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Creative writers as arts educators

Teresa Cremin and Debra Myhill

Summary

In the field of writing in education two strong even common-sense views exist: firstly, that to teach writing effectively teachers must be writers themselves and secondly, that professional writers have a valuable role to play in supporting young writers. These perspectives are not unquestioned however. In particular the positioning of teachers as writers within and beyond the classroom has been the subject of intense academic and practitioner debate for many decades. For years too professional writers have visited schools to talk about their work, and have run workshops and led residencies. However, relatively few peer-reviewed studies exist into the value of their engagement in education and those that do, in a manner similar to the studies examining teachers as writers, tend to rely upon self-reports without observational evidence to triangulate the perspectives offered. Furthermore, the evidence base with regard to the impact on student outcomes of teachers' positioning themselves as writers in the classroom is scant. Nor is there a body of evidence documenting the impact of the work of professional writers on student outcomes.

Historically, these two foci – teachers as writers and professional writers in education - have tended to be researched separately, with limited overlap and dialogue between them. Predominantly professional writers in education work directly with students as visiting artists, less commonly with teachers. As a consequence such writers have been positioned and have positioned themselves as offering enrichment opportunities and have not therefore been able

to make a sustained impact on the teaching of writing. Moreover, whilst writers' published texts are read, studied and analysed in school (as examples for young people to emulate and imitate), their compositional processes receive very little attention and the craft knowledge on which writers draw is rarely foregrounded in the classroom. In addition, writing is often seen as the most marginalised creative art, in part perhaps due to its inclusion within English which itself has been side-lined in the arts debate.

Notwithstanding these challenges, research and development studies have begun to create new opportunities for collaboration, with teachers and professional writers sharing their expertise as pedagogues and as writers in order to support students' development as creative writers. In such work the concept of writer identity has come to the fore; how writer identities are shaped and formed, and the challenges, constraints and consequences of students and teachers identifying themselves as writers in school. In addition recent research has sought to listen to and learn from professional writers, analysing for example their reading histories, composing practices and craft knowledge in order to feedforward new insights into classroom practice. It is thus gradually becoming recognised that professional writers' knowledge and understanding of the art and craft of writing deserves increased practitioner attention; it has potential to support teachers' understanding of being a writer and of how they teach writing. This in turn may impact upon students' own identities as writers, and their attitudes to and outcomes in writing.

Key words

Identities, teachers, professional writers, pedagogy, craft knowledge.

Teachers as writers: mining the evidence base

Looking back: the evolution of the field

The notion that ‘teachers of writing must write’ was initially articulated in the 1970s and 1980s as a way of enabling teachers to learn about writing in order to enrich their teaching and potentially impact upon student achievement. It is commonly associated with the work of both Emig (1971, 1983) who argued for ‘frequent inescapable opportunities for composing for all teachers of writing’ (1983:95) and Graves (1983), who in turn asserted that teachers need to be able to control the ‘inseparable crafts’ of both teaching *and* writing (1983:5). Within the process writing movement which developed at this time, (in response to the emphasis on writing exercises and drills), teachers were expected to voice their thinking aloud in class, demonstrate the process and position themselves as fellow writers alongside their students. Whilst from the outset Graves’ body of work was subject to criticism for its lack of research rigour (Martin 1985; Smagorinsky 1987); for selectively reporting success stories alone (Smith and Elley 1998); and for its ‘evangelical reportage’ (Beard 2000, 41), his assertion that ‘teachers of writing as writers must write’ and make visible the challenges and pleasures of composition has persisted. Internationally, the value and purpose of teachers being writers continues to receive considerable professional attention and remains the focus of research (e.g. Cremin and Locke, 2017).

The assertion that ‘writing teachers must write’ was popularised by the US National Writing Project (NWP) and has been enshrined as one of their key tenets for nearly 50 years (NWP and Nagin, 2006). It was also a central strand of the government funded NWP in New

Zealand (1987 -1991). In other parts of the world too myriad projects encompassing attention to teachers as writers have developed, both within Higher Education in the context of training student teachers and as part of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Advocates of teacher writing come from different, but interrelated fields, many are drawn from the process writing movement (e.g. Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983; Elbow, 1998; Murray,1982), from NWP's (e.g. Lieberman and Wood, 2003; Caruthers and Scanlan, 1990; Sunstein 1994; Whitney, 2008), from teacher research, where it is advocated professionals' voices deserve to be heard (e.g. Cochrane Smith and Lytle, 1993; Whitney, 2017), and from research into teacher identity and self-efficacy (e.g. Cremin and Baker, 2010, 2014; Locke and Johnston, 2016; McKinney and Giorgis, 2009; Woodard, 2015, 2017).

The debate about the efficacy of teachers' writing, understanding how writers write and position themselves in the classroom, the focus here, was particularly intense in the 1980s-1990s with many educators advancing support for this position, either as a generic good (e.g. Dahl. 1992; Sunstein, 1994; Perl and Wilson, 1998) or in relation to the claimed beneficial consequences for students (e.g. Susi, 1984; Root and Steinberg, 1996). Some authors even asserted that when teachers engage as writers, student writing improves (Caruthers and Scanlan, 1990). Such claims were dismissed and derided by others (e.g. Jost, 1990; Gillespie, 1991; Robbins, 1992, 1996; Frager, 1994) many of whom agreed with the view of Geekie et al., (1999) that 'teachers are not writers in any but the most superficial sense' (219). Other practical critiques included the challenge of teachers finding the time to write in class. It was argued that if teachers do so they not only shirk their responsibilities as educators (by wasting instructional time), but become susceptible to exposure (Gleeson and Prain, 1996). In addition, concerns were expressed that the focus on teachers as writers was overshadowing

the importance of their perceptions of writing and expectations of their students (Robbins, 1992, 1996).

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, researchers have continued to examine this arguably common-sense notion that to engage and reflect upon the craft of writing will enhance teachers' professional practice (e.g. Cremin and Baker, 2010; Daisey, 2009; McKinney, 2017; Morgan, 2010; Norman and Spencer, 2005). Practitioners too have retained an interest in this notion and have engaged in writing workshop opportunities and projects, within teacher training (e.g. Luce-Kapler, 2001; Gardner, 2014) and CPD (e.g. Street and Stang, 2017; Whitney, 2009). However, as Whitney (2017) observes relatively few of these studies use an identity lens and whilst 'many have asked teachers to write, fewer have explicitly targeted the development of writing identity' (76). In addition, some writers who are also teachers have published their reflections on the process, from the point of view of the university tutor-writer (e.g. Jenkins, 2004; Vakil, 2008) and the school-based teacher and writer (e.g. Spiro, 2007; Yates, 2007).

Researching teachers as writers: challenges and opportunities

From the outset educators have faced methodological challenges in documenting the difference that teachers being writers might make to their understanding, their identities and practice and to student outcomes. Indeed, much of the early work in this field, including the plethora of studies which emerged from the NWP in the US have been described as 'discursive, journalistic and anecdotal in nature' (Cremin and Baker, 2014:3). Despite the size and sustained nature of the US NWP, its research base, as Andrews (2008) observed is not strong. Whilst multiple reports about the value and efficacy of the NWP approach exist, few document or seek specifically to focus on the pedagogical consequences of teachers

being writers, further investigation ‘into the specific outcomes of NWP participation for classroom practices and student outcomes’ is sorely needed (Whitney 2008: 151).

In order to review the available evidence in this contested field, and cognisant that in teacher education and training contexts internationally, teachers’ development as writers is often supported, Cremin and Oliver (2016) undertook a systematic review of this area. Encompassing the years 1990-2015 they interrogated the data on teachers’ attitudes to writing, their sense of themselves as writers and the potential impact of teacher writing on pedagogy or student outcomes in writing. Inclusion criteria ensured that all studies focused on teachers’ identities and practices as writers, focused on primary, secondary or preservice teachers in mainstream education and were peer-reviewed reports of empirical investigations. Of the 439 papers identified, only 22 were judged to meet the relevance and trustworthiness measures employed (relating to the methodological detail and contribution of findings to the review questions). This reflects the relative lack of rigour in the field across this period. Only post 2000 studies were considered appropriately rigorous for inclusion, earlier papers tended to rely on self-reports and be anecdotal in nature, with educators asserting their various positions with supporting evidence, rather than submitting data to systematic analysis.

From a methodological perspective, the studies included in the review and related papers published since, within Cremin and Locke’s (2017) edited collection for instance, reveal the challenge that sample size and research methods present in terms of evaluation. Influenced by context and conceptual frame, studies fall into two main types: they are either small scale qualitative studies, frequently with less than five teachers (e.g. Baker and Cremin, 2017; Dix and Cawkwell, 2011; McKinney, 2017; Whitney, 2009) or larger-scale quantitative surveys, predominantly in the context of pre-service education for the elementary phase (e.g. Gallavan

Bowles and Young, 2007; Daisey, 2009; Whyte et al., 2007). The former afford in-depth data, but since some involve teachers who are published poets (Gannon and Davies, 2007), ‘exemplary’ teachers of writing (Brooks, 2007) or Masters students (Morgan, 2017), it is not known how the work might relate more widely. The larger studies, whilst offering more representative samples, raise questions about the appropriacy of surveys as a tool to explore teachers’ beliefs, practices and identity positions. In these studies additional data to elaborate participants’ responses were rarely gathered and self-reporting was relied upon.

In terms of the other research methods employed, the smaller scale studies utilise a mixture, including interviews, (individual and small groups) teachers’ writing journals, assignments, questionnaires and writing samples. Some include observation of teachers’ participation in writing workshops but very few indeed observe teachers’ teaching writing in school. As such they are unable to offer any detail about this lived experience and the potential influence of teachers’ writer identities in this context. There are three exceptions, one UK study (Baker and Cremin, 2017; Cremin and Baker, 2010; 2014), and two US studies, one focused on a US NWP Summer Institute (see McCarthy, Woodard and Kang, 2014; Woodard, 2015; 2017) and McKinney and Giorgis (2009). All three in different ways examine how teachers construct and negotiate their identities as writers and writer-teachers in the classroom. Finally studies very rarely consider evidence of the impact of teachers’ positioning themselves as writers on students’ writing outcomes or attitudes. Only four include student data: Cremin and Baker (2010, 2014, and 2017), Locke and Kato (2012), Whyte et al., (2007) and Woodard (2017).

The database of studies from the review and later publications therefore indicate that further high-quality research is needed, with more observational data drawn from practicing teachers

and their students, preferably with analysis of written outcomes and a wider conceptualisation of writing, since very few studies include awareness of the digital and multimodal nature of contemporary writing.

Teachers' attitudes to writing and sense of identity as writers

With regard to teachers' attitudes, the systematic review suggests that whilst the picture is complex, a tendency towards negativity can be noted; very considerable self-critique is voiced and doubt and discomfort are often expressed (Cremin and Oliver, 2016). Past school and university experiences of writing appear to play a significant role in influencing teachers' attitudes and these shape their later writing identities in diverse ways. Unsurprisingly perhaps a sense of emotional angst and challenge is also documented within psychological studies of novice and professional writers, (e.g. Brand and Leckie, 1988; D'Mello and Mills, 2014), but in education this represents a potential cause for concern. If teachers have low self-esteem as writers, are concerned that they have nothing significant to say and express disquiet about the possible value judgments of others, there may well be pedagogical consequences and ramifications for the dispositions and identities of younger writers. Gardner (2018) in a recent paper discussing the differences between personal and school literacy, highlights the not inconsiderable challenge of reshaping a young person's negative self-definition as a writer. The evidence also suggests that tensions exist between teachers' literate practices and instructional practices and that these are compounded by the emotional struggle experienced in enacting the dual identity positions of teacher and writer in the classroom (e.g. Cremin and Baker, 2010; Woodward, 2015). The cognitive, social and emotional demands of enacting this dual persona deserve increased recognition and attention.

Teachers' conceptions of writing and their writing practices

Research evidence also suggests that teachers have rather narrow conceptions of what counts as writing or what makes a 'writer'. The implied definitions offered by many pre-service and practising teachers only include academic writing and narrative or journal writing (Cremin and Oliver, 2016). Few value or recognise the range of writing in which they engage daily and rarely note their digital practices, instead they tend to associate 'writing' with 'creative writing' connected to literary print-based publications and notions of authorship (e.g. Cremin 2006; McKinney and Giorgis 2009; Woodard 2013; Yeo 2007). Their perceptions are often rooted in historical conceptions of writing and traditional notions of authors as 'creative writers' whose literary work is well-known and respected. It is possible that educators tend not to self-identify as writers for this reason. However the review also revealed considerable diversity and connections between teachers' histories of literacy and their adult conceptualisations of writing (Cremin and Oliver, 2016). In some studies pre-service teachers, many of whom were reluctant ill-confident writers, saw a writer's ability as 'fixed', an innate creative talent that is present or absent (Norman and Spencer, 2005; Street, 2003). Potentially such views have disempowering consequences for practice and for children's development as writers, although views varied and some more self-confident writers saw writing as a skill that could be developed in supportive environments.

The pedagogical consequences of teachers' attitudes, conceptions and personal practices

The evidence base in relation to pedagogical consequences is scant. Whilst the survey data from the available evidence (Cremin and Oliver, 2016) indicates that teachers and students teachers perceive there may be consequences if they position themselves as writers, few follow through studies have been undertaken. The rest remain reliant on self-report and professional intentions. These intents tend to cluster around affording more social and

emotional support for writing, and include for example a desire to create more secure writing environments where greater sharing and increased choice would be offered (e.g. Morgan, 2010; Gardner, 2014). Offering more positive feedback was also mentioned (e.g. Daisey, 2009). Teachers' planned classroom changes appear to have been derived from the experience of writing and reflecting upon being writers in intensive writing-focused CPD and workshops led by university lecturers and NWP consultants. These opportunities are claimed to enhance teachers' understanding of the writing process and their self-confidence as writers (e.g. Locke and Kato 2012; Dix and Cawkwell, 2011; Whitney, 2009).

The few classroom-based studies which encompassed observation indicated however there are challenges for teachers seeking to draw upon their personal writing practices or demonstrate writing in school. The struggle they experience impacted upon their assurance as writers, their personal authenticity and sense of authorial agency (e.g. Cremin and Baker, 2010, 2014). Additionally, the pressures of state standards and limited curricula created challenges for teachers' wishing to connect to their own writing practices (Woodard, 2013, 2015). Although the evidence is inconclusive with regard to the consequences for students' attitudes, outcomes and engagement as writers, the review does suggest that teachers' writing histories and sense of themselves as writers, both negative and positive, can influence classroom practice (Cremin and Oliver, 2016). Pre-service and CPD opportunities offer the potential to explore and transform teachers' attitudes and identities as writers (e.g. Morgan, 2010; Whitney, 2008, 2009). In particular teachers' confidence as writers seems to impact upon their pedagogical choices and may influence the extent to which they are enabled to respond flexibly to policy requirements and skills-based models.

Professional writers as educators

Looking back: Evolution of the field

Although, as reported earlier, the notion of teachers as writers has a history reaching back over 50 years, there is no parallel body of research relating to professional writers as educators. A search of two major education databases, the *British Education Index* (BEI) and the *Education Research Complete* (ERC) database illustrates the paucity of research in this area. Table x illustrates the results of the search and the search terms used. Despite what appears to be a high number of relevant publications found in ERC, none were research studies directly related to professional writers as educators. The research studies instead related to teachers as writers, students as writers, second language learning, academic writing, professional development, professional writing and publishing. The search also uncovered several publications which were not research – a newspaper article, a magazine article for practitioners, and a poem with commentary.

SEARCH TERMS	BEI	ERC
PROFESSIONAL WRITERS and TEACHING	3	79
PROFESSIONAL WRITERS and EDUCATION	4	144
PROFESSIONAL WRITERS and CREATIVITY	7	8
PROFESSIONAL WRITERS and SCHOOLS	4	113

Table 1: the outcomes of a literature search

In the light of dearth of research, this section offers an overview of perspectives on the role of professional writers as educators from a broader lens, including literary and arts practitioner perspectives, as well as professional publications for teachers.

Firstly, however, it is important to pause a little on the term ‘professional writers’. There are many contexts which include writing as a key part of professional activity, such as journalism, marketing and public relations, academic publishing, and many more where writing is an important element of a professional role. Nonetheless, there is a broad tendency in publications which consider professional writers as educators to conceive of this as relating to ‘creative’ professional writers (novelists, poets, playwrights etc). Atypically, research by Cremin, Lillis, Myhill and Eyres (2017) reports on a study which sought the views of writers from journalism and academia, as well as creative writers to consider writer identity; and in the Higher Education context, Sims (1991) refers to journalists as professional writers in the context of a Journalism course. For the purposes of this chapter, however, we acknowledge that professional writing occurs in many contexts, but we restrict our attention to creative professional writers as that is the principal group referred to in consideration of writers in schools.

Professional writers reflecting on their own practice

Given the focus of this chapter on the educative possibilities that professional writers may be able to realise in writing classrooms, it is significant that there is considerable literature where creative writers discuss and reflect both their own writing and how they write. Arguably, *The Paris Review* represents the most significant resource in this respect, with a dedicated section, *Writers at Work*, which includes interviews with writers about their writing, spanning nearly 70 years. The very first interview was with E.M Forster (Forster,

1953), and subsequent interviewees across the intervening decades have included a string of literary ‘giants’: T.S Eliot, Graham Greene, Kingsley Amis, W.H Auden, Raymond Carver, Margaret Atwood, Umberto Eco and Hilary Mantel. The interviews tend to be a mix of biographical information regarding their literary journey, discussion of their mission as writers and the content of their work, and reflections on how they write. For example, Simone de Beauvoir reflects on what motivated her to write:

It may be that in my case the vocation was accentuated because I had lost religious faith; it’s also true that when I read books that moved me deeply, such as George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, I wanted terribly much to be, like her, someone whose books would be read, whose books would move readers. (de Beauvoir, 1965)

and Joan Didion describes a writing routine she uses to get back into the rhythm of writing:

When I’m working on a book, I constantly retype my own sentences. Every day I go back to page one and just retype what I have. It gets me into a rhythm. Once I get over maybe a hundred pages, I won’t go back to page one, but I might go back to page fifty-five, or twenty, even. But then every once in a while I feel the need to go to page one again and start rewriting. At the end of the day, I mark up the pages I’ve done—pages or *page*—all the way back to page one. I mark them up so that I can retype them in the morning. It gets me past that blank terror. (Didion, 2006)

Without doubt, these interviews provide rich insights into the lives, identities and practices of creative writers, and there are many other similar accounts by writers themselves which give voice to their authorial identity and their compositional practices (e.g. Ted Hughes, 1967; Margaret Atwood, 2015), including by authors of children's books (Ursula Le Guin, 2004; Michael Morpurgo, 2006).

In similar vein, there is a substantial body of work often referred to as the 'handbook' literature, where professional writers give advice to others specifically about how to write. These books are less personal and autobiographical, and focus instead on communicating to aspiring writers the specific skills and techniques that will help them become successful. They are often sharply focused on technique, with chapters entitled, for example: *Sentence Length and Complex Syntax* (Le Guin, 2015); *Narration* (Prose, 2012); *Understanding the Power of Words* (Fairfax and Moat, 1998); *Writing on Schedule* (Brandt, 1981) and *Elementary Principles of Composition* (Strunk and White, 1999). Many of them incorporate exercises for readers to try out their skills and they are predominantly oriented towards adult writers, rather than children as developing writers. Table 2 below gives a flavour of the authors and titles of some of this handbook literature: it is worth noting that several (Strunk and White, 1999; Hemingway 1999) are reprints and new editions of books published substantially earlier, a testimony to their enduring appeal.

Ursula Le Guin (2015)	<i>Steering the Craft: A Twenty-First-Century Guide to Sailing the Sea of Story</i>
Francine Prose (2012)	<i>Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them</i>

Stephen King (2012)	<i>On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft</i>
Julia Bell and Andrew Motion (2001)	<i>The Creative Writing Coursebook: Forty Authors Share Advice and Exercises for Fiction and Poetry</i>
John Fairfax and John Moat (1998)	<i>The Way to Write</i>
Dorothea Brande (1981)	<i>Becoming a Writer</i>
Strunk, W and White, E.B. (1999)	<i>The Elements of Style</i>
Ernest Hemingway (1999)	<i>Ernest Hemingway on Writing</i>

Table 2: A sample of the range of handbook texts for aspiring writers

Such advice to writers is also evident in the media and on websites. In recent years, these have included in *The Guardian's* 'Ten Rules for Writing Fiction' drawing on advice from authors such as Margaret Atwood, Roddy Doyle and Neil Gaiman (The Guardian, 2010) and 'Thirty Novel Writing Tips' (New Novelist, 2017). These pieces testify not only to professional writers' capacity to reflect on their own practice, but also to their capacity to verbalise and share their understanding of writing and being a writer.

[The writer's craft](#)

Indeed, what the *Paris Review* and the handbook literature show, above all, is how many writers do see themselves as writers with a craft to share: they have an understanding both of the process of writing and of writing as text which draws on their professional experience. The notion of writing as craft is important here as it signals that it is something that can be learned, not an innate aptitude. A feature in The Guardian (2011) encapsulates this with its

heading ‘On writing: authors reveal the secrets of their craft’ and its strapline, ‘How do you set about writing a novel? What inspires a poem? Pencil or computer? Pain or pleasure?’ This directly connects what writers know with what others might learn about writing. The idea of writers being masters of a craft is not new: Frank Kermode described E.M. Forster as ‘a critic who knew how to write novels and his practitioner’s knowledge of the craft was what would distinguish him from his Cambridge audience’ (Forster 2005: xii) and from the perspective of the classroom, Leigh and Cramer (2011:82) argue that:

Writers know writing. They have acquired knowledge that enables them to successfully practice the art and craft of writing. Writing is their work and livelihood, their frustration and pleasure, their success and failure.

However, it is evident that this awareness of professional writers’ craft knowledge is exploited principally within its own field, with others who aspire to join the professional writing community. There is very little which makes a direct connection between writers’ craft knowledge and how this might be a valuable resource in the writing classroom. Without doubt, this a rich vein for future research, as the ‘learnability’ of a craft has a strong educational angle: arguably, we might reconceive young writers in school as apprentices in the craft of writing.

Professional writers as educators in school

This educative potential for writers to work in schools with children, and teachers, as writers has only recently become a focus for genuine consideration, and as noted earlier very little robust research has been conducted in this area. Historically, the idea of author visits to schools, usually children’s authors, has been a more familiar concept, although recent

curriculum pressures to meet assessment targets appear to be reducing arts engagement in schools (Jeffries, 2018). Such pressures notwithstanding, arguably the author visit was only ever an occasional experience, rather than an embedded practice, and these visits focus more on reading and motivating children to read through inspiring encounters with the authors.

Recent work is signalling more strongly the benefits of professional writers working with children and teachers with a focus on writing, rather than reading, with both arts organisations and educational organisations advocating the benefit of involving professional writers with schools. The United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA), for example, has published a substantial resource for teachers, offering professional development guidance on planning and organising the engagement of writers in schools (Cremin et al 2010); and the creative writing organisation, *First Story* (2017) has a new programme of writer residencies in schools. Indeed in the UK there is currently more advisory material for schools and writers, than research, including Coe and Sprackland (2005); Goddard (2012); Marsh (2004); and Dixon (2006).

The title of Dixon's contribution, *Surviving and Thriving as a Visiting Author*, is a salient pointer to the fact that writer visits to schools can be challenging, a fact satirically summarised in Carol Ann Duffy's poem *Head of English*, where the writer is seen as somewhat tangential to the core concerns of the writing classroom. In contrast, a characteristic of emerging work in this area is a very deliberate reframing of professional writer visits in schools as a collaborative partnership, where teachers and writers work together. Two research studies have looked at this in some depth. A new professional body, the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) was established in 1987 specifically to promote writer engagement in schools, and their study, *Class Writing* (Owen

and Munden, 2010) investigated the effectiveness of writer residencies in schools. Writers in residence worked in nine schools across England, a mix of primary and secondary, for three years. The project outcomes suggested that this kind of residency can improve students' attainment in writing, but only where the schools genuinely work with them collaboratively. Horner's study (2010) was commissioned Arts Council England to 'to initiate discussion across the arts and education sectors about developing good practice for involving young people in writing in ways that would be sustainable in the future' (Horner 2010: 2). It also found that there could be significant benefits for students in working with writers, particularly in motivation and engagement, but highlighted the crucial need for teacher and writer partnership working, and the report recommended, amongst other things, that there is a need to 'develop ways of working with writers and others so that aims are agreed, there is mutual support and evaluation is taken seriously, including contributions from writers and pupils' (Horner 2010: 5).

This overview of professional writers in education makes it clear that this is as yet a relatively unexplored area. The professional practice of writers actively engaging in schools as writers, rather than as authors, is an emerging area of interest in arts and education: the sparsity of research will, in part, be due to this. It is a field ripe for a systematic programme of research in the coming years.

Teachers and professional writers learning together

Evolution

Historically, as noted above, professional writers in education have tended to visit schools to talk to students about their published works or to run workshops, but in the last decade or so, at least in England, more collaborative projects with teachers working with writers within and

beyond school have developed, with the intention of enabling teachers to learn from the experience and teach writing more effectively.

[The journey from a writing residential to the classroom](#)

In such a partnership project between Arvon (a UK creative writing foundation) and a team from two universities, sixteen teachers attended an Arvon residential and were also given the opportunity to build co-mentoring relationships with professional writers through CPD and working together in school. The concept of co-mentoring was at the heart of the work as the professional writers and teachers worked together for their mutual benefit (as writers and pedagogues) and in order to support student writers (Cremin, Myhill, Eyres, Wilson, Oliver and Nash, 2017). The project used mixed research methods, combining a Randomised Controlled Trial with a complementary qualitative data set. 32 primary and secondary teachers were involved in total, 16 each in intervention and 16 in the comparison group.

The teachers who attended Arvon were positioned as writers from the outset and although several voiced initial trepidation, the relaxed ethos and opportunities to participate in workshops and tutorials, and to incubate ideas and share their emerging writing proved highly engaging. They became personally involved, often drawing on life experiences as they explored memories and identities, although this dimension of being a writer and personal reasons for writing were not foregrounded. Utilising an identity lens revealed that whilst the teachers consistently demonstrated strong teacher identities (noting texts and activities for later classroom use for example), the experience impacted upon their identities as writers. Despite an early reluctance on the part of many to view themselves as writers, by the close of the week almost all were willing to acknowledge, accept and in some cases embrace the title. The community of writers' ethos at Arvon which offered challenge and support appeared to

play a significant role in this identity shift/broadening. Interviews undertaken more than a term after the project ended indicated that the teachers' newly claimed writing identities had been sustained and strengthened by further writing and teaching in which they had reportedly sought to foreground 'writers not writing' and more 'creative' approaches.

The teachers' pedagogical intentions at the close of the residential oriented around a desire to re-create the relaxed, inclusive and supportive Arvon ethos back at school. They voiced a desire to commit to periods of 'just writing', offer students more autonomy and choice and make more time for revision and supportive feedback, as well as use Arvon writing activities. Many also expressed an intention to write alongside their students in class, undertaking the same activities. Observational evidence and data from the teacher and co-mentor reflections suggest that as they embraced the Arvon creative writing ethos, the teachers did make more flexible use of time and space for writing, created freewriting opportunities, and shared written work, thus emphasising the writing process. The professional writers also foregrounded the idea of being a writer, with some also prompting their teacher co-mentor to write in class. However, some aspects of the Arvon experience were less evident; explicit teaching of the craft of writing and focused feedback was rarely observed. When this was seen it tended to be led by the professional writers, perhaps due to teachers' lack of confidence in critiquing writing, as noted in other studies (Myhill and Wilson 2013), and in the absence of set curriculum criteria related to their student's own writing.

In relation to the impact of the work on students, the qualitative interview evidence indicated that the majority of the students (6-8 per focus group in 16 classes), felt the project had had a positive impact on their motivation, confidence, ownership of writing and skills as writers. Commonly they expressed enhanced enjoyment and engagement in writing, due they perceived to more creative freedom, choice, freewriting and the chance to share and discuss

ideas. In identifying approaches that had helped, students commonly noted the advice of professional writers and teachers who shared their own writing as well as time to reflect and dialogue about their writing. In contrast the statistical results showed that the control group students improved writing scores more than the intervention group. There was very significant variation by class indicating a strong teacher effect: that is how teachers implemented the Arvon ethos and experience of working with a professional writer varied considerably. It is likely that the teachers, through prioritising space for freewriting (which fostered student engagement) not only profiled the generation of ideas over evaluating and revising them, but also reduced the time available to prepare students for the assessment tasks. The results also raise questions about the inclusivity of assessment rubrics - perhaps part of what is valuable in developing as a writer is less readily measurable.

Co- mentors teaching writing

The Arts Council England report (Horner 2010) into the work of writers in schools found some evidence of a positive benefit of writers working in schools, but it also made a number of recommendations, including that professional writers *should* ‘consider ways of working with teachers, such as mentoring or team teaching to enable schools to continue to teach in ways that encourage creativity in writing to flourish’ (Horner 2010:6). In the *Teachers as Writers* study, referred to earlier, an important element was that the notion of co-mentoring was built into the way teachers and writers worked together in school, seeking to recognise and complement each other’s roles. Through interviews with the teachers and recorded discussion between the teacher and the writer after teaching a lesson together, new understanding of this particular co-mentoring relationship was generated.

Both teachers and writers learnt much from the co-mentoring experience but the focus here is on the perspectives of the professional writers. The writers were all experienced visitors to schools, though for most the dominant experience was the more traditional author visit, typically a short one-off session with students rather than any sustained engagement. Several of the authors were very aware that they treated these author visits as a performance, or a kind of show, which they repeated in different schools and tended 'to deliver in a similar way' each time. To an extent, these reflect rather formulaic engagement with schools which is more author-centred than child-centred, and as one writer observed, 'it's very easy after a while to go into an act when you're being the writer.' But the writers expressed frustration at the fact that so often author visits were 'a one-off thing' and 'you've got an hour and a half and you've just got to go bang, bang, bang, bang.' Another writer reflected on this rather ephemeral role:

I am sure that so often people want their money's worth and so you don't have the luxury of the preparation sessions or talking with the teacher or anything; or the teachers didn't have any ideas anyway; or they disappeared. It was just a way of bringing a writer in but ... it's not an ongoing thing necessarily, it's just a one-off, and I think there's much more of that than there used to be.

One writer was openly critical of the 'writer as performer' approach, where the school implicitly adopted a stance of 'Here's the writer, they're going to do their stuff and you stand up and you do you're the stuff you're doing and you go away and everyone thinks that, thinks it's wonderful'. This writer felt that this kind of engagement was superficial and made little long term difference because the end result effectively a response of 'hooray, that's great, and now we'll go back to doing what we always did'.

In contrast, the co-mentoring experience was a new way of working, and one which made several of the writers re-evaluate their normal ways of working in school. Some of the writers realised that they had not always thought sufficiently about what kind of relationship they should develop with the teacher and they could helpfully be 'open to a bit more collaboration' and consider how to generate 'more involvement from the teacher'. One writer reflected that 'I play my cards close to my chest a bit... I know what I'm going to do and I just go in and I do it and may be, maybe I could give them a bit more information beforehand it would help them to plan about it and also to think about what they could do with it in going forward.' A similar sentiment was expressed by another writer who felt the experience had made her more aware that as a writer she has 'something that is special and different to offer' but also that she needed to be better at 'tying that in with what they need in the classroom rather than me kind of just going off in whatever direction takes my fancy.' At the same time, one writer had come to realise the need 'to respect the role of that teacher as a writer as well', and draw on that.

The co-mentoring experience also developed greater understanding of the classroom from the teachers' perspective. For one writer, the co-mentoring had overturned previous negativity towards schools: 'before... I was a bit anti education systems and I was a bit anti teachers sometimes. ... I kind of see it from the other side more'. For other writers, the experience had made them much more aware of the pressures and constraints that teachers face in terms of workload, curriculum change and the dominance of performance targets, and in particular that 'there doesn't seem to be much room for creativity in the curriculum'. Specifically in relation to writing, there was a new awareness of the pressure exerted on teachers to teach writing in a formulaic way, drilling children on what should be included in their writing, and 'on the boxes you need to tick to get them through the exams and the curriculum and all of

that.’ This teaching of writing where the pressure is ‘to do things in a certain way’ and ‘to get the children to use all of those ... what they call it, complex punctuation, tricky words and complex sentence structures’ created a conflict for teachers as ‘they know that’s not what good writing is.’ One writer concluded that ‘there’s an increasing divide between curriculum writing and what I would call real writing.’

What is evident from the reflections of these professional writers on their co-mentoring experience is that effective educational engagement of writers in schools requires careful consideration and negotiation of the roles of the teacher and the writer in the classroom, and recognition of their mutual reciprocity.

Conclusion

Teachers of writing and professional writers in education have only relatively recently begun to work in collaboration in order to explore enhancing the teaching of writing and students’ outcomes. The two fields have developed separately, with more attention paid to teachers’ development as writers and less to the ways in which professional writers operate in educational contexts. As noted, there is limited research literature documenting the contribution of professional writers to teachers’ assurance and skills as writers, to these practitioners’ pedagogy or to students’ motivation and achievement as writers. Framed too often as ‘performers’ visiting to share their published products, professional writers in schools have had their hands tied and their voices quietened; they have been offered up, and indeed often have offered themselves up, for enrichment or entertainment, not for educational purposes. Yet they have a great deal to offer specialist and non-specialist teachers, since as research indicates a considerable degree of tension and negativity surrounds the teaching of

writing in the years of schooling. This relates not only to the challenges presented by narrow conceptualisations of writing in policy documentation and curricula, but equally as importantly to teachers' lack of assurance as writers, negative writing histories and the tensions which arise when they seek to enact the dual identity positions of teacher and writer in the classroom.

Rather than modelling writing, demonstrating and composing publically in front of whole classes, it may be more helpful for teachers to develop the practice of writing alongside their students. Through experiencing the process as fellow writers (as professional writers do when leading workshops) teachers thus positioned may come to re-view writing, to recognise the challenges and satisfactions involved and to identify themselves as writers. In so doing they may come to widen their own conceptualisations of writers, which are currently dominated by romantic notions of 'authorship' and limited to published novelists and poets. Recognition of the diversity of writing and writers in the 21st century is essential if students are to see themselves as writers, as authors and as designers within and beyond school. In developing their own identities as creative young writers, they will be enabled to select the most appropriate media with which to communicate their own authorial intentions. On the journey towards teachers' and students identifying as writers, not merely pedagogues and pupils, professional writers have a potentially rich role to play. Their in-depth understanding of the process of writing, their craft knowledge and full membership of a wider community of writers can serve to motivate, engage and educate both teachers' and students as writers.

However more research is needed in order to help teachers create an effective balance between developing students' as writers and developing their writing skills. In particular

teachers' capacity to bridge between experience and practice, and between professional writers' craft knowledge and the teaching of writing needs close documentation. The ways in which professional writers' knowledge and practice is re-appropriated in classrooms and with what consequence is an area for future research. A new UK project *The Craft of Writing* is addressing this (see

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/research/centres/centreforresearchinwriting/projects/craftofwriting/>). Additionally the breadth of writers needs attention, and more journalists, scientists, playwrights, comics, songwriters, web designers and so on involved in education. The extent to which such writers' craft knowledge varies is another area for research.

The idea of writing as a craft, which seems particularly to characterise the way professional writers conceive of it, has much to offer professional practice and writing pedagogy. In an educational context, in England at least, where writing is positioned largely as a skills-based activity, the notion of craft reframes learning to write as an activity which requires creativity and judgment, not simply rule-mastery of skills. It is also a powerful reminder that it can be learned, as the idea of 'learning a craft' is a culturally familiar trope. Viewing children as apprentices in the craft of writing generates an intellectually coherent place for professional writers as educators, sharing their craft in the classroom. But it also requires that professional writers can verbalise their craft knowledge. In the *Teachers as Writers* project, referred to earlier, the professional writers were not all confident in articulating the craft knowledge for writing when asked directly. However, analysis of their interviews, their tutorials with the teachers as writers, and their reflections with teachers on the classroom teaching experience revealed a rich and complex repertoire of craft knowledge. It was also evident that professional writers, unsurprisingly, are not a homogenous group, and some writers were

much more able to verbalise craft knowledge than others. In the new project, *The Craft of Writing* some of these issues are being explored in more depth: professional writers' craft knowledge is being investigated in a more focused and explicit way, and a Craft Framework for Writing is being developed, drawing on writers' craft knowledge, but with the classroom in mind.

At the same time, it is important to be critically mindful of key differences between young children learning to write and professional writers, who by definition are both highly successful and highly experienced in their craft. Firstly, there is a fundamental discussion to consider concerning whether the approaches employed by professional writers in their own writing practice can justifiably or usefully be employed in the classroom. At a basic practical level, children in classrooms are unlikely to be able to get up and go for a walk, or take a break for an hour if they hit a writer's block, yet professional writers can. At a pedagogical level, the fact that professional writers are experts and young writers are novices signals dangers in simplistic assumptions that we should reproduce professional writers' ways of working in the classroom. Research into the writing process in the field of cognitive psychology provides considerable evidence of some important differences between novice and expert writers which need to be taken into account. Very young writers, who are still learning how to shape letters and spell words, devote most of their working memory to the effort of writing at this level and have no memory capacity to advance plan, think ahead, or imagine the whole text (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987). Even older writers who have largely automatized the transcription process may be unable to manage the cognitive demand of managing the iterative cycle of planning, drafting and revising, and need to treat each of these processes one at a time (Berninger et al 1996), counter to the practice of professional writers. As writers become more expert, apart from the automatization of transcription, the writing process becomes more effortful. Unlike any other practice, which usually speeds up

with greater expertise, with writing ‘expert writers paradoxically spend more time on their text and operate more complex processes than novices’ (Alamargot and Chanquoy 2001:185). Thus a key consideration for both future research and professional writers’ engagement in schools is how best to use professional writers’ expertise to support teachers and how to match this with young writers’ developmental needs.

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