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Writing: Less is more -focusing on feedback

Teachers, Arvon tutors and the Craft of Writing research team all enjoyed a return to [Lumb Bank](#) for the second set of Craft of Writing residential in January – and across the three groups fought off the challenges of snow and a broken boiler, making the weekends quite different to June memories of sunshine and the World Cup!

During this time the teachers continued their journeys as writers and wrote in workshops and their own free time, refining and revising their writing. They also shared their experiences, challenges and successes of putting the Craft of Writing Framework into practice, and discussed ways of circumnavigating difficulties when seeking to develop children’s creative writing in school. The Framework, as noted in earlier blogs, was derived from an analysis of the craft knowledge deployed by professional writers. The data had been collected in the previous [Teachers as Writers](#) project.

The focus of this second weekend was on critical feedback in order to generate a shared vocabulary and language to talk about writing and help revision skills. The tutors Steve Voake and Alicia Stubbersfield prompted the teachers to write and then, working in small groups, to read their work to one another, explore authorial intentions and offer focussed feedback. The teachers also attended one to one tutorials and received yet more critical feedback to support them as writers. As a community we reflected on the stubborn resilience in all our writing, of a tendency to tell rather than show – something we acknowledged we all need to work on, and the value of modelling ways to do this in the classroom.

Another recurrent theme was ‘less is more’; reinforcing a mind-set in revising to ‘cut, cut, cut’, and we considered how to engage our readers, hook them in, and take out extra filler information that adds nothing to the image, character or atmosphere. We discussed how through feedback we can encourage young authors to make meaningful choices based on their knowledge of effective writing rather than simply adding more adjectives or fronted adverbials for the sake of it. The teachers used the Craft of Writing Framework to give feedback to each other and were supported to make explicit use of it in focused feedback conversations with children too, to help them develop a better understanding of what needs to be done to improve their writing.

On Friday night each weekend we relished the opportunity of hearing the Year 5 children’s work, written for each class’s seasonal short story collection and on Saturday evening we celebrated the production of the teachers’ group anthologies. These were variously entitled: *Words from the big chair* (the tutors’ old wooden bench); *Stationery not provided* (hints of pen and paper borrowing!) and *Writing from the cold face* (linked to the broken boiler!) The pleasure and pride the teachers took in voicing their poems and short stories was a delight to see.

Two fairly typical comments from teachers sum up the atmosphere and impact of this time to write, review and revise their writing:

“I felt settled and ready to write. The supportive approach of everyone here infused and enthused us all and gave us the confidence to share and open up”

“I’ve begun to write a story of my own- something I’ve always wanted to do. I have a Framework and a plan as to how I can enable children in my classroom to become writers.”

It was a chance to celebrate what has been achieved so far, reflect on challenges and plan forwards. Now the teachers are seeking to further embed the Craft of Writing Framework in their classroom practice in order to create communities of writers where writing is shared, critiqued and celebrated, and where feedback purposefully supports the children's learning about writing and being a writer.