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Writing as a craft: Re-considering teacher subject content knowledge for teaching writing

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ABSTRACT

The importance of teacher subject knowledge as key professional knowledge has been emphasised in successive studies over the past thirty years, yet there are very few empirical studies which address either content or pedagogical knowledge for teaching writing. At the same time, in a number of international jurisdictions, writing attainment lags behind reading attainment. This article addresses these concerns by considering what might constitute subject content knowledge for writing, and thus what might inform pedagogical interventions to improve achievements in writing. The article draws on an Arts Council-funded project in England, *Teachers as Writers*, a collaborative research project with the creative writing charity, Arvon. Drawing on qualitative data from nine professional writers, the article analyses how the writers communicated an understanding of writing as ‘*the craft of what we do*’ and articulated their craft knowledge during their encounters with teachers. The article proposes that subject content knowledge for writing might more helpfully be considered as craft knowledge, rather than as a body of factual knowledge, and presents a framework of five thematic themes through which to conceptualise this craft knowledge. These themes offer a way of thinking about craft knowledge as both text-oriented and writer-oriented.

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1. Introduction

Despite a sustained tradition of research into the importance of teacher knowledge (for example, Shulman 1987; Ball et al 2008; Blomeke, Gustafsson, and Shavelson 2015), there remains an empirical silence about what constitutes teacher subject knowledge for writing (Ballock, McQuitty, and McNary 2018). Yet, at the same time, there appear to be international concerns about standards in writing, particularly compared with reading attainment (ACARA 2019; The National Assessment Governing Board 2019; Department for Education 2017; Ministry of Education 2017). This paper addresses these dual concerns by considering what might constitute subject content knowledge for writing: this has significance for what might inform pedagogical interventions to improve attainment in writing.

The article draws on an Arts Council-funded project in England, *Teachers as Writers*, a collaborative research project with the creative writing charity, Arvon. *Teachers as Writers* was a mixed-methods investigation, comprising a randomised controlled trial and complementary qualitative data set examining the value of professional writers' engagement with teachers as writers, and its impact on classroom practice and student outcomes (Cremin and Myhill 2019; Cremin et al. 2020). The project focused upon a residential creative writing course for the teachers, led by two professional writers, which involved writing workshops, free time and space for writing and individual writing tutorials with the professional writers. The residential focused on creative writing, a widely-used but ill-defined term. For the purposes of this study, we adopt the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) benchmark statement for creative writing, which argues that it can take many forms but these '*tend not to be informational, but imaginative interpretations of the world that invite the complex participation of the audience or reader*' (National Association for Writers in Education 2008, 2). In practice, the residential invited teachers to write poetry, personal narrative and fictional narrative. Following the residential, the teachers planned and taught a fictional narrative unit of work in collaboration with a professional writer, including two co-taught lessons. An unexpected outcome of the project was how the writers communicated an understanding of writing as '*the craft of what we do*' and articulated their craft knowledge during their encounters with teachers. One writer observed that in contrast to art teachers, who '*are passing on a craft, they're passing on what they can already do, they can draw and paint*', English teachers are '*trained in the art of criticism rather than in writing*'. Our work here in the context of teaching writing parallels emergent research elsewhere drawing on expert professionals to inform understanding of subject knowledge in related English areas (van Rijt and Coppen 2017). In the light of this, this paper sets out to examine professional writers' understanding of the craft of writing and through this, to answer the research question, 'what might constitute subject content knowledge for the teaching of writing?'

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge

Shulman is commonly attributed with being the architect of the concept of teacher knowledge, arguing that there is a need to understand the 'elaborate knowledge base for teaching' (Shulman 1987, 7), based on his view that effective teaching 'requires basic skills, content knowledge and general pedagogical skills' (1987:6). He offered various taxonomies of the teacher knowledge base, and acknowledges his own cross-article inconsistency in this respect (1987:8). Indeed, many subsequent studies build on Shulman's thinking by generating new taxonomic variations and sub-categorisations, such as Grossman's (1990) four knowledge types: subject matter knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and knowledge of context; Banks et al's (2005) taxonomy of teacher professional knowledge; and Ball et al's (2008) six domains of content and pedagogical knowledge. More recently, Blomeke, Gustafsson, and Shavelson (2015) have distinguished between the stable cognitive resource of teacher knowledge and the more dynamic,

variable cognitive skills used to manage specific classroom situations. Given that Shulman's taxonomy was theoretical, rather than empirically evidenced, it is understandable that so many subsequent studies have focused on refining and reshaping it. However, this has meant that Shulman's arguments about the importance of the teacher knowledge base in fostering thoughtful teachers capable of effective pedagogical decision-making, is often overlooked. He challenged the then prevailing orthodoxies of teacher education, which focused on classroom practice, arguing that 'the currently incomplete and trivial definitions of teaching held by the policy community comprise a far greater danger to good education than does a more serious attempt to formulate the knowledge base' (Shulman 1987, 21). In contrast, he maintained that teacher education courses should focus not merely on classroom skills, but also on the knowledge base which underpins them. He described a model of pedagogical reasoning and action, bringing together knowledge and skills, and argued that this should be 'the intellectual basis for teaching performance' (1987:20). Central to Shulman's thinking was how knowledge informs action, and how action could reshape knowledge.

At the heart of such pedagogical reasoning are the twin concepts of content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Shulman conceived of content knowledge as the 'knowledge, understanding, skill and disposition that are to be learned' (Shulman 1987, 8), in effect, the specialist knowledge of the discipline. However, it is PCK which interests him most as it represents a 'special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding' (1987: 8). PCK brings together the content knowledge with 'the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others' (Shulman 1986, 9): in other words, it combines what teachers know as a subject-specialist with what they know about teaching and learning. For Shulman, PCK has particular significance in teacher education, not least because it is 'most likely to distinguish the understanding of the content specialist from that of the pedagogue' (Shulman 1987, 8). Subsequent research has explored whether the specialist subject knowledge is separate from PCK, or whether it is in fact part of it. Kind (2009) discusses this in terms of a *transformative* or an *integrative* view, whereby subject knowledge is either transformed by teaching knowledge as part of PCK, or where PCK includes both subject and teaching knowledge. She concludes that, in the context of Science Education, thinking of subject knowledge as a separate component is most helpful because it allows attention to 'home in on subject-specific issues, including how to teach difficult and abstract concepts' (Kind 2009a, 198).

2.2. Subject knowledge for writing

Whilst the epistemological nature of Science is very different from English, we share Kind's view that there is value in thinking about subject knowledge as a separate category because teachers' capacity to transform what they know into effective teaching and learning pedagogies is dependent, in part at least, on the nature of their subject knowledge. Numerous studies have pointed to the link between subject knowledge and pedagogical practices (Gess-Newsome 1999; Hay Mcker 2001; Goulding, Rowland, and Barber 2002; Walshaw 2012; Smithers and Robinson 2013), highlighting, for example, the

importance of deep conceptual understanding (Kind 2014); how students bring subject knowledge misconceptions to their teaching (Van Driel et al. 2002); and how insecure subject knowledge leads to weaknesses in planning (Goulding, Rowland, and Barber 2002) or to greater reliance on textbooks and recall questions (Kind 2009b). Both Coe, Aloisi, and Higgins (2014) and Metzler and Woessman (2012) found a direct relationship between a teacher's subject knowledge and student outcomes.

However, research into both subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge is dominated by studies in Maths and Science (for example, Parker and Heywood 2000; Goulding, Rowland, and Barber 2002; Ball et al 2008; Loughran, Mulhall, and Berry 2008; Kind 2014), possibly because both have a clearly specifiable disciplinary knowledge base. English, or literacy, is less clear. Shulman's description of content knowledge for English very much reflects the standard coverage of a traditional English literature degree:

... the teacher of English should know English and American prose and poetry, written and spoken language use and comprehension, and grammar. In addition, he or she should be familiar with the critical literature that applies to particular novels or epics that are under discussion in class. Moreover, the teacher should understand alternative theories of interpretation and criticism, and how these might relate to issues of curriculum and teaching. (Shulman 1987, 9)

His description is, of course, of its time and reflects an American context, but the Literature component remains broadly the same today, and the emphasis on literary knowledge is echoed in Moon's (1999) model of subject and pedagogical knowledge for English. In England, an English Literature route into teaching in England is a preparation for teaching reading, comprehension and interpretation, and is most closely aligned to post-16 specialist study and the Literature element of national examinations at age 16. Despite the existence of many degrees in English Language, Cultural Studies, or Creative Writing, for example, the English Literature degree remains the dominant route into secondary English teaching (Blake and Shortis 2010), and primary teachers may have a wholly unrelated degree. Furthermore, primary teacher education courses in England are mandated to address the teaching of reading, through phonics. As a consequence, teachers may be more confident as teachers of reading, rather than of writing.

Although several studies on effective teachers of literacy flag the correlation between teacher subject knowledge and teacher effectiveness (Wray et al. 2002; Flynn 2007), subject knowledge of writing is not foregrounded: indeed, Flynn relegates it to knowledge of 'the technicalities of written and spoken English' (2007:145). There are numerous studies which consider the subject knowledge needed to teach reading (for example, Alatalo 2016; Joshi et al. 2009; Moats 2009), but a systematic search for studies investigating subject knowledge for writing resulted in 43 publications, of which only seven directly addressed teacher knowledge, excluding those which focused on grammar or spelling alone. A further five studies explored the challenges of assessing writing (Limbrick and Knight 2005; Parr et al 2007; Collopy 2008; Parr and Timperley 2010; Gardner 2012), these often touched indirectly on subject knowledge, because as Limbrick and Knight noted, assessment needs 'a judgment which requires a depth of teacher knowledge' (2005:19). Ballock, McQuitty, and McNary (2018) observe that studies of

teacher knowledge for writing have been limited, and comment that ‘the paucity of empirical findings offers little guidance for teacher education programs with respect to preparing teachers of writing’ (2018: 57).

Of the seven studies which did address teacher knowledge, three (Gibson 2007; Bentley 2013; Wahleithner 2018) focused on pedagogical content knowledge for writing, rather than the underpinning subject knowledge. Relevant to this paper, however, Bentley argues that teachers need ‘meaningful experiences as writers’ (2013:220) in addition to their pedagogical training, and argues that preservice teachers in the study ‘learned how to be an effective writing teacher from gaining “insider knowledge” as a writer’ (2013: 223). The remaining four studies addressed teacher subject knowledge in different ways. Mosenthal and Ball (1992) found that teachers, in interviews, talked about aspects of writing such as revising and editing, the characteristics of texts and different written genres, but in their teaching they emphasised ‘the writer’s intentions in the act of writing’ (1992: 351), framing subject knowledge around the intention of the writer. Subject knowledge of narrative writing is foregrounded in Gearheart and Wolf (1994), whilst Moon (2012) proposes the explicit teaching of classical rhetorical techniques for writing, requiring secure subject knowledge of rhetoric. Ballock, McQuitty, and McNary (2018) conclude that subject knowledge alone is insufficient, it is the pedagogical knowledge and understanding of writing development which is most important.

2.3. Subject knowledge of the craft of writing

Given this dearth of attention to what constitutes teacher subject knowledge for writing, we might usefully consider the knowledge that professional writers bring to their own writing. There is, of course, a substantial suite of ‘handbook’ literature, books written explicitly to outline the techniques of successful writing for aspiring writers (for example, Hemingway and Phillips 1999; Strunk and White 1999; King 2012; Prose 2012; Le Guin 2015), and books drawing on their own direct experience of writing. 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’ (Leigh and Cramer 2011:82). The notion of writing as a craft is not new, either within education or in the world of writers. The educationalists, Moon (2012:48) talks of ‘the craft of writing’, and Twiselton (2006, 94) too notes the importance of ‘the crafting of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and texts’. The founders of Arvon, the research partners for the project reported here, maintained that ‘All art is achieved through the exercise of a craft, and every craft has its rudiments that must be taught’ (Fairfax and Moat (1998, 1), a reminder that the craft can be taught, and by implication, learned. Arguably, this body of professional craft knowledge of writing represents knowledge for writing, but it has not been seriously considered as a way to think about subject knowledge for the teaching of writing. The term ‘craft knowledge’ may be more useful than ‘subject knowledge’ because it describes not simply a body of content knowledge but substantive knowledge of how to craft and shape a text.

3. Methodology

As explained earlier, the qualitative data reported here draws from the *Teachers as Writers* study, co-created with the national creative writing charity, Arvon. In this study, professional writers engaged with teachers in two distinct ways: as writing tutors during an initial week-long Arvon residential writing course and/or by teaching alongside the project practitioners during a classroom-based scheme of work on narrative fiction. This article explores what writers revealed about the craft of writing when engaged in this way, the key knowledge they identified for their own teaching purposes, and the implications of this for teachers' subject content knowledge for writing.

3.1. Sample and ethics

The writer sample comprised nine published authors, six male and three female, and included poets, novelists and playwrights. Of these, two writers engaged with teachers as tutors during the Arvon residential and eight writers (including one of the tutors) participated as co-mentors, teaching with the teachers during the classroom phase. The tutors, selected by Arvon, came from across England, and all were experienced in working with teachers and school students. In terms of ethical principles those of BERA (2011) were deployed and approval was gained from both the University of Exeter (STF/15/16/02) and the Open University (HREC/2015/2072). Written consent forms were signed by all participating writers and teachers, who were given comprehensive, tailored written information.

3.2. Data collection

Over the course of the study, data were collected from writers on a repeat basis from the start of the Arvon residential course to the end of the classroom teaching phase, a period of approximately 3 months. A total of 63 separate writer conversations were audio-captured. These were of three types: 1) semi-structured interviews with each writer, conducted by researchers; 2) writers' one-to-one tutorials with teachers during the residential; and 3) writers' critical reflections following classroom teaching (see Table 1). During the residential phase, the two writing tutors were each interviewed twice, once at the start of the course and again at the end. For the classroom phase of the study, the eight writers who participated as co-mentors were each interviewed twice, once before meeting their partner teacher and once following the intervention.

The first of these interviews focused on writers' personal practices and the principles or key knowledge that informed their writing; the second focused on their judgement of the impact of the *Teachers as Writers* residential on teachers' writing or perceptions of writing, and the impact of the classroom work on students' writing. Each of the writers'

Table 1. Data sources.

Data source	Number of writers	Total dataset
Interviews	9	20
Tutorials	2	27
Post-lesson reflections	8	16

one-to-one tutorials with teachers during the residential, and each of the writers' post-lesson reflective discussions with teachers were audio-recorded. The interviews with writers lasted approximately 1 hour each. Tutorials and post-lesson reflections lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

3.3. Data analysis

All audio data, as summarised in Table 1, were professionally transcribed, and then coded inductively by a team of three researchers using NVivo software. An iterative process of open and axial coding was adopted, whereby thematic categories and related sub-categories were identified collaboratively and refined over successive rounds of analysis. The first phase of analysis resulted in a set of codes linked to the research questions specified for the *Teachers as Writers* project and reported elsewhere (Cremin et al. 2020; Cremin and Myhill 2019). Within this initial analysis, one large cluster of data was coded as 'Craft Knowledge', signalling that this might be a significant theme. As a consequence, a second phase of analysis searched through the full dataset looking for any data relevant to the theme of craft knowledge, and all comments that expressed writers' knowledge about the craft of writing were identified and discussed. It is important to note that this included both *direct* statements about craft knowledge by the writers, and *inferred* craft knowledge deduced from, for example, advice they gave to the teachers in the tutorials. As analysis progressed, a working framework of sub-themes of craft knowledge was established. When all comments could be easily assigned to existing categories and no new codes were proposed, the framework was considered sufficiently inclusive. A summary of the final thematic codes and their definitions is shown in Table 2.

3.4. Strengths and limitations

A repeat model of data collection over time and in different contexts enabled the accumulation of a rich body of evidence about writers' understandings about the craft of writing. Whilst self-reported data are widely regarded as less reliable than 'live' data, in this study the integration of contextualised data from tutorials and post-lesson reflections may have provided more authentic insight into writers' craft knowledge than interview claims alone, particularly as writers often struggled

Table 2. Summary of code definitions.

CRAFT KNOWLEDGE OF WRITING	
Summary of Thematic Codes	Definition
The writing process	Knowledge about the strategies and processes involved in writing, from pre-writing activities to final proofreading.
Text-level choices	Knowledge about structural and text-level features and their effects.
Language choices	Knowledge about language choices and their effects.
Being an author	Knowledge about the personal resources and intentions that authors bring to their writing.
Reader-writer relationship	Knowledge about the interaction between reader and writer, and the ways in which readers become engaged in or affected by writing.

to define their knowledge about writing when asked directly. One limitation of the study is that nine writers is a relatively small sample in terms of the diversity of possible writing processes and craft knowledge they represent, and the tutorial data involved only the two professional writers who lead the *Teachers as Writers* residential.

4. Findings

As noted in the methodology above, the data for this study drew on three different sources: interviews with the professional writers; audio-recording of the professional writers in tutorial sessions with the teachers during the Arvon residential; and audio-recordings of the writers' post-lesson reflections with teachers after their co-teaching. Table 3 presents the main thematic codes, and illustrates the frequency of these codes in total, and in each of the data sources.

Although the writing process is significantly more frequently represented, it is important to bear in mind that the interviews asked direct questions about the writing process, which is likely to account for its numerical dominance here. This is reinforced by the high frequency occurring in the interviews, compared with the tutorials and post-lesson reflections. The responses suggest that, in addition to knowledge about the writing process, knowledge about structural and text-level features and their effects; about language choices and their effects; and about the personal resources and intentions that authors bring to their writing are particularly important aspects of craft knowledge of writing for these writers. A bar chart representation of this data (see Figure 1) makes some of the contrasts in responses in the different data sources more visible.

In the interviews, the writers gave more prominence to the writing process and being a writer, partly, as noted earlier, because of the interview questions, but perhaps also because in interview they were more self-consciously aware of their identity as authors. In contrast, in the tutorials, the text level and language choices are considerably more prominent, reflecting the close focus of the tutorials on the teachers' own written texts. Here perhaps the tutorial context has revealed craft knowledge which is more text-focused, than writer-focused. And although the reader–writer relationship is less strongly represented overall, it was in the tutorials where this received most attention as the professional writers supported the teacher writers in directing their thinking towards their readers.

Below we outline the more detailed findings for each of these thematic codes.

Table 3. Showing the main thematic codes and their distribution.

Main Thematic Codes	Number and Source of References			
	<i>Interviews</i>	<i>Tutorials</i>	<i>Reflections</i>	<i>All</i>
The Writing Process	163	53	56	272
Language choices	35	118	27	180
Text level choices	34	88	43	165
Being an Author	89	26	25	140
Reader-writer relationship	16	28	10	54

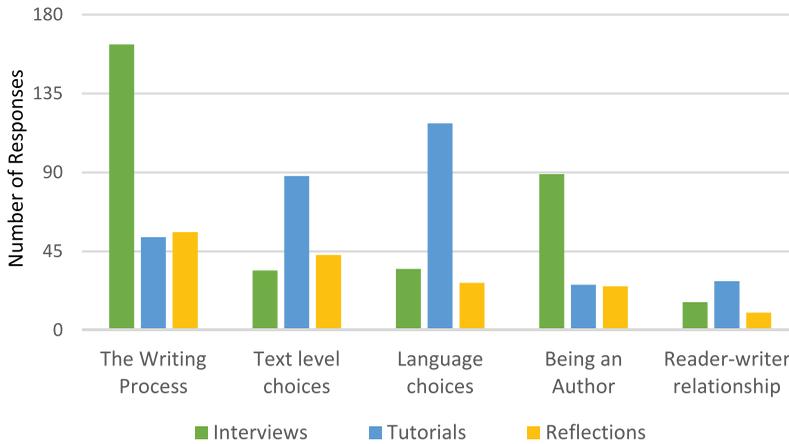


Figure 1. The distribution of responses across the data sources.

Table 4. Writing process sub-codes and definitions.

Sub-code	Definition	Example
Revision	Knowledge of the strategies/processes involved in improving text	<i>You go down level after level after level ... restructuring, polishing, working on it as an object in itself</i>
Writing process as a whole	Knowledge of the nature of writing process as a whole and ways of managing it	<i>It's not that linear process of gathering, drafting, editing, finalising. It's a circular thing</i>
Creative experiment	Knowledge of the strategies/processes involved in exploring textual possibilities	<i>It's giving yourself the time to explore and to play, to find out the things you really want to write about</i>
Drafting	Knowledge of the strategies/processes involved in generating text	<i>I think it's the discipline of doing it ... the act of turning up that is quite important to this process</i>
Preparing to write	Knowledge of the strategies/processes involved in preparing or planning to write	<i>Sometimes you plan it and it works really well. Other times ... you have to find another way into the story</i>
Reviewing	Knowledge of the strategies/processes involved in evaluating text	<i>It's about ... being quite rigorous about what works and what doesn't</i>
Drafting	Knowledge of the strategies/processes involved in generating text	<i>I think it's the discipline of doing it ... the act of turning up that is quite important to this process</i>

4.1 The writing process

Analysis of writers' comments about writing process resulted in the clustering of references in six sub-codes, defined as shown in Table 4. What is most evident here is the writers' knowledge of how they manage the writing process, and the strategies which work best for them.

Of these, knowing about strategies concerned with generating material or plans for writing (Creative experiment, Preparing to write) or with improving text produced (Reviewing, Revision) were more often discussed than the drafting process itself, as shown in Table 5.

Eight writers identified strategies they employed when **Preparing to write**. Preparatory activities ranged from 'day dreaming', 'walking around noticing', 'gathering ideas' in a notebook and 'freewriting' to more formal research and planning – plotting a 'skeleton structure in huge detail', sketching out 'key scenes', creating 'grids and matrices'. These processes not only varied from writer to writer but also from task to task: 'the

Table 5. Distribution of the references across the data sources.

Main code	Sub-codes	Number of writers	Number and Source of References			
			Interviews	Tutorials	Reflections	All
Writing process	Revision	9	37	15	16	68
	Writing process as a whole	9	28	11	13	52
	Creative experiment	6	21	13	10	44
	Preparing to write	8	30	3	7	40
	Reviewing	8	27	4	4	35
	Drafting	9	20	7	6	33
	Totals		163	53	56	272

process does really differ from book to book. Several writers mentioned an incubation phase: once you have an idea you let it ‘*sit in your mind a little bit*’, ‘*you gnaw away at it; it festers a bit before (you) start putting it on paper*’.

Creative experiment was identified by six writers as an important means of generating ideas for writing. They stressed the role of writing that is exploratory and consequence-free, ‘*where you are just trying to see what comes out*’. They argued that writers need to ‘*play with language*’ – ‘*that process of pure experimentation and risk-taking*’ – in order to find what they want to say: ‘*you’re kind of fishing (but) you don’t know what you’re going to catch*’. By contrast, **Drafting** was described by all writers as a more ‘*routine*’ and disciplined process, one which could be ‘*damn hard work*’ and required ‘*persistence*’: ‘*you cannot walk away from it . . . you just have to sit there till you’ve done your 1000 words*’. Some writers set themselves daily targets, wrote at particular times of day or for set periods whilst others wrote more sporadically, but all stressed the necessity of ‘*making an appointment with yourself, turning up and doing it*’. They also agreed that initial drafts were frequently a ‘*splurge*’ or ‘*rush of first thoughts*’. It was necessary to switch off your ‘*inner editor*’, ‘*lower (your) standards*’ and not worry that first attempts were often ‘*rubbish*’, ‘*abysmal*’, ‘*an unholy mess*’.

Writers described **reviewing** as the process by which they interrogate their texts from the perspective of readers in order to decide what works and what doesn’t work, rereading ‘*dispassionately*’, ‘*as somebody else would read it*’. The need to be ‘*100% brutally honest and truthful*’, meant that writers often had to put some ‘*distance*’ between initial drafting and evaluation. They built in time to ‘*survey the wreckage*’ themselves but also identified the social nature of reviewing and the significant role of critical feedback; at the same time, it was stressed that authors need to retain ownership of the decision-making and stay true to their intentions.

Revision was the most frequently mentioned sub-theme in all three datasets, accounting for a quarter of all comments about writing process. There was consensus that ‘*none of us as professional writers would expect to get it right first time*’, and ‘*if you want to be a writer you have to edit*’. A distinction was drawn between the ‘*exciting*’ process of revising to shape and improve text – a multi-level process ‘*as energetic as the first draft*’ – and the more superficial task of proofreading. Revising most often involved ‘*surgery*’, a ‘*ruthless*’ cutting ‘*through the flab*’ to ‘*find the story*’ or uncover ‘*the statue in the stone*’, but it also entailed ‘*expanding*’, ‘*restructuring*’, ‘*reworking*’ and ‘*rewriting, almost sentence by sentence*’.

All writers agreed that **Writing process as a whole** was rarely ‘*a linear thing*’ but a more ‘*messy*’ and ‘*complex*’ recursive cycle: ‘*writers don’t go from A to B or A to X*’, ‘*it’s a circular thing*’. There was also no one way of doing it: ‘*you’d rarely find two who do it the*

same way'; 'sometimes one (way) works, sometimes another'. Getting 'from the first draft . . . to that thing that you're happy with' was time-consuming and often frustrating, a 'struggle' and 'hard slog'.

4.2 Knowledge of Language Choices

Language choice as an element of craft knowledge formed a substantial thematic category, with 11 sub-codes (see Table 6).

Table 6. Language choices sub-codes and definitions.

Sub-code	Definition	Example
General comments	General references to language choices	<i>Some students . . . don't appear to understand the rhythm of language or what makes a well-turned sentence</i>
Word choice	Knowledge about the power of word choice	<i>I explained what a shroud was . . . if you were describing snow as a shroud, what atmosphere would it create?</i>
Being concise	Knowledge about the importance of clarity, and avoiding redundancy	<i>How can I make that clearer and how can I make that more specific and how can I say more by saying less.</i>
Detail	Knowledge about the significance of detail and precision in description	<i>. . . the importance of specificity. So rather than just saying the house, let us see what the house is, give us a certain particular description of a certain thing that helps them see that it's not just any old house for instance</i>
Sentence structure	Knowledge about the structure and syntax of sentences	<i>Our job is to, you know, structurally, technically work with them on, 'Actually that sentence would be better like this'</i>
Technical aspects	Knowledge about accuracy in spelling and punctuation	<i>Two 'p's' in Tupperware</i>
Avoiding cliché	Knowledge about phrases that sound 'a bit romantic' or 'clichéd'	<i>That is a bit clichéd compared with the rest of it</i>
Rhythm	Knowledge about the sound of language and strength or consistency of rhythm	<i>It's got a very kind of strong sense of rhythm. You probably felt it when I was reading it. You know that whole 'the elders knew a time when springtime blossomed and the world sprang into life' has got a lovely kind of rhythm to it</i>
Tense	Knowledge about tense choice	<i>They're thinking about tense . . . they're playing with that idea of I want to do something in present tense maybe</i>
Repetition	Knowledge about the value of repetition and its use for structural purposes	
Rhyme	Knowledge about the negative effect of rhyme, but also the value of internal rhyme	<i>If the rhyme begins to take over then you lose something . . . You've got a little rhyme in there 'clanging and jangling,' so you've got that kind of very lyrical sense of language</i>

Table 7. Distribution of references across sub-codes and data sources.

Main code	Sub-codes	Number of writers	Number and Source of References			
			Interviews	Tutorials	Reflections	All
LANGUAGE CHOICES	General comments	2	2	9		11
	Word choice	6	8	35	7	50
	Being concise	5	6	22	6	34
	Detail	6	5	14	9	28
	Sentence structure	6	9	9	2	20
	Technical aspects	3	1	9		10
	Avoiding cliché	2	1	6		7
	Rhythm	2	1	5		6
	Tense	2	1	3	1	5
	Repetition	3	1	3	1	5
	Rhyme	3		3	1	4
	Totals		35	118	27	180

The frequencies in Table 7 are illuminating. It was in the professional writers' tutorial conversations with teachers about their writing where they revealed most strongly their knowledge of language choices in shaping text, because the attention is directed towards text. Of course, the numbers are indicative, rather than normative: a category like word choice is potentially applicable to every word in a text, whereas one might talk about tense or repetition just once or twice in reference to a piece of writing. However, the same cluster of 4 sub-codes (word choice; being concise; detail; sentence structure) are most frequently discussed across data sources, suggesting some commonality of importance.

A small cluster of responses were **general comments** about the significance of language choices, such as observing that *'the importance of the word, how line endings improve the work and that kind of thing'*, or making approbatory comments, such as *'I love 'splashing a giggle''*, without any specific explanation of why.

A large number of comments related to **word choice**, particularly in the tutorials. Sometimes this was drawing attention to the way that a choice is not arbitrary but deliberate to create a particular effect. One writer recalled a workshop with children who did not see that it mattered which type of bird was named in a story, but *'we talked a bit about the difference between a sparrow, a crow and you know and that it does matter'*. At other times, attention was drawn to word choices the professional writer did not think effective: for example, one writer commented that *'I think "yowling" perhaps feels a little too cartoon . . . there's something about the ending that needs kind of a more of a gravitas perhaps'*.

Particularly in the tutorials, the professional writers referred to **being concise**, stripping away unnecessary information, and getting to the point more quickly. One writer encouraged the teacher to think about *'how can I make that clearer and how can I make that more specific and how can I say more by saying less'*. The same writer advised another teacher *'to cut through that kind of flab . . . get it out the way because what you need to do is find the story'*. A cluster of responses across the data sources were concerned with over-elaborating noun phrases with adjectives, accompanied by a view that in school, children are taught to use *'lots and lots of adjectives and really to kind of pad it out'*.

In contrast, but not in contradiction, another sub-code indicated the importance of **detail**, addressing specificity and precision in description, *'simple things like telling them to put the names of streets in and the names of people in'* or using *'specific descriptions . . . that are really anchoring in reality'*. The detail was often to create a strong sense of place, or character, or to help the reader visualise a very particular scene, as when one writer asked *'whether there are particulars that you can put in that make it so that you can see a particular person'*.

An equal number of comments about **sentence structure** were made in interviews and tutorials. In the interviews, the emphasis was on principles or beliefs about sentences, including advocacy of particular kinds of sentences such as *'inverted sentences'*. One writer felt that students, including MA students *'still needed very strong grounding and grammar and the shape of a sentence and the feel of a sentence'* and the appreciation of *'the beauty of a well-turned sentence'*. In the tutorials, the discussion was about particular sentences the teacher had written and guidance on how to change it. Three of the nine comments in tutorials were about punctuation: the position of full stops and the choice of colons and semi-colons.

This also included critique of the national assessments of writing at age 11, where professional writers felt children were encouraged to simply put in certain kinds of punctuation, rather than to use them purposefully.

Two sub-codes characteristic of the tutorials were **avoiding cliché** and **technical aspects**. Professional writers picked up on clichés in the teachers' writing such as 'precious moments' or 'gone forever' and encouraged them to push for greater originality. The technical aspects related to accuracy – with spelling errors and sentence boundaries corrected, and recommendations made regarding punctuation decisions. A set of sub-codes represented by a fairly small number of comments were **rhyme**, **rhythm**, **tense** and **repetition**. The emphasis here was on the sound of language – the 'lyric quality' of structured repetition or internal rhyme, for example, but also the 'panto' effect of 'forced' rhyme scheme that 'take over'.

4.3. Knowledge of text level choices

A significant cluster of comments were made by professional writers revealing their knowledge about text structure (See Table 8). The preponderance of comments referring to narrative is likely to be due to the fact that narrative was the focus of the teaching unit.

Table 9 indicates the distribution of the references across the data sources.

Comments on **narrative structure** focused principally upon knowledge of the structural elements of a story. Writers commented on how at the heart of a story is often 'some kind of problem', 'conflict', 'obstacle', 'disruption of the status quo', 'quest' or 'journey' with 'people wanting to do something, or to get something, or to find something, or to stop something'. Stories should start with 'a really compelling scene', a 'moment of action'; the middle is 'where the real working out comes' and the ending should bring 'resolution' or 'pay off'. Writers stressed the need to maintain the 'line of a story' and avoid over-complicating or 'dotting about' chronologically. However, writers also noted that common school structures, such as story mountains, can be formulaic Table 10 .

Table 8. Textual choices sub-codes and definitions.

Sub-code	Definition	Example
General comments	General references to narrative and story	<i>Sense of story and meta language of story</i>
Narrative structure	Knowledge about the narrative elements that support good story structure	<i>You've got the main elements ... the character, the main character, the setting and the ending</i>
Characterisation	Knowledge about the techniques used to develop character	<i>Show your reader what this person like ... adding layers, adding details and just fleshing the character out</i>
Viewpoint	Knowledge about the importance of viewpoint as the 'filter' through which a reader experiences events	<i>She got us writing from the point of view of an animal, and that was incredibly liberating</i>
Show not tell	Knowledge about the importance of revealing information through portrayal rather than direct explanation	<i>Instead of telling us about the fear, show us what the fear feels like and how it works</i>
Dialogue and tone	Knowledge about the role of dialogue and tone in narrative and poetry	<i>Dialogue can really bring a piece alive</i>
Poetic structure	Knowledge about the techniques which help to structure a poem	<i>The structure might be internal rhyme, you know, or assonance</i>

Table 9. Distribution of the references across the data sources.

Main code	Sub-codes	Number of writers	Number and Source of References			
			Interviews	Tutorials	Reflections	All
TEXT-LEVEL CHOICES	General comments	2		1	1	2
	Narrative structure	8	13	19	13	45
	Characterisation	7	4	14	12	30
	Viewpoint	7	6	17	9	32
	Show not tell	5	8	20	3	31
	Dialogue and tone	3	3	8	2	13
	Poetic structure	3		9	3	12
	Totals		34	88	43	165

Table 10. Being an author sub-codes and definitions.

Sub-code	Definition	Example
Drawing on experience	Knowledge that writing leans on or builds from experience	<i>It starts as something in my life that's real and important to me</i>
Authorial intention	Knowledge that writers should start with having or finding something to say	<i>You need to know whether you're going to build a shed or a cathedral before you start</i>
Emotional connection	Knowledge that writing is emotive	<i>Not just thinking about story as a technical thing ... it's an emotional thing</i>
Authentic voice	Knowledge that writers have their own style/ footprint	<i>Just allowing them to use their own voice and be authentic</i>
Drawing on reading	Knowledge that writing is shaped by reading	<i>The best way to learn how to write is to read other people and see what they're doing</i>
Ownership	Knowledge that writer have rights over their writing	<i>Do whatever you like because that's your book, it's your writing</i>

Table 11. The distribution of references across sub-codes and data sources.

Main code	Sub-codes	Number of writers	Number and Source of References			
			Interviews	Tutorials	Reflections	All
Being an Author	General comments	1	1			1
	Drawing on experience	9	26	7	10	43
	Authorial Intention	9	21	6	2	29
	Emotional Connection	8	13	3	7	23
	Authentic voice	7	13	5		18
	Drawing on reading	6	10	5	1	16
	Ownership	3	5		5	10
		Totals		89	26	25

Table 12. Reader–writer relationship sub-codes and definitions.

Sub-code	Definition	Example
General comments	General references to considering the reader	<i>Think[ing] about your reader</i>
Helping the reader understand	Knowledge of how to ensure the reader is able to follow the text	<i>It's always about taking the simple way of getting to your reader</i>
Engaging the reader	Knowledge of how to involve the reader and keeping them in the moment	<i>Make the reader feel like they're there</i>
Affecting the reader	Knowledge of how to influence readers' feelings	<i>What is it you want your reader to feel when they close the book?</i>
Reader-writer interaction	Knowledge about the collaboration between reader and writer	<i>The reader is as much a part of your piece of writing as you, the writer</i>

Table 13. The distribution of references across sub-codes and data sources.

Main code	Sub-codes	Number of writers	Number and Source of References			
			Interviews	Tutorials	Reflections	All
Reader-writer relationship	General Comments	5	4	3		7
	Helping the reader understand	6	5	14	1	20
	Engaging the reader	4	1	9	4	14
	Affecting the reader	4	4	2	4	10
	Reader-writer interaction	3	2		1	3
	Totals		16	16	28	10

In terms of **characterisation**, writers emphasised the importance of knowing your characters well – their backstories, motivations and problems. They discussed ways of revealing character indirectly for example, through their possessions or dialogue rather than description, and the need to sustain *‘that element of conflict’*, raise *‘the emotional stakes’* and avoid keeping characters safe or passive. The writers also talked about **viewpoint** as the *‘filter’* through which a reader experiences events, and how, through viewpoint, writers need to *‘inhabit’* the perspective/s of characters and find their distinctive voice. They commented on the implications of different narrative perspectives – *‘first person where you are that person, or third person limited where you’re just staying on that person’s shoulder’*, *‘dual narrative’* or third person omniscient narrator where *‘you can take that camera to someone else if your main character isn’t in that scene’* Table 11.

Although **show not tell** is a commonly used mantra in school, the writers showed clear knowledge of what it meant in practice. They gave a strong message that writers should avoid stepping in to tell readers how to feel or explain what is already apparent from the context or imagery. Instead, *‘coming at things indirectly’* is more effective – showing characters through their actions or possessions, letting readers listen in to dialogue and watch events unfold. When revising, they recommended cutting out words that state what is already obvious Table 12.

An understanding of the narrative purposes of **dialogue and tone** was evident. Writers spoke of how interaction and dialogue can *‘bring a piece alive’*, allowing the reader to *‘hear’* characters, and of the importance of finding the rhythm and tone of characters’ voices. Linked to the idea of show, not tell, the writers argued for letting the context show how things are said, rather than relying on speech tags and adverbs. In part, this relates to the practice in primary school of asking children to use a range of reporting verbs, other than ‘said’, whereas the writers were aware of the advantage of the invisibility of ‘said’ Table 13.

The comments on **poetic structure** related to the variety of ways to create structure, such as *‘bookmarking’* the start and end of a poem; using repetition as a structural pattern; and the deliberative use of line endings, stanza breaks and last lines.

4.4 Being an author

The theme, *Being an Author*, foregrounded attention to aspects of writing which related to characteristics of authorship, often positioned in contrast to experiences of school writing as being mere production of text.

Drawing on experience was the most frequently mentioned sub-theme of being an author. There was consensus that convincing writing (and fiction) is rooted in personal experience, albeit often used imaginatively, such that '*ordinary everyday experiences*' are fictionalised in order to evoke stronger, '*more truthful*' accounts. Whilst acknowledging that writing about '*what you know, it makes you vulnerable*', it was clear that intensely remembered, often emotionally charged events were used as imaginative springboards. Connections to keeping a notebook as a life writing resource were commonly made.

Authorial intention was also mentioned by all writers. Unanimously, writing was seen as starting with something to say '*that is important to you*' or through '*discovering what you want to build*'. This involved '*taking risks and not being scared*'. '*Writing for yourself*' was foregrounded, ideally '*without compromise*'. Clarity about what they wanted to achieve or convey in writing was noted by several writers in advance of selecting an appropriate form, audience or language. One writer mentioned '*an absolute compulsion*' to tell a particular story.

The significance of making **emotional connections** was noted by eight writers. Closely aligned to drawing on experience, this was linked to the '*therapeutic side*' of writing. It involved for some turning often '*raw*', '*difficult*', '*incredibly painful*' material into finished works that fictionalised events, reducing the trauma associated with them and making sense of the experience. Even when work is '*made up and all in your head*' it was acknowledged that writers feel '*emotional attachment*' to their work. Emotional connections, some writers posited, give writing '*power*' and '*narrative truth*'.

Using an **authentic voice** in writing was noted by seven writers who considered each author has '*their own voice*' – a '*way of expressing themselves*'. Voice was described as initially an imitative process in which you '*write like your favourite authors*' in order '*to develop your own style*', although others perceived imitation as less fruitful. Many writers commented on trusting this '*voice inside*', this '*extension of the spoken*'. Several perceived voice as essential to create '*truthful work*' that was '*honest without being confessional*' and '*not necessarily divorced*' from self.

Drawing on reading was noted by six writers. They recognised reading as a shaping influence on writing, reflected upon others' work and '*sort of emulate[d]*' their '*nuances of language and rhythm*'. Several consciously used their reading to '*borrow techniques . . . without plagiarising*'. This attention to reading as a '*writer rather than just as a reader*' underscores the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing.

Ownership of writing, linked closely to authorial intention, was mentioned by three writers. They noted retaining their '*integrity*' by taking '*charge of their own destiny as writers*', asserting that whilst feedback can be helpful and negotiation necessary, writers should come to '*their own conclusions about it so that, regardless of the outcome, it is theirs*'.

4.5. Reader–writer relationship

The *Reader–Writer Relationship* theme captured writers’ comments of the ways in which writing requires knowledge of how to establish a relationship with an implied reader.

The **reader–writer relationship** was noted most frequently in responding to teachers’ drafts in tutorials. Five writers commented generally on this relationship: on writing for different audiences and considering what their readers need to know. One observed ‘*usually as an author you end up needing to know far more than the reader does*’.

Strategies employed to **help the reader understand** were referred to by six writers who perceived they needed to communicate clearly: ‘*if we overwrite something it’s a bit like misting up the glass*’. Others noted consciously ‘*recreating*’ experience for absent readers and that readers need ‘*reassurance and handholding at the beginning to ensure they ‘keep hold of the thread of the story*’. The notion of **engaging the reader** was commented upon by four writers who identified different strategies to ‘*suck the reader in*’ including: making ‘*the stakes as high as possible*’, evoking ‘*the sensation of being in a place*’, getting quickly to the ‘*nub of the story*’ and withholding information. As one writer noted ‘*it doesn’t matter if the reader doesn’t know what’s going on*’ as long as they are ‘*interested and wanting to find out*’.

Four writers commented on strategies to ‘*impact on someone else*’, thus **affecting the reader**. One highlighted the power of ‘*playing with words*’ and ‘*seeing how you can affect ... your reader in a way that might be totally unexpected*’. Others commented upon concealing information in order to ‘*make them do a bit of the work*’ and seeking to unsettle readers. With regard to **reader–writer interaction** three writers commented upon a ‘*contract*’ or ‘*partnership*’ and making sure ‘*the reader trusts the account that’s being told*’. All three stressed the need to ‘*leave spaces in writing for readers*’ to bring their own interpretations.

The five themes presented here represent an insight into how these professional writers conceptualise the craft of writing as expressed through interviews, through their tutorial work with teachers at the residential, and through their post lesson reflections on the co-teaching of writing. The three different data sources help to strengthen the validity of the themes, drawing as they do on reported views through interviews, direct guidance to teachers during tutorials, and contextualised reflections based on a specific teaching experience. Nonetheless, the fact that the writing in both the residential and the teaching in school focused on narrative may mean there are themes or sub-themes which might arise were the written genre different.

5. Discussion

The research question informing this paper was to consider ‘what might constitute subject content knowledge for the teaching of writing?’ The professional writers’ capacity to talk in some detail about the craft of writing, evidenced here, offers a helpful way to think more precisely about teacher subject knowledge for writing in terms of ‘craft knowledge’ for writing. The five themes generated from the data can be categorised as craft knowledge which is **text-oriented**: *Reader-writer Relationship*; *Language Choices* and *Text-Level Choices*; and as **writer-oriented**: the *Writing Process* and *Being an Author*. This distinction offers a new way to conceptualise teachers’ craft knowledge as it is

a reminder that teaching writing is not simply about the written text, but also about teaching writers. In the currently performative agenda so prevalent in Western countries, where high value is placed on testing, grades and statistics a focus on writing, not writers, predominates (Cremin and Myhill, 2012; Hardy 2015). Assessment frameworks such as Key Stage 1 and 2 National Tests in England and the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in Australia have unintended consequences, prompting teachers to prioritise the written product, and pay less attention to the process, to young writers' attitudes to writing and their sense of identity as authors.

As a writer-oriented theme, the *Writing Process* highlights writers' knowledge of the 'slow' and 'cyclical' nature of composition as a process none 'would expect to get right first time'. The professional writers know a range of strategies for generating ideas, evaluating and redrafting which they draw on to solve problems and to manage the inherently 'messy' process of text development. In line with established cognitive models (Hayes & Flower, 1980), all described writing as a recursive act in which sub-processes interact rather than proceed in order. However, as several observed, 'there is a disjunct between [writing as process] and some of the expectation in school'. Including knowledge of the writing process as part of craft knowledge for teaching writing may encourage a re-thinking of common classroom routines, which frequently adopt a routinised, linear sequence of plan-draft-revise (Czerniewska 1992, 84), a strategy writers explicitly opposed: '*that isn't the way it works*'. Research has shown that whilst linear approaches serve to close down opportunities for exploration and reconceptualisation, recursive approaches facilitate creative interpretations and improved text quality (Carey & Flower 1980). This shared understanding of effective process signals the need for more flexible classroom models, with increased attention to 'the principle of experimentation' and 're-writing ... as energetic as the first draft'. Similarly, the writers attached greater significance to revision than to planning, defining revision as a formative, multi-level activity which addressed authorial intention, reader response and text quality. This is in contrast to children's experience of revising as predominantly a final, text-focused task. Stronger craft knowledge of the formative functions of critical feedback and revision might lead to a shift in teaching emphasis from *what* writers produce to *how* writers write. Linked to this, including knowledge of the Writing Process as part of the craft knowledge for writing would generate possibilities for more overt attention to metacognition and self-regulation, including metacognitive understanding of oneself as a writer (Harris, Santangelo, and Graham 2010), and stronger self-regulation of the writing process (McKeown et al. 2016).

The second writer-oriented theme of *Being an Author* foregrounds the significance of knowledge about how authorial agency and identity might be fostered. The writers were aware that they drew upon lived experience in order to compose, and often borrowed from and fictionalised highly emotive events. They commonly reported mining memories and some consciously borrowed from others' work, utilising notebooks to capture both life and literature as possible resources for later writing. Authorial intention was recognised as a critical shaping force that supported the development of an authentic voice and enabled some to take 'charge of their own destiny as writers'. The knowledge and understanding of being an author reflected here is unequivocally person focused in nature, shaped by their identities as writers, their writerly purposes and life experience. This contrasts

markedly with the experience of children in school where an explicit text focus prevails, such that frequently children are positioned as text producers, not as young writers. With an emphasis in classrooms on the production of text genres, drawing on life is often confined to units on autobiography, and whilst literature may be analysed and imitated, writers' notebooks are rarely used. Yet research indicates young writers' identities matter (Collier, 2010; Cremin 2020; Cremin and Myhill, 2012; Ryan and Barton, 2014) and there is value in children being positioned as authors enabled to exert their authorial agency.

Two of the text-oriented themes, *Language Choices* and *Text-level Choices*, are overtly related to the attention to the shaping and crafting of text. What is salient here, however, is writers' knowledge of the subtle relationships between the choices they make and the meanings they create – in other words, they show awareness of 'the effects of different choices on the rhetorical power of their writing' (Lefstein 2009, 382). The writers critiqued what they felt were unhelpful pedagogic practices (in the UK context), whereby young writers were taught to put certain things into their texts, such as adding more adjectives, using certain kinds of punctuation marks, and over-using reporting verbs. These practices and the emphasis on 'deploying' grammatical features have also been observed in other research studies internationally (Bell and Hardman 2018; Myhill and Newman 2016). The writers also demonstrated specific craft knowledge relevant to writing narrative, such as how to create characters, how to use dialogue, and the possibilities offered by different narrative viewpoints. This knowledge moves beyond the linguistic features of a genre to a more sophisticated understanding of the repertoire of choices available. Developing teachers' craft knowledge of the relationship between language and text-level choices and meaning, as well as expanding their knowledge of specific aspects of genres (such as characterisation) might empower teachers and the young writers they teach to move from the production of rather formulaic texts, compliant to checklists of features to be included (Barrs 2019), to more agentic and writerly decision-making about texts. The third text-oriented theme, the *Reader-Writer Relationship*, focuses on the ways in which writers need to adapt their texts, mindful of the needs of their readers. Knowledge of how to manage this relationship with the reader is an important aspect of de-centring from writer-based prose to more reader-based prose (Flower 1979; Perera 1984), and thus a relevant aspect of craft knowledge for writing. In supporting young writers attend to their readers, teachers will be re-asserting the significance of audience and the children's agency as authors.

6. Conclusion

This paper, drawing on a detailed analysis of professional writers' comments on writing, proposes a new way to think about subject content knowledge for the teaching of writing. Given the dearth of research which has addressed this aspect of subject content knowledge, and the evidence of professional writers' knowledge of the craft of writing, we offer a way forward by conceptualising subject content knowledge for writing as craft knowledge composed of five themes: the Writing Process; Being an Author; Text-level Choices; Language Choices; and the Reader–

Writer Relationship. Further, we suggest that this represents a way of thinking about subject knowledge for writing as being both text-oriented *and* writer-oriented. Professional understanding of subject content knowledge influences practice, and, as a recent systematic review of teachers as writers' highlights, there is value in pre-service and in-service programmes developing teachers' conceptions of writing and sense of self as writers (Cremin and Oliver, 2016). A wider recognition and knowledge of the dual orientations of this craft knowledge for writing could support teachers in making the nature of writing and their position as decision makers more visible to young writers.

At the same time, we recognise the exploratory nature of this study, and that this is a first step in developing a conceptual framework for teacher subject knowledge for writing. In particular, there is a need to expand the number and type of professional writers who form the evidence base, and to widen the genres addressed beyond fictional narrative to include, for example, genres typically thought of as 'creative', such as poetry, and other genres, such as argument, or explanation texts. We are therefore cautious in the strength of claims we make. Nonetheless, the study advances thinking about what might constitute teacher subject knowledge for writing, re-positioning subject knowledge as knowledge of the craft, rather than a body of discrete knowledge, and proposing a tentative framework through which to conceptualise this craft knowledge.

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