the people. The fact that it was written in three languages is a testament to the power of text – by ensuring as wide an audience as possible would allow for as many people as possible to read the good words of the priests and the good deeds of the pharaoh.
It took many more centuries for writing to travel to Europe and even longer for the invention of paper to revolutionise people’s access to writing. From the earliest colonial days in New South Wales it was recognised that the government needed to take some responsibility for the education of children. In 1801 the Female Orphan School was opened followed by the Male Orphan School in 1819. Compulsory education was introduced in the 1870s. Together with the Industrial Revolution, this led to writing becoming more widespread. Prior to this, while some of the population could be considered ‘literate’, the definition at the time meant only being able to read and comprehend, with most available reading material centring on biblical scriptures. Writing also belonged to those in the privileged classes, as it was they who had access to the necessary tools, like pens and paper. It was earlier, back in the fifteenth century, that Johannes Gutenberg invented interchangeable, reusable print, leading to the drop in prices of printed materials, such as books and newspapers. The printing press was also responsible for some of the problems with our English writing system. A Flemish printer working for William Caxton (who brought the printing press to England and is credited with standardising the English language) decided that ‘ghost’ should have an ‘h’, as that was how it was spelled in his language. David Crystal (2013) argues that knowing these stories behind our often incomprehensible spelling system makes the language come alive – the added benefit is to make awkward spellings easier to remember.

Fast forward five centuries, and advancements in technology mean that whether through our text messages, status updates, blogs or tweets, being able to write means being able to participate. These foundations are laid in classrooms up and down the country, where the inspiration for a positive relationship with writing can be sparked. Therefore, this book aims to demonstrate how writing can be exciting, whilst still meeting the requirements of government policy and Australian Curriculum statements. It will also stress the importance of confident and skilful teachers with excellent subject knowledge for English, providing children with real reasons for writing, which in turn will enable them to become enthusiastic and developing young writers. Some of the ideas in the book will be familiar, and this is deliberate. The book aims to show how the exemplar activities can be adapted and refined rather than through the presentation of a set of stand-alone sessions. Most importantly, this is a book about children as writers: examples of children’s writing will be used throughout to exemplify or illustrate points of interest. As is appropriate, all the young authors gave permission for their work to be used and, therefore, their writing is not to be judged or assessed, rather it provides a picture of what is possible.

**Early writers**

From an early age, children want to write. They try their hardest to let the grown-ups know that their print carries meaning until, finally, we can decode their messages. Children in Pre-school classes role-play writing and use what they learn in school to transform
home-writing experiences. Here, three-year-old Jonas demonstrates his new-found writing ability and declares to his mum that he has ‘written’ his name.

At first, your eyes might be drawn more to the map that illustrates the journey of the pencil around the page. However, look at the top left-hand corner and you can just make out some letters; there’s an attempt at a ‘J’, certainly an ‘O’ and maybe at the end you can see a sideways ‘N’.

Jonas is demonstrating what Marie Clay (2000) would describe as an understanding of concepts about print, in that he is writing from left to right, each individual letter is clearly
demarcated and there is an attempt at a capital letter. Most importantly, just as the example you see below, he understands that print carries meaning.

These very young children are participating in writing activities, both at school and in the home, which allows them to borrow and revise their early mark making and whilst these initial experiences may have been shaped by the adults or copied from siblings, it is the children themselves who contribute to the maintenance and transformation of these practices (Gazkins et al., 1992, as cited in Dyson, 2009).

TA DAH!

For example, in her homework, four-year-old Maisha demonstrates her difficulty in writing the word ‘chicken’ on a worksheet – all too familiar to Foundation class teachers.

Figure 1.3 Chicken worksheet
However, two weeks later, and at home, Maisha writes the sentence *Chickens can lay eggs*, all by herself.

![Image of Maisha's writing]

*Figure 1.4 Chickens can lay eggs*

As readers, we will never know if she knew that the word *chicken* defeated her the first time and that since then, and behind the scenes, she has been practising getting it right. What is clear, however, from her new sentence is that she can not only now spell the tricky word: Maisha has moved on from the understanding of individual letters making up words, and her words have now become sentences that make sense and carry meaning.

---

**How children learn to write**

The theory of how children learn to write and, furthermore, how they become successful writers remains under-researched, when compared with research into reading (Myhill, 2005; Kress, 1994). One key theorist was Vygotsky (1982): his work at the beginning of the twentieth century highlighted that children discover through the process of learning to draw things, that they are beginning to draw speech. This in turn becomes a method of writing letters and words and very soon they begin to realise that reading and writing does something, it communicates and it has a purpose (Vygotsky, 1982:117). His notion was that as written language develops, it becomes a complex and new form of speech; a system that allows meanings to be attached to signs and symbols. This in turn leads to a blurring of what constitutes a writing activity. For example, reflect back on Jonas’s map – was this a piece of writing or was he drawing? A study by Larkin (2010) into early marking-making found that young children do not register a difference between these activities because both involve using a pencil. So in a sense, when children learn to write they are ‘learning to represent aspects of their world’ (Parr et al., 2009) and, therefore, in order to shape their texts, children need to draw on their personal interpretations of the world and events. As you review a child’s piece of writing you are reflecting on their complex social worlds where ‘already existent texts intermingle to create new ones’ (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2008: 180). This may be presented in a multimodal format including texts combined with oral, visual or gestural modes (Christie, 2003:288). This notion of a combination of images and text colliding to create new meanings is illustrated in six-year-old Ben’s Christmas writing.
Jottings

Read through Ben’s writing and make a list of all the features that he’s included, remembering to reflect back on Christie’s notion of multimodal writing (2003).

One autumn day, when the leaves went falling as they woke up to hear the snow falling on the ground. Ben ran down the street for play outside. But as he turned the corner, he saw a young girl who was picking up the leaves. It looked like a fun time she found under a tree, sitting in the leaves to write.

All of a sudden CRASH!! Ben saw himself falling and falling.

Figure 1.5 Ben’s Story

What did you have on your list? Maybe you thought about context and started your list with It’s Christmas, perhaps you thought about the surface features of his writing and included Knows about apostrophes, or possibly Writes from left to right. All of which are correct, but what is invisible to the reader is the ‘where’ and ‘when’ of this piece of writing. It is an artefact that captures a particular point in time.

What the reader is unaware of is that six-year-old Ben is attending his granddad’s funeral, surrounded by busy adults doing the kinds of things that adults do at funerals. Ben sits at the kitchen table with the stickers and pens given to him by his grandma and he crafts his text. His work does what Christmas messages should do: it offers a bit of hope, is interactive and multimodal, and just as with a song or poem, it invites the audience to listen. The writing also demonstrates something deeper than the text on the page: it helped him to connect an unfamiliar situation with something familiar. That is the power of writing. It allows children to put into words and pictures how they feel.
Demands on the young writer

Cremin and Myhill (2012) argue that writing is a deliberate act and one that has to be taught – shaping thoughts into words is complex. Writing is also not a ‘one-off’ activity, hence the emphasis this book places on writing as a process, or a layered experience – one that builds on previous experiences and, hopefully, leads to more crafted and refined writing. In the 1980s and 1990s the notion of writing as a verb, rather than as a noun, was emphasised (Bearne, 2002). The idea was that the process of writing is just as important as the output or product. If, like Vygotsky, we make the connection between speech and writing, it makes sense to reflect on the process of writing words with that of the spoken word. Speech is fleeting and relies on a shared experience. The speaker is encouraged by a listener who supports, extends or just nods in acknowledgement at what the speaker is saying. Writing can be transitory. It might be a note or a typed word that is quickly deleted or rubbed out, but it is more often precise and organised. Writing requires ideas and needs time to be crafted, and as the words come together on a page or screen, a permanent record of those ideas or thoughts is created. This is what can make writing so challenging for young writers. If you are aware that you cannot spell well, or if you know that your handwriting is tricky to read, this can make the act of writing feel like a daunting prospect. For the developing writer in your classroom, these things matter, as will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

Over to you

Think about the writing that you have done over the past week and make a list. Having created the list, think about the types of writing you completed and for what purpose. Was the writing an end in itself, or did the writing contribute to a different type of end product? If you had a shopping list, then the end product would have been a cupboard full of food. If there was a note to a family member, then maybe there was the conveyance of an emotion or an instruction.

Further reflection on what is on your list of writing will also give you an insight – not only into your own definition of writing, but also the extent of your writing. You may have found yourself surprised by the amount, or indeed the lack of writing you created. Furthermore, did your list include emails or text messages? If so, your view of writing may reflect the more recent, and previously mentioned, multimodal approaches to text design. Were there any examples of handwritten letters or cards to family members who would not have appreciated a more digital form of communication? All of these things are important when you are designing authentic and appropriate writing activities for your classes.

Over 30 years ago, Frank Smith (1982) suggested that in order to understand the complexities and challenges of writing, it helped to separate it into two specific areas: transcriptional skills and compositional skills. Composition skills are concerned with getting ideas, the grammar and
selection of words – in essence, doing what authors do – and the transcriptional skills involve the physical effort of writing, including the spelling, capitalisation, punctuation, paragraphing and legibility of the writing (Smith, 1982:20). You may also see these terms referred to as authorship or secretarial skills (Latham, 2002) and what is being suggested is that writers bring together ideas about a piece of writing – the compositional skills – and skills for the writing – the transcriptional skills. While it may be obvious that in order to write, you need to have something to write about and the skills to write it down, Smith went further and argued that in order to be a successful writer, the compositional and transcriptional skills should be taught separately – and that transcriptional skills should always be last (1982:23). This is an interesting parallel, as is discussed in Chapter 3, to the implementation of the Australian Curriculum: English where transcription, which includes grammar, handwriting and spelling are included within content descriptors. Teachers must balance the demands of teaching both compositional or grammar for meaning and transcriptional, including grammar for accuracy skills, (Derewianka, 2001), within their writing program.

**Individual voices**

All children in your class will benefit from a range of approaches to composition and transcription skills, and this is particularly true of children who may have cognitive problems, for example dyslexia or dyspraxia. Such children may find these dual demands of writing difficult. In order to support them, consider the differentiation and personalisation of their writing tasks. It is important to lay the foundations for writing with an emphasis on oral work, and for composition, look for alternative ways for children to record their ideas. Children who have sensory impairments will benefit from writing tasks that are adapted to their specific needs – and this may involve having a multisensory approach or using other adults as scaffolds, or who can remove the barriers that transcription skills can present. The use of visual cues and symbols can support those children who have social and communication difficulties with the chance to share their ideas with a focus on content rather than on the handwriting or spelling. But for all children, providing a purpose for writing needs to be at the core of quality writing experiences, and this is what should remain at the heart of your practice, regardless of government changes and policy initiatives.

**Policy and practice**

Over the last 50 years, the teaching of writing has been typified by very public debates about concerns over writing attainment. The 2005 National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (DEST, 2005) concluded that students performed best when their teachers engaged in evidence-based practice and engaged in ongoing professional learning to improve their practice. For over 30 years, the teaching of writing has focused on particular models of classroom writing: the workshop approach (Graves, 1983); the skills-based approach (Berninger and Swanson, 1994); genre theory
Inspiring Writing in Primary Schools

(Snyder, 2008). Based on earlier work by Rothery and Martin this approach advocated the explicit teaching of writing in context with an emphasis on understanding how the field (what the text is about) the tenor (the roles and relationships between the writer and the audience) and the mode (how the message is being transmitted) and the purpose that the text aims to achieve will influence the structural and language choices made by the writer.

Government policy rarely mirrors the type of engagement with writing that happens for children away from their classrooms, and therefore it fails to recognise how teachers might build on the type of writing that children are doing at home. This is reflected in Ofsted (UK) reports (2009; 2011) which suggest that schools make insufficient links with children’s out-of-school experiences and, consequently, children feel that English is a subject with little relevance to their lives.

Where does that leave the knowledge that Emily demonstrates in this story written at home?

As a Year 2 pupil, Emily might not be expected to create such a lengthy text as this, or to use phrases such as ‘soft and sound’, rather than the expected safe and sound. Or indeed, maybe a
target for her would be to make sure the writing began at the margin. However, what she is
telling the reader is that she likes writing and that she is enjoying telling a story based on her
real-life Christmas experience. She may also be writing more at home than at school, so where
is the opportunity in Emily’s classroom for her to share these out-of-school practices?

**No excuses**

Ensure that your classroom is a place where children have the time and space to write.
In addition, drop the drawbridge between home and school and invite children to bring
in and share their home-produced writing, or find out what skills or techniques they bring to a new
piece of writing.

At the heart of the writing process is the notion that meaning-making is of huge importance
for children and their teachers, who need to plan writing activities that are engaging and
meaningful. When children know that the writing does matter, they write more and they
write better. Bearne (2002) asks practitioners to question whether they are writing teachers, or
teachers of writing, and this is a question that this book will continue to refer back to.

If we want children to write enthusiastically and creatively, then teachers need to have
that same enthusiasm when it is time to start writing. One of the features of high-quality
literacy lessons is when teachers have good subject knowledge and a clear understanding of
the individual needs of their pupils (AITSL, 2014). As a writing teacher you need to have
considered some of the wider debates about writing. For example, you may already have very
specific views about the nature of English as a subject, or you may have a particular attitude
towards writing. Beyond the practical considerations in planning writing, what is crucial is
the extent to which you are aware of your role in supporting the young writers in your classes.
Therefore, the starting point is to know what children think about writing and whether your
definition of writing matches theirs.

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