

## **Teachers as writers: Learning together with others**

### **Abstract**

In the context of renewed interest in teachers' identities as writers and the writers as artist-educators, this paper reports upon the findings of 'Teachers as Writers' (2015-2017). A collaborative partnership between two universities and a creative writing foundation, the study sought to determine the impact of writers' engagement with teachers on changing teachers' classroom practices in the teaching of writing and, as a consequence, in improving outcomes for students. The project afforded opportunities for writers and teachers to work together as learners in order to improve student outcomes. The study involved two complementary data sets: a qualitative dataset of observations, interviews, audio capture (of workshops, tutorials and co-mentoring reflections) and audio-diaries from 16 teachers; and a randomised controlled trial (RCT) involving 32 primary and secondary classes. The findings reveal that the teachers' identities and assurance as writers shifted significantly. The Arvon experience also led to pedagogic shifts which the students reported impacted positively upon their motivation, confidence, and sense of ownership and skills as writers. However, these salient dispositional shifts did not impact upon the young people's attainment. The professional writers gained new understandings which substantially altered their conceptions of writers' potential contribution in schools.

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

There is a longstanding view that teachers of writing need to write themselves to more confidently support children in learning to write and to create classrooms as writing communities. Notions of knowledge and expertise underpin all teaching, this is reflected in the body of research on pedagogical subject knowledge (e.g. Schulman 1987), and research on personal epistemologies and epistemic cognition (e.g. Brownlee et al., 2011; Chinn et al., 2011). Teachers of mathematics can do Maths; teachers of Physical Education are competent sports people; and teachers of French speak French. However, the way our Higher Education system structures disciplinary knowledge means that teachers of English are more likely to have taken A-level English Literature and a degree in English Literature than any programmes which address language or creative writing (Shortis and Blake, 2010), and are more likely to see themselves as readers than writers (Gannon and Davies, 2007). As a consequence, we may have a cadre of professionals teaching English or literacy who are highly-qualified and enthusiastic experts in reading and the analysis of literary texts, but not necessarily confident and knowledgeable producers of written text.

Voices arguing for the importance of teachers as writers emanate most powerfully from educationalists in the 70s and 80s, particularly in the United States and linked to the National Writing Project (NWP). Prominent amongst these were Murray (1982), Graves (1983) and Emig (1983) who all attested to the learning benefits possible for children when their teachers are writers. Atwell argued that teachers needed to 'get inside writing' (1991:28) to understand the process of, and motivations for writing, so they could then draw on that knowledge in the classroom. In England, more recent voices from beyond the classroom have echoed these sentiments. The inspectorate, drawing on their observations of classroom practice maintained that 'teachers who are

confident as writers themselves and were able to demonstrate the compositional process taught it effectively' (Ofsted, 2009:5), and Arts Council England recommended that 'training is provided where teachers themselves write; this is one of the most effective ways of improving understanding of the teaching of writing' (Horner, 2010: 6).

However, the arguments for the educational benefits of teachers being writers are based heavily on advocacy rhetoric and anecdote, and rigorous empirical evidence of consequential student learning success is scant (Cremin and Oliver, 2016). The 'Teachers as Writers' (TAW) project (2015-2017) was a collaborative partnership project between two universities and a creative writing foundation, which set out to address this lacuna and to determine the impact of writers' engagement with teachers in changing teachers' classroom practices in the teaching of writing and in improving outcomes for students.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The study was interdisciplinary in nature and drew on both sociocultural understandings of writing as a social act within communities of practice (Cremin and Myhill, 2011) and psychological representations of writing as recursively cycling between planning, text production and reviewing (Alamargot and Chanquoy, 2001). It also drew upon a systematic review of research into teachers as writers and research literatures related to professional writers and students' identities as writers. The review was undertaken prior to the project with a view to carefully interrogating the available evidence (1990-2015) in order to inform policy and practice and identify gaps in the field (Cremin and Oliver, 2016). As Andrews notes, the comprehensive international scope of systematic reviews, as well as their transparent and replicable nature and the involvement of more than one researcher reduce the potential for bias enabling gaps 'to be more reliably identified in comparison to the rhetorical gaps identified in non-systematic literature reviews' (2005:405). The review sought to establish evidence on teachers' attitudes to writing, their identities as writers and the potential impact of teacher writing on pedagogy and students' written outcomes. The methodology was fourfold:

- Stage 1: five educational databases were searched using keywords, locating 438 papers;
- Stage 2: 159 of these were identified (after initial screening) for closer scrutiny and 43 found to address teachers' writing identities and practices;
- Stage 3: Inclusion/exclusion criteria were applied;
- Stage 4: Analysis and synthesis of the 22 included papers was undertaken.

Drawing on these 22 papers, the review revealed that student teachers and practising teachers tend to have negative attitudes to writing, lack confidence as writers, and adopt narrow conceptions of writing and writers which are historically framed, focused on print-based texts and related to authors of narrative/expressive genres. ~~This is~~ These limitations are likely to impact negatively on teachers' self-identification as writers. Teachers' identities as writers are also influenced by experiences at school, with secondary practitioners contributing more often than primary phase colleagues to the construction of largely negative writing histories (e.g. Daisey, 2009). Little evidence was found of the pedagogical consequences of teachers' identities, particularly with reference to student writing outcomes. In one large scale study, there were indications that the interaction between teachers with extensive writing lives and their involvement in the US NWP may impact positively on students' writing achievement (Whyte et al., 2007). But the data cannot reveal as the

authors acknowledge, whether NWP affiliation prompts, or is prompted by, teachers' personal writing practices.

Of particular interest to the TAW project was that some studies, including more recent ones, indicate that teachers who are aware of their writing identities reflect upon and share the complexities and challenges involved, and that this increases their capacity for responding flexibly to policy demands and limited skill-based models (see Cremin and Locke, 2017; Woodard, 2017). Additionally, and significantly, the review indicates that teacher education and professional development opportunities (both pre and in-service training programmes) have the potential to influence teachers' conceptions of writing and sense of self as writers (e.g. Dix and Cawkwell 2011; Gardener 2014; Whitney, 2008). Extended opportunities to write within a community of writers and reflect upon the processes involved can impact upon both teachers' self-confidence as writers and their approaches to teaching writing (Cremin and Oliver, 2016). Just such opportunities were offered teachers within the TAW project.

In comparison with the wealth of studies focused on teachers as writers, there is very little research which focuses on professional writers working in schools. A plethora of reflective texts written by professional writers attest to their identities and practices as writers, (e.g. Le Guin, 2015; the *Paris Review*), but few offer recommendations for teachers or young writers at school. The tendency to frame creative writing and creative writers as poets, novelists and playwrights persists in this research area also. Unusually though one recent study sought to widen this brief by examining a range of writers' identities; encompassing those from academia and journalism in addition to 'creative writers' (Cremin, Lillis, Myhill and Eyres, 2017). This set of 12 in-depth interviews revealed that the writers' evolving identities had been significantly influenced by their engagement as readers and by formal education. All had been keen readers and all but two, (both science academics), recognised connections between their early reading and their later /current writing. Drawing on life experience was also acknowledged as significant. The writers' memories of schooling indicated constraints and challenges, but, motivated in part by a desire to create fictional worlds (through drawing, play and writing), each of them had persisted. Although an ACE report highlighted that professional writers need support in making their implicit knowledge about writing explicit (Horner, 2010), a central tenet of the TaW project was that their knowledge and experience of writing has the potential to inform our understanding of being a writer and enhance the teaching and learning of writing.

Finally, recognising the role that literacy plays in young people's identity construction, the research also drew on studies of young writers. These indicate for example that children's writing identities are formed and shaped by their interactions with peers, and those at home and school (Collier, 2017; Chamberlain, 2019). Furthermore, national surveys in England repeatedly indicate that young people's attitudes to writing are predominantly negative (Clark and Douglas, 2011), that more boys than girls express such views and lack confidence as writers (Clark, 2016) and that reshaping young people's negative self-definitions as a writer represents a very significant challenge (Gardner, 2018). Studies in several countries indicate the constraining influence of accountability cultures where the prescribed curriculum is interpreted literally, and few opportunities are offered for young writers to explore writing as an act of self-definition, in the US (Dutro et al., 2013), the UK (Burke, 2011) and Australia (Fawley and McLean Davies, 2015). More optimistically, research reveals the benefit to young writers of understanding and being able to manage the writing process strategically (Myhill,

2009). This metacognitive skill, the research team perceived, might be easier to develop if teachers' own professional knowledge and practice was enhanced.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The TaW project took as its starting point the writing residential course for teachers which has been run by Arvon ([www.arvon.org](http://www.arvon.org)) for many years. This residential course gives teachers the opportunity to be tutored by professional writers at one of Arvon's three centres. It sets out to build teachers' confidence as writers themselves, with the hope that this will also change their pedagogic writing practice in school. The residential itself builds a community of writers, with communal writing workshops, one-to-one tutorials with professional writers, space and time for individual writing, and sharing and celebrating each other's writing. For this project, there was also an additional experience of co-mentoring where each teacher worked collaboratively with a professional writer (post Arvon), both outside and then inside the classroom; sharing the planning, teaching and reflection upon teaching.

The research was a response to an Arts Council England call for more evidence-based research into the impact of arts work on education. Accordingly, it was a mixed methods study, combining a RCT to provide rigorous empirical evidence of impact on student outcomes in writing, with a complementary qualitative dataset of observations and interviews. The latter provided rich data to help us evaluate and understand the impact of an Arvon TAW residential experience, and subsequent working with professional writers, on teachers' classroom practices. Five research questions were devised which set out to explore different aspects of the Teachers as Writers residential experience:

1. What impact does writers' engagement with teachers have on teachers' identities as writers?
2. What impact does writers' engagement with teachers have on teachers' pedagogic practices in the teaching of writing?
3. What impact does writers' engagement with teachers have on student outcomes in the teachers' classes?
4. What impact does writers' engagement with teachers have on teachers' efficacy in supporting students to develop motivation, confidence and writing skills?
5. What impact does writers' engagement with teachers have on writers' own effectiveness in supporting teachers and young people to develop their motivation, confidence and writing skills?

#### **3.1 The Sample**

The study involved 32 class teachers and their students in 26 schools in South-West England. The sample was balanced at recruitment point, as far as was possible, for gender, key stage, and pupil premium status. The subsequent randomisation process was conducted at class level; and, post-randomisation this balance remained broadly the same (see Table 1), although in primary, because of some mixed age group classes, although there is an age balance overall, the intervention group had both more year 3 and more year 6 students than the comparison. The intervention group also had marginally more boys, and fewer Pupil premium students than the Intervention group. The total student sample involved was 711.

	Boys		Girls		Pupil Premium		Total
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Intervention	188	52	175	48	87	24%	363
Comparison	167	48	181	52	94	29%	348
	KS2		KS				
Intervention	212		151				
Comparison	198		150				

*Table1: overview of the student sample by gender, pupil premium and key stage*

### 3.2 The Intervention

The intervention involved a week-long Arvon ‘Teachers as Writers’ residential, which took place at in April 2016 at the Totleigh Barton Arvon Centre and involved creative writing workshops led by two professional writers, one-to-one tutorials, time and space for writing, and the sharing of writing. Following the residential, each teacher was partnered with a professional writer, and both the teachers and the writers participated in two Continuing Professional Development (CPD) days to work together in co-planning a creative writing unit of work and co-teaching two lessons. This was framed as a co-mentoring relationship, recognising the complementarity of the professional writers’ ‘writerly’ knowledge, and the teachers’ pedagogical experience.

### 3.3 The Randomised Controlled Trial

The RCT element of the project followed accepted principles for conducting RCTs, including blind randomisation and blind marking of the test writing. The randomisation process allocated classes to the intervention or the comparison group, maintaining an even balance of primary and secondary classes in each.

To establish whether the teachers’ involvement in the project had an effect on students’ achievement in writing, a test of their writing was collected before and after the intervention (March and July). A pre and post-test design was used, with a writing task conducted before and after the intervention. The writing test used was based on two tests used successfully in previous projects: they invited personal narrative which is the most accessible kind of writing for many students and requires no prior knowledge. Although the test was the same across all age groups, the wording and format was varied to ensure it was age-appropriate. The test was conducted in conditions which were as consistent as possible across the sample; the group of test administrators was trained to administer the test in each classroom, and a standard test implementation rubric used. The test marking was fully blinded and conducted by a group of experienced teachers trained by a lead assessor, independent of the research team. These teachers were experienced in assessing primary and secondary writing within the National Curriculum framework. The training process included an initial moderation and calibration stage, and double-marking of a 10% sample to ensure consistency. In line with national assessment of writing at the time, the tests were scored under three categories: Composition and Effect [C&E]; Sentence Structure and Punctuation [SSP]; and Text Structure and Organisation [TSO]). The total marks available were 30, with a maximum of 8 marks available for each of Sentence Structure and Punctuation, and Text Structure and Organisation, and a maximum of 14 marks for Composition and Effect.

### 3.4 Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative component of the study elicited a substantial body of data from a range of sources, allowing for a very rounded understanding of how the Arvon residential was experienced by the teachers and how that experience and the co-mentoring played out in school.

- Arvon residential dataset: audio-capture of the five writing workshops and tutorials with teachers; audio-diaries of 12 teachers; end of residential teacher interviews; interviews with the writing tutors; and field notes written by the co-participant researchers;
- Teacher interviews: four audio-captured interviews with each intervention teacher through the lifespan of the project;
- Student focus group interviews: two audio-captured interviews per group, before their teachers had attended the residential and after co-mentoring;
- Writer interviews: two interviews per writer, at the start of the project and after they had worked as co-mentors;
- Classroom observations: two observations per teacher before and after the residential;
- Co-mentoring dataset: one observation per teacher of a co-taught lesson; and recorded discussion between teacher and writer, following the second co-teaching lesson.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis adopted an inductive process of open and axial coding, using NVivo 11, where an initial coding was undertaken to establish a working set of codes, which was then iteratively developed, refined and cross-checked by the coding team, and grouped into thematic axial clusters. Each data set had at least two coders, and the iterative process ensured that there was constant comparison of codes and coding decisions. A final check of each analysis was undertaken to ensure that utterances attributed to codes had been consistently applied.

## 4.0 FINDINGS

### 4.1 Qualitative Findings

As noted, the project sought to understand how the Arvon residential TAW experience, where writers engaged with teachers, impacted upon: teachers' identities as writers; their pedagogic practice; students' outcomes in writing; students' motivation, confidence and skills; and the writers' own effectiveness in supporting teachers and young writers.

#### 4.1.1 *The teachers' identities (RQ1)*

Whilst seven of the teachers viewed themselves as writers at the outset, the others did not initially claim a writer identity, in part due to a tendency to associate the term 'writer' with creative writers whose literary work had been published as seen in other studies (Woodard, 2013; McKinney and Giorgis 2009). Several felt the term was too grandiose to contemplate, yet many reported keeping diaries or writing blogs and appeared to position themselves on the edge of 'writerhood'. Over time however some came to accept and, in many cases, embrace the title 'writer'. To some extent this was due to a shift or a broadening in the way being a writer was understood, but there was also a greater commitment to this identity position on the part of many of the practitioners. The supportive Arvon writing community played a role in their willingness to write and gradually their desire to be seen and see themselves as writers. An invitational context for writing enabled ideas to be generated and although many teachers were initially anxious about sharing their writing, over time they adopted the writing behaviours of those around them, including: writing and sharing in workshops; writing in free time; attending tutorials; listening to readings from professional writers

and discussing their writing spontaneously with one another. Their work was read with interest and responded to with commitment by the tutors and their assurance grew. Whilst not all chose to write alongside their students in classrooms during co-mentoring sessions, many did and the final interviews (undertaken approximately eight months after the residential), suggest their newly-enacted writer identities had been sustained. It appeared this additional role adoption was influenced by the experience of being a member of the community of writers at Arvon. As one teacher described it, she was learning:

*...what it feels like to be a writer and how hard that can be and what you can do if you're stuck. And also just that it doesn't have to be perfect, you know it's the enjoyment of it and the enjoyment of creating it...we're going to have to build that culture of actually 'we're writers' in here. We're not doing writing or having writing done to us.*

The invitational ethos of Arvon was maximally personal; teachers often drew on life experience in their writing or used it as an imaginative springboard and fictionalised their lives, and concomitantly, they showed increased awareness of the value of writing to express feelings. Arvon tutors offered support for the social and emotional challenges of writing and established largely non-hierarchical relationships with the teachers. As one practitioner observed *'It was very much on a human level as writers being in the room on a level playing field'*. The tutors openly reflected upon their experience of being writers, shared their own *'brick walls'* and possible ways to resolve these, and highlighted for example that *'you don't have to get it right first time'* and that *'for anyone at any age the experience of sharing writing can be like taking your clothes off in public'*. Teachers' compositions were read with respectful interest, focused feedback was offered, and their authorial agency was mostly upheld, even when marks were made directly onto their writing. As one teacher observed *'his comments always feel very open and not really, well, you know, it's more sort of a 'could', or a 'would', rather than a 'need to'*. This combination of factors influenced their engagement and is likely also to have contributed to the reported increase in teachers' assurance as writers.

Unsurprisingly the practitioners' identities as teachers remained secure throughout the project. During Arvon workshops this was frequently a lens through which they engaged:

*...it's almost like you can't turn off the teacher in the head, like ooh we're trying this, ooh this would work really well with Year 10, ... or ooh I'm realising that it's taking me more time to come up with ideas than I thought it would; I can understand how those poor Year 8s feel ....Yeah so I was doing a lot of thinking about teaching whilst I was in there.*

#### 4.1.2 Pedagogical consequences (RQ2)

The sixteen teachers' pedagogical intentions following the residential were partially realised. They embraced the relaxed Arvon ethos and both reported and were observed to set aside time and space for idea generation and text development in their classrooms, often through offering freewriting in which the students could if they chose to, (they often did), draw upon their lives. This opportunity to free write and to let ideas and words have space to form freely without reference to their 'inner editor' was not documented during the pre-Arvon observations. Introducing this one practitioner told her class *'Just get writing. Don't think about it. Don't worry. There's no such thing as right and wrong with this'*. This time to 'just write' in personal non-assessed notebooks, contrasted, many of the teachers commented, with their previous practice which they described as more teacher-led and teacher-directed. More flexible use of classroom and outdoor spaces was also observed, and, in line

with Arvon's stated values, a new emphasis on sharing writing developed, with students positioned as authors regularly reading their work aloud to one another. As one professional writer noted '*the ethos of what you're doing is sharing and respecting the person who is sharing that work.*' When the writers led the freewriting, teachers often wrote alongside their students and shared their compositions with them as fellow writers. Some teachers though, concerned about curriculum coverage and potential behaviour problems continued to circulate around their class. There was also a shift in emphasis in the writing process from planning to revising. However, the professional writers often modelled this part of the compositional process and led discussions about the purpose of revision which underlined meaning and impact: '*not thinking about spelling and punctuation but words and content...the creative part.*'

The two features evident at Arvon which were much less commonly adopted back in school were explicit teaching and feedback on writing. At the residential there was considerable explicit input about the craft of writing (e.g. on narrative techniques, 'show not tell', the significance of verb and noun choices over adverbs and adjectives). This was rarely observed in classrooms except during revision episodes and there was little evidence of focused teacher feedback, although some peer feedback was noted. During co-teaching when professional writers led revision sessions, teachers tended to rely on the writers' expertise for evaluative comments. It may have been that the teachers lacked assurance in providing feedback on creative writing and perceived this was a 'sensitive' area as one described it, especially as, unusually there were no set objectives.

#### 4.1.3 *The professional writers as learners (RQ5)*

The co-mentoring strand of the work and the co-teaching observed evidenced considerable flexibility: reciprocity was evident in some teacher and writer pairs who engaged in constructive role-swapping involving a '*very careful dance*' of collaboration, other adopted much less mutually supportive roles. The experience prompted some writers to seriously re-think their roles; they came to question both the routinised ways in which they tended to work in schools and the ways in which teachers were inclined to position them within their one-off visits. These were often framed as a '*show*', albeit '*the show might be all glitzy*' as one writer observed, just '*what are they [the students] taking away?*' Several writers became increasingly aware that co-mentoring offered a more purposeful educational oriented and learner focused relationship with the teacher, one which nudged them to be '*open to a bit more collaboration*', become '*aware of the aims that the teacher has*' and enriched their understanding of '*the difficulties in trying to bring creative work into the school*'.

#### 4.1.4 *Teachers' efficacy in supporting students to develop motivation, confidence and writing skills (RQ4)*

Opportunities for the teachers to foreground the notion of 'being a writer' were enhanced through the presence of the professional writers in class and this, combined with the shifts in time and space, ethos, freewriting, sharing and revision, impacted upon the young writers. A common theme was the perceived reduction in pressure and prescription and an increase in '*creative freedom*'. For example:

*The whole classroom has become more relaxed...you can share ideas and feedback...help each other and it's less competitive.' (Year 8)*



*I just like being free when I write...I like being in my head when I'm writing. I like writing what I'm thinking, ...whatever I want (Year 5);*

The focus group data indicate that the students perceived the project impacted positively on their motivation and confidence as writers and their writing skills. Heightened enjoyment and engagement were voiced, a stronger sense of ownership expressed and a greater understanding of the writing process and progress in writing skill claimed. Whilst some aspects of the project were labelled as less helpful by some students (e.g. the emphasis on editing was seen as stressful), overall very positive benefits were identified. In particular a strong sense of liberation was expressed, with students often noting that teachers were *'taking the pressure of us'* (Year 3), *'helping us more by not helping us as much'* (Year 9). They also frequently expressed a stronger sense of authorship and ownership *'(I enjoy it when) I'm writing down how I actually feel and I'm not told to write it...because it's my own writing'* (Year 7). Regardless of age, the young people became more articulate about the interactive process of peer response, *'feedback from the class instead of just [the teacher]'* (Year 5), revision through *'miss[ing] out bits you don't really need'* (Year 3) and rewriting until it was *'pitch perfect'* in *'every little detail'* (Year 6). When their teachers wrote alongside them, students valued this as *'you don't feel as distant'* (Year 8) and *'she can learn at the same time, but then she can teach us what she's learned'* (Year 3). In sum, young people in the focus groups voiced considerably more positive dispositions about writing and being writers following the project.

#### 4.2 Quantitative Findings (RQ3)

As noted earlier, the RCT sample included 32 teachers, and 711 students, evenly distributed across primary and secondary phases. It is important to recognise the possibility of self-selection bias in the teacher sampling, as attendance at the Arvon residential required teacher willingness to give up a week of holiday time – thus participants may have already been somewhat favourably disposed towards writing. The student sample, spread across upper primary and lower secondary age ranges, had a higher percentage of socially disadvantaged students overall, as indicated by Pupil Premium status, than the national average. The randomisation process resulted in groups who retained broad similarity, although the intervention group had a marginally higher percentage of boys to girls (52%:48%) and a marginally lower percentage of socially disadvantaged students (24%:29%).

To consider the effect of the intervention on the students' writing, several statistical processes were adopted. Firstly, descriptive statistics were conducted. Table 2 below presents the means and standard deviations for the pre and post test scores.

Group	Number	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST	
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Comparison	348	6.64	5.005	8.88	5.290
Intervention	363	5.14	4.576	6.32	4.682

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations on pre and post-test scores.

The gain score for each student (i.e. the difference between their test score pre-intervention and post intervention) was calculated across the sample (see Table 3). The difference in the mean gain scores suggests that the comparison group had made more rapid progress.

Group	Mean	Number	Standard Deviation
Comparison	2.32	348	4.701
Intervention	1.18	363	4.509
Total	1.74	711	4.636

Table 3: The Gain Scores for the Comparison and Intervention groups

Looking at the sub-components of the assessment, the intervention group had improved equally across all three measures with an average gain score of 0.4 marks on each. The comparison group improved most on Composition and Effect, with an average gain of 1.1 marks; they also improved by 0.7 marks for Sentence Structure and Punctuation and 0.6 marks for Text Structure and Organisation (see Figure 1). This result is rather surprising, as not only did the comparison group make greater gains during the intervention period, but their most significant gain was in Composition and Effect, which is where we might have anticipated the intervention group would score well, given the project’s focus on creative writing.

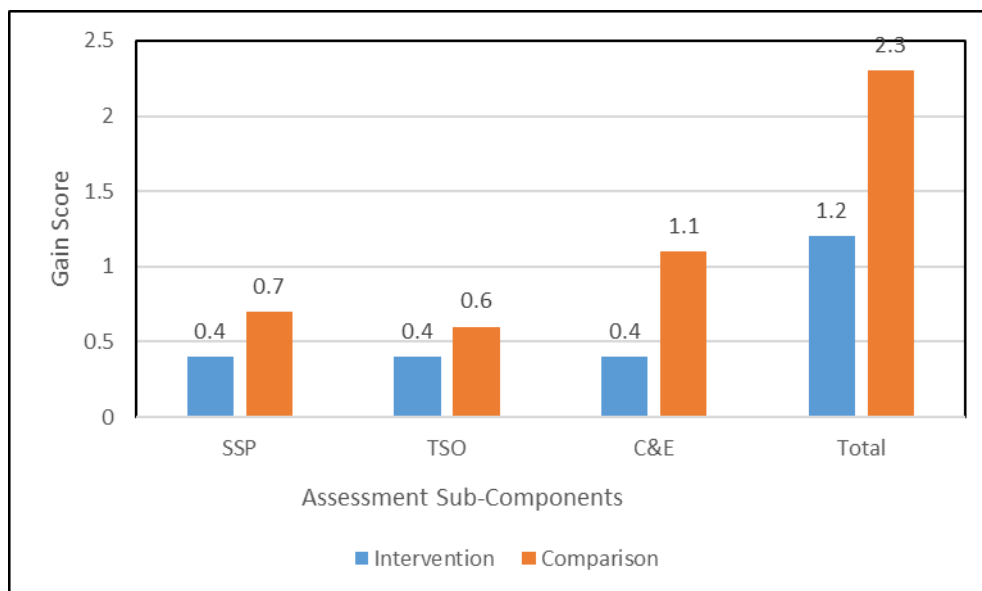


Figure 1: The Differences in Outcomes between the Intervention and Comparison groups

If these outcome data are considered at class level, rather than student level, a picture of much greater variability is clear, with a small number of classes in both intervention and control groups making no improvement or achieving a negative gain score (5 classes in each group). At the same time the most improved classes in both the intervention and the comparison groups made substantial progress (an average gain score of 8 marks in the best performing comparison class, and 7.3 in the intervention class). The range of variation is widest in the intervention group. The overall pattern, however, reflects the greater gain of the comparison group with the strongest gain scores in comparison classes, and the most negative gain scores in the intervention classes.

To determine whether these results evident in the descriptive analysis of the statistics were meaningful in a more generalizable way, and not just the random results that would be achieved by chance, further inferential statistical analyses were undertaken. Because the data represents students ‘nested’ in classes who could not therefore be randomly assigned as individuals to

comparison or intervention groups, it was important to recognise that effects might be more linked to the class as a group than to students as individuals. To address this, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted, because by using the pre-test scores as the co-variate ANCOVA controls for pre-existing differences between the comparison and intervention groups (such as higher attainment at the starting point in one group than the other). It is important to note that this represents a robustly strict approach to the data. When ANCOVA controls for the covariate it also removes some of the treatment effect, reducing the likelihood of obtaining a significant result. Field (2013:479) explains that introducing the covariate to the analysis allows us to ‘*reduce the error variance, allowing us to more accurately assess the effect of the experimental manipulation*’. The ANCOVA analysis indicated that the difference between the two groups was indeed statistically significant ( $p=.000$ ), with a very small effect size (partial Eta squared) of 0.03.

A further level of analysis was undertaken using multi-level modelling, because it is another statistical technique which can handle clustered or nested data such as in this study. Multi-level models recognise that effects can occur at different levels, or hierarchies, and that these can interact. For this test, rather than using pre to post-test gain score, as with the ANCOVA, Contextual Value Added was used with the post-test as the outcome and the pre-test as the statistical predictor. The effect size was calculated, following Elliot and Sammons (2004), thus:

$$ES = \text{continuous predictor variable coefficient} * 2SD \text{ continuous predictor variable} / \sqrt{\text{child level variance}}$$

$$\text{Or } \Delta = \beta_1 + 2sd_{x1}$$

This method of calculating effect size evaluates the change on the outcome measure produced by ‘*a change of +/- one standard deviation on the continuous predictor variable, standardised by the within school standard deviation, adjusted for covariates in the model*’ (Eliot and Sammons 2004:14). The results are presented in Table 4.

CVA Analysis	Model 0 (no predictors)	Model 1 (all predictors)			
	B	B	Standard Error	p	Effect Size
<i>FIXED EFFECTS</i>					
<b>MEAN POST-TEST SCORE</b>	7.59	5.68			
Control Group					
Intervention Group		-1.10	0.95	0.237	<b>-0.34</b>
Student: School Year (treated as continuous)		0.29	0.24	0.224	0.33
Student: Gender		-0.64	0.26	0.014	-0.20
Student: SEN		-1.11	0.38	0.003	-0.34
Student: PP		-0.33	0.31	0.287	-0.10
PRE-TEST SCORE		0.49	0.04	<0.001	1.47
<b>Standard deviation of continuous predictor measures (for ES calculation)</b>					
Student: School Year (treated as continuous)	1.84				
PRE-TEST SCORE	4.85				

Table 4: CVA Analysis - Fixed Effects

This analysis indicated a negative effect size of the intervention of -0.34.

In summary, then, the statistical results show that the comparison group made stronger improvement in the time period than the intervention group, and that this stronger performance was evident both at student level and class level. Perhaps counter-intuitively, given that the residential experience teachers focused on creative writing, the comparison group improved most significantly on Composition and Effect.

## **5.0 Discussion**

Arguably, the finding that merits most discussion is the statistical outcome of the RCT, signalling a negative effect size of the intervention of -0.34, which runs counter to the anticipated outcomes of the project. The first thing to consider in relation to this is the nature of causal assumptions underpinning the project. In a nutshell, the assumed causal relationship between intervention and outcomes was that the involvement of teachers in a rich and creative writing residential experience would lead to improvements in children's writing. This causal assumption is, on reflection, too simplistic, and is founded on a direct and uncomplicated cause-and-effect mechanism. But we know that creating change in educational practice and outcomes is a highly complex process, and that many initiatives in education do not achieve the changes expected. In this case, the causal chain from residential experience to improved student outcomes may be more indirect, with a range of mediating factors which need to be considered, and more time for teachers to embed new ways of working. One key mediating factor may well be the extent to which a residential experience generates sufficient explicit pedagogical knowledge to be transferred to the classrooms. Certainly, the qualitative data suggest that only some of the experience of working with professional writers transferred into the classroom.

From this TAW project, a new study has arisen which builds on our learning and which conceptualises causal relationships somewhat differently. In the new project, 'The Craft of Writing' funded by the Education Endowment Fund and the Royal Society for the Arts, the team has developed a logic model which attempts to represent the causal mechanisms in a more nuanced way, and which includes more explicit follow-on Continuing Professional Development to support reflection on the pedagogical implications of the residential experience. This model hypothesises that the Arvon residential experience, and linked Continuing Professional Development, will increase teachers' confidence as writers themselves and will strengthen their 'subject knowledge' of the craft of writing. This, in turn, should lead to them changing their classroom practices in the teaching of writing, drawing on their greater craft knowledge and confidence, thus fostering stronger communities of creative writers. As a consequence, students will have a stronger sense of ownership, agency and confidence in writing, culminating, over a longer period of time, in their improved attainment in writing. However, it is also important to recognise that change is not a simple, unidirectional mechanism, and a RCT does not account for the way in which these elements of change are highly subject to disruption by other contextual factors: student characteristics; teacher effectiveness; school assessment regimes; national expectation about writing standards and so forth. Such contextual factors shape teachers' and students' identities as writers, as the work of Cremin and Locke (2017) and Woodard (2017) has shown.

There are two other key factors to consider in relation to the RCT results. The first relates to the writing measures and issues of writing assessment. The pre and post-test writing measures were

well-aligned to curriculum expectations in terms of the nature of the task and the assessment judgments made. To that extent, it is fair to claim they were a reliable judgment of students' written outcomes within the framework of national standards. But these standards and expectations may not align with those of Arvon and the professional writers. In other words, what is valued in writing by the current National Curriculum (DfES, 2013) may not be what is valued in the professional world of writing. Certainly, the Arvon residential gave primacy to writing from personal experience and for understanding of oneself, and valued the experience and process of writing in its own right, not simply the written product. This raises important and salient questions about possible disjuncture between school writing, and writing beyond school, and about socially-determined differences in what constitutes 'good writing'. Many scholars have argued that tensions exist between teaching the skills of writing and enabling children to use their own personal and cultural resources in creative writing (e.g. Connolly and Burn 2017; Dobson and Stephenson, 2017; Gardener, 2018). They highlight that these tensions are exacerbated in cultures of accountability and serve to constrain children's creativity and engagement as writers.

The second factor to consider regarding the RCT results, relates to the way in which teachers translated their Arvon experiences into the classroom. The writing residential was a rich and multi-faceted experience, including workshops, which stimulated deep imaginative immersion in writing, and tutorials, which involved critical engagement with what had been written. The qualitative data, particularly the classroom observations and teacher interviews, suggest that teachers may have translated more of the former than the latter into their own classroom practice. This may have been because, as Horner (2010) suggested, the professional writers were not making their own implicit knowledge explicit, or it may have been the teachers' greater comfort with immersion than with critical feedback. Many of the lessons observed involved time and space for writing, freewriting activities, imaginative stimuli for writing, and sharing and celebrating writing. Fewer involved critical engagement with the texts produced (and when they did this was frequently dominated by curriculum expectations). As a consequence, students in the intervention group may have participated in a much more motivating, rich and agentic experience of writing, but at the same time they may have had much less explicit teaching of writing than usual. No data are available regarding the practices of the classroom writing practices of the comparison group, but it seems likely that some of the previous practices of the intervention teachers were put to one side in order to allow time for choice-led free writing activities. On the Arvon residential, the teachers experienced substantive and informed feedback on their writing in the tutorials, but this was less evident in the lessons observed, and there was a tendency to rely on the professional writers to provide it. The teachers may have deferred to the professional writers in this way due to a lack of assurance about their own craft knowledge, capacity to offer tailored feedback, and hesitancy in responding to the students' creative writing (see also Myhill and Wilson 2013). Thus the differential outcome between intervention and comparison groups may be attributable, at least in part, to a reduction in explicit taught input and feedback in the intervention group. It may also be attributable to insufficient time for the intervention to affect student outcomes.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

It is important that negative results from RCTs are reported, and equally important that RCTs are accompanied by robust qualitative data collection. Our conclusion from this research is not the simplistic one that residential experiences where teachers work with writers have a negative effect: rather through combining the statistical and qualitative data together, a more nuanced and

productive understanding of the effect of these experiences has been enabled. Arguably, the strength of this analysis is not in generating generalizable data about 'what works', but in raising further questions for research to address some of the issues identified and to introduce modifications which might facilitate a more powerful transfer into classroom practice and into student outcomes.

The TAW project uniquely reveals that writers' engagement with teachers that is flexible, focused and encompasses a sense of both the personal and the communal, has the potential to significantly enhance teachers' writer identities and that this can contribute to pedagogic change. The teachers established a more relaxed ethos, altered their classroom writing routines, and gave space to freewriting and students' authorial intentions, and this, the students reported, positively influenced their motivation, confidence and sense of ownership and skills as writers. The students' dispositional shifts and enhanced sense of authorial agency should not be ignored. Nonetheless, these shifts did not impact upon the young people's attainment. At Arvon, a strong sense of the teachers' and their tutors' personal, social and emotional engagement in writing developed and the teachers' sense of self as writers and as members of the writing community grew markedly. However, it appeared that more time and perhaps more sustained support and knowledge was needed for the teachers to translate the energy, focus and identity shifts within the Arvon experience into a transformed and balanced pedagogy for teaching writing. The new project, the Craft of Writing, seeks to redress these issues, with two weekend residencies and ongoing professional support over a year, as well as an explicit Craft of Writing Framework derived from the professional writers' data within TAW. This Framework will be used to frame explicit feedback to both teacher and student writers.

Additionally, this Teachers as Writers research challenged the professional writers established working practices in schools and afforded new opportunities for learning through their work as co-mentors. It demonstrated that co-mentoring and the enactment and performance of new roles can offer writers and teachers an alternative way to work together in order to benefit younger writers. As such co-mentoring deserves closer attention in future studies. So too do teachers' identities as writers and the dynamic interplay between their identities as writers, their knowledge and understanding of the craft of writing, and their pedagogic practice.

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