

Writing for self



Learning to write is a developmental process. The Australian Curriculum, the NSW English syllabus, the NSW Literacy continuum, and the ACARA Literacy progressions all provide guidance as to content and possibilities for student progress.

We are assisted by these documents. But we are rapidly losing sight of the fact that writing is a social process. It is personal and creative.

At the heart of growth in the writing process is motivation and excitement with the many possibilities for learning and communication that writing opens up.

Ljungdahl & March 2014, p. 287

We tap into and develop that ‘motivation and excitement’ by both honouring what our students bring to the table, and providing opportunities for them to use this in their writing, and new experiences and ideas.

As we consider the important role of background knowledge ... we must consider the diverse worlds from which our children come.

Ness, 2019 p. 37

Writing is identity work. It is about who the writer is. Our students bring to their reading and writing their own background knowledge, built from their lives and their experiences. Every person writing about an incident, an object, a scene, will see it entirely differently to every other person - child or adult.

When we enforce a formula for our students to record what they see or what they experience, with no other opportunities to express themselves, we deny them their identity (Sedgwick p. xvii). This is more than just the opportunity to have their own experience. It is devaluing their lives.



This is powerful stuff, particularly in the light of our current context of the writing **abilities** and **skills** in apparent free fall in measurable quality, as defined by a system that measures success

through a benchmark score, standardised testing and a system that often pits individuals against one another and schools against schools.

Anderson, 2019

Here are some resources for writing for pleasure. Some assist in honouring what the child brings to the writing table, and others provide experiences that allow the child to develop their own ideas.

Writing about identity

Dutton, D'Warte, Rossbridge and Rushton's latest volume from PETAA (2018) ***Tell me your story – Confirming identity and engaging writers in the middle years*** is almost compulsory reading. The strategies presented '*support teachers to step aside and empower students to confirm their own identity ...*' (p.v111).

Activities in the book are school-tested, and include photographs, examples of classroom dialogue, scaffolding and what to do in the stages of writing with students – the 'pre-writing phase', the 'writing phase', and the 'post-writing phase'.

See pages 82-86 for work on identity and how it is shaped. Included are 'micro-activities' that provide the time and space for students to 'play with writing'. (See pp.78-81)

Also look for:

- Kaye Lowe's *What's the story? Making meaning in primary classrooms* (2002, PETA) which includes ideas for students exploring and developing their own stories – part of identity.



Writing Poetry

There are numerous poetry forms that are interesting and easy to incorporate into the classroom without the constrictions of more formal poetic structures.

Fred Sedgwick's '***Writing to Learn: Poetry and literacy across the primary curriculum*** (2000) includes observing with writing and science, ideas easily adapted for our general capabilities, using visual images and so on. The section on patterns includes cumulative poems, syllabic poems, 'oxymorons' – great fun for children to play with, to explore the language, and to learn about the features of effective writing. These are all classroom-tested, with many examples of children's writing.

Also look for:

- Steven Herrick's [Poetry Workshop](#) (preparation for a school visit – get him to come to your school – he is amazing). Check out '[Ten things your parents will never say](#)' on You Tube that you can use as a model.
- Michael Rosen - numerous books and poems, and '[Strict](#)' on You Tube. Fine hyperbole.
- Mandy Tunica's poetry books published through PETAA



Inspiring writing

Liz Chamberlain's *Inspiring Writing in Primary Schools* (2017 PETAA) is an excellent resource which includes a wide variety of writing ideas above and beyond producing limited transactional writing, writing just to get things done.

Gems include the rights of the writer, such as The right to not be criticized, or '*The right to write with a leaf*', etc. (see pp.25-27).

The importance of spoken language in the Australian Curriculum is highlighted, and how spoken language 'underpins the development of reading and writing' (p. 35).

Chapters 5-10 each have a specific focus, and provide ideas for planning for writing, ideas for writing, links to numerous useful resources, and general inspiration for every teacher. Chapters are titled intriguingly – '*Story stones for telling stories*', '*Found words*', '*Using technology and popular culture*'. '*Creating a geographical soundscape*' is one such idea, and reminds me of an amazing piece of work from the UK - Susan Stenger's '*Sound Strata of Coastal Northumberland*', an aural response to a cross-section geological strata diagram drawn by Nicholas Wood in 1838. Some details [here](#).

It's ... about encouraging students to play, to move beyond their normal styles and subjects of writing, beyond their use of traditional structural, narrative and poetic forms – and to ask them to see what happens.

In the enjoyment of writing, student writers can find themselves and discover the power of language. Powerful literacy skills can be gained in this discovery, with lifelong implications.

Creely & Diamond (2018)

The ideas and suggestions here are a follow-up to my blog [It's time to think about why we write](#).

References and resources

Anderson, M. (2019) *Why do we educate our children? Is why being lost in the how (all the testing and measurement) in Australia?* EduResearch Matters blog, AARE March 4 2019

Creely, E. & Diamond, F. [Where has the joy of writing gone and how can we get it back?](#) The Conversation: November 21, 2018 4.18pm AEDT

Ness, M. (2019) *Leveling the Playing Field* in 'Literacy Today', Vol. 36 Issue 4, Jan-Feb. 2019, International Literacy Association: USA

Stenger, Susan (2015) *Sound Strata of Coastal Northumberland* AV Festival Publication, UK

Ljungdahl & March, P. (2014) *The Writing Developmental Continuum*, Ch. 15, in Winch, G., Ross Johnston, R., March, P., Ljungdahl, L. & Holliday, M. (2014) *Literacy: Reading, Writing and Children's Literature* 5th Edition, OUP: Australia

NOTE: Out-of-print books can often be obtained second-hand through [abebooks.com.au](#), or [Book Depository](#).