Teaching Writing in Today’s Classrooms:
Looking Back to Look Forward
Dedication

We dedicate this book to:

Donald H Graves
1930–2010

and

The Australian Literacy Educators’ Association (ALEA):
its presidents, office bearers at national, state and local
levels, and all its members for their ongoing commitment,
dedication and professional interests
over the past forty years!
Teaching Writing in Today’s Classrooms: Looking Back to Look Forward

Edited by
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AUSTRALIAN LITERACY EDUCATORS’ ASSOCIATION
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Foreword

Jan Turbill, Cindy Brock and Georgina Barton

This book has its genesis many decades ago. Two critical events occurred during this time – events that were considered then (and now) highly significant and indeed ‘revolutionary’ by some. And most importantly what began ‘way back then’ has continued to influence and impact on teachers’ learning and pedagogy today and hopefully will continue to do so into the future. The title of the book was carefully chosen to reflect these dynamic events and their impact – *Teaching writing in today’s classrooms: Looking back to look forward*.

So what were these events? And why were they – are they – so important?

The first was the formation of the Australian Reading Association (ARA). Many of us had become members of the International Reading Association¹ (IRA) whose journals reflected research predominately for educators in the USA. Many had attended the annual conventions of IRA in the USA and many groups across Australia had become National Affiliates of IRA (see Nea Stewart-Dore’s *A Short History of the Australian Literacy Educators’ Association*, (2008) for more historical details).

The formation of the Australian Reading Association took place in August 1975 at a national conference in Adelaide. The first president was a dynamic and energetic Tess Caust, with John Elkins as Vice President. In 1980, ARA became a National Affiliate of IRA when IRA’s Vice President Ken Goodman presented the association its Charter at the national conference, held in Canberra in late August.

Twenty years after its inception, in 1995. ARA changed its name, logo and corporate colours to become the Australian Literacy Educators’ Association (ALEA). The discussion to make this change began in the 80s as ARA’s National Council argued the association needed to reflect not only

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¹ The International Reading Association (IRA) finally changed its name in 2015 to the International Literacy Association (ILA) after much pressure from international affiliate associations, particularly ALEA and NZLA.
research in, and pedagogy on the teaching of reading, but also writing. Now looking back through the past forty years, we can proudly argue that ARA/ALEA has served its membership well as a peak national association. It has represented its membership in matters of advocacy, curriculum and policy development. Equally as important to the profession are the journals and publications that apprise educators of latest research, pedagogies and issues in the teaching of literacy.

The second critical event occurred in Sydney in August 1980. Sydney University hosted the Third International Federation for the Teaching of English (IFTE) conference. It seemed at the time that the ‘who’s who’ of English, reading and writing research from the USA, UK and Australia were presenting: Ken and Yetta Goodman (USA), James Britton (UK), James Moffett (USA), Garth Boomer (Australia) among others. It was a powerful week.

In particular there was one speaker, who in the words of Bob Walshe (1981) had a ‘jovial expression, twinkling eyes and held the audience captive for 60 minutes’. This man was Donald Graves. Donald Graves had been researching in classrooms where children begin to write, and rather than consider the teaching of writing as a set of skills, he and his colleagues at the Writing Process Laboratory in New Hampshire had been exploring ‘writing as a process’ in kindergartens with startling results. We, in the audience, were amazed at what the young five/six-year-olds were achieving as writers; what they said about their writing; and how confident they were as writers.

His opening words, captured in R.D. Walshe’s edited version of many of Don and his colleagues work, were:

*Children want to write. For years we have underestimated their urge to make marks on paper. We have underestimated that urge because of a lack of understanding of the writing process, and what children do to control it. Without realising it we wrest control away from children and place road blocks that thwart their intentions. Then we say, ‘They don’t want to write. What is a good way to teach them?’* (Graves, 1980, in Walshe, 1981, p. 17)

Those of us in the audience who taught early years were hooked! Don’s
words and examples from the 16 children observed closely over two years,\(^2\) made so much sense. His key messages both excited and challenged us. We wondered why hadn’t we thought like this before? It was indeed the beginning of a revolution in the teaching of writing in Australian primary schools. We had to try to implement ‘process writing’ particularly in the early years as soon as we could! And we did, with many books, articles and presentations to follow during the 1980s.

The initial intersect between these two events occurred at the ARA national conference held just a week later in Canberra. While Donald Graves did not attend this conference, many of the other speakers did. These speakers too focussed on the teaching of writing. Frank Smith, for instance, shared his thoughts on the importance of ‘reading like a writer’ in order to become an effective writer. He later wrote his talk in Language Arts in 1983. Yetta Goodman introduced us to the importance of ‘kidwatching’ as children read and write in order for us to learn what they were learning. And there was so much more.

So why this book? And why now?

Looking back, the 1980s and 1990s saw many advances in the teaching of writing, particularly in primary classrooms. For much of this period, at least until the mid 1990s, there seemed to be relative calm in the field of literacy teaching (one might argue that such ‘calm’ is synonymous with ‘little political interference’) and we felt excited about what we, and the children were achieving and learning. The teaching of writing certainly seemed to have ‘come out from the cold’ and was now being recognised in syllabuses and curriculum across the country as a critical component of becoming literate. For the first time teachers were encouraged to develop programs that integrated ‘talking, listening, reading and writing’. This was particularly so for the teaching of writing in the first years of school. This ‘new pedagogy’ was viewed to be more holistic and labelled by many as ‘whole language’ – a term that originated in the USA and ‘imported’ to Australia (Cambourne & Turbill, 2007). Sadly, there were some educational researchers and policy-makers, who argued that this ‘new pedagogy’ was,\(^2\) It is interesting to note that one of Don’s research assistants and his PhD student gathering data was Lucy Calkins.
among other things, not teaching pre-requisite reading skills, particularly the skills of word-decoding – ‘phonics’.

Thus from time to time there were debates about the ‘right’ way to teach reading. These debates, aired publicly via the media, argued that the progressive pedagogy of ‘whole language’ was too ‘laissez-faire’ and ignored the explicit teaching of skills such as phonemic awareness and thus was the cause of all reading failures. Robyn Ewing (2006) sums these debates thus:

*In my 30 years as a teacher and teacher educator, no single educational debate in Australian primary education has recurred as often, caused as much angst or been politicised so keenly as that related to reading, and more specifically, the merits or disadvantages of using so-called ‘whole language’ versus ‘phonics’ methods to help children learn to read.* (p. 1)

Early in the 2000s Australia saw the return of a conservative Liberal Government, and a new Minister of Education, Dr Brendon Nelson. Nelson decided that this issue needed to be resolved once and for all. In late 2004, he called for a National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. While the Inquiry had the potential to explore current trends, research and future directions in the teaching of literacy, it soon became apparent that this was not the case. On reading the Inquiry’s terms of reference, it was clear that it was to be an inquiry into the teaching of reading only, and specifically the teaching of reading to children who experienced difficulties in learning to read, approximately 8–11% (Armstrong, (2006, p. 9).

The subsequent report, *Teaching Reading,* was released in late 2005. There were 20 recommendations emanating from the report which the states and territories were required to adopt. The most concerning of these was Recommendation 2. It stated that:

*Teachers provide systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction so that children master the essential alphabetical code-breaking skills required for foundation reading proficiency.* (p. 14)

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While the recommendation continues requesting that teachers provide an ‘integrated approach’, the above clearly placed the focus squarely onto the teaching of reading – the teaching of reading as a ‘highly reductive approach’ (Ewing, 2006, p. 2).

The word ‘literacy’ is used throughout the Teaching Reading report, however it is clear that the meaning intent of the word is ‘reading’. Indeed the statement in the report, ‘Reading – the key element of literacy competence ...’ (p. 31) clearly confirms this assumption. The term ‘writing’ is rarely mentioned in the report and when it is, it is used as a tag after reading (e.g. ‘read and write’; ‘reading and writing’). There is no specific discussion of writing and its role in learning to read or indeed becoming literate.

As a result the teaching of writing began to move ‘back into the cold’, as schools turned their focus to their ‘whole school’ reading plans and, in general, a more prescriptive reductionist pedagogy.

While there was relative silence (and funding) regarding the teaching of writing post the release of the report and its recommendations, this was the not the case with the ‘testing’ of writing. Recommendation 9 called for a national assessment of all Year 3, 5, 7, and 9 students across Australia. As a result the National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was introduced in 2008 to assess all children at these points of schooling. Four components are assessed, namely: Language Conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation), Reading, Numeracy and a Writing task. The writing task had to be assessed by trained teachers using a set marking rubric. It requires the ‘human-as-instrument’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 194) to make judicious decisions about a child’s written text. Teachers were encouraged to train as assessors as this process was also perceived to be a form of professional learning about writing – at least the nature and standard of writing as determined by the test designers. It must be pointed out that while there was national assessment of writing in 2008, there was no national curriculum until 2011. The writing assessment task and its marking guide became the curriculum for many.

McGraw (2012) argues that NAPLAN is not a high-stakes test, however the taking of the test as well as the results have caused a great deal of angst and stress in schools and in children (Dulfer, 2012).
The writing task requires children to write a one-shot-perfect product on a particular focus provided by the prompt material, within a set time frame. The marking guide clearly shows that marks are deducted for spelling errors, grammatical errors, and lack of an appropriate structure of a particular genre. Critics argue that NAPLAN has forced teachers to teach writing according to the writing assessment guides, and thus the teaching of writing began to focus on the explicit teaching of text structure, and practice in writing one-shot-perfect productions. Writing as a process, where revision forms a major role in preparing the writing for a specific purpose and audience was beginning to disappear from many primary classrooms.

Trend results of the NAPLAN writing assessment over the past several years are showing that children’s writing scores are falling behind those of reading and far too many are not reaching the ‘minimum national standard’ (see NAP4 website for national reports). This in turn has raised concerns at the national, state and school levels. Questions are being asked: Why is this so? What is happening in our schools with respect to the teaching of writing? How can we improve the writing of our children, so that they are confident and skilled writers? Principals and teachers have begun to search for solutions. The teaching of writing is being brought back out of the cold once again.

With the passing of Donald Graves in September, 2010 we were reminded of the importance of his work and the legacy he gave us. Many teachers in our schools had never heard of writing as a process, of Donald Graves and his and others’ research. Many had focused on teaching text structure, and other relative skills, but not what it meant to revise and re-work a piece writing over time to achieve the intended purpose for a given audience, let alone how to teach their students how to do this. It was becoming increasingly clear to ALEA’s National Council that we cannot, must not, forget the seminal work on the teaching of writing from the 1980s and early 1990s. The many important ‘gems’ we learned about writing as a process and how it can be taught needed to be brought to the fore; to keep the teaching of writing ‘out of the cold’. One important step towards

achieving this goal was the joint decision between the two Presidents of ALEA and the Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA), that the two associations co-sponsor a special plenary session, the Donald Graves Address, to be presented at the annual ALEA national conference. It was decided the invited speaker should be a world expert of the day in the teaching of writing in primary classrooms. Thus far, three internationally renowned speakers, Mem Fox, Teresa Cremin and Ralph Fletcher have presented the Donald Graves Address. And we are so pleased that the key messages from these addresses are published in this book.

Given all that has happened in the past forty years, it is fitting that this book be a celebration of ALEA’s 40th birthday. And we feel extremely privileged to have been asked to work together to make it happen. As mentioned, the title was carefully chosen and plays out in the structure of the book. While the main focus throughout the many chapters is the teaching of writing in today’s classrooms, it was deemed necessary to make sure we looked back in order to identify and explore the key ‘gems’ from the past. These form the foundation of the now and the future. We needed to view what is happening now, to identify ‘good’ classroom practice and ideas that can be readily shared with our readers. And we needed to consider where we are going; what are the issues and pedagogy that will inform future effective writing teaching?

Hence our readers will see there are three sections in the book. Section 1: Looking back has been the responsibility of Jan (after all she was there!). Section 2: What is happening now has been the responsibility of Cindy. And Section 3: Looking forward has been the responsibility of Georgina.

The whole process has been a wonderful experience. We have loved working together. We have learned a great deal about writing and the teaching of writing from our authors, as well as from our own writing. (This Foreword for instance, has been drafted, reviewed, revised, reviewed and revised over many days! It is important that we make sure our intended meaning is as clear as possible for our readers). The hardest part has been restricting the book to the 20 chapters herein. Our authors and reviewers have been so easy to work with, meeting deadlines and responding to further requests promptly. We thank them for their commitment and willingness to share with others in this very special book.
We are so excited and know our readers will find this book both informative and useful. Enjoy!

References
SECTION ONE:
Looking back – what we can learn from the past about the teaching of writing

Jan Turbill

Too often in today’s ‘throw away’ society, we are encouraged to discard anything that is considered ‘old’. In education circles this often means anything published prior to 2000. We need to know our history: the critical milestones of change and gems of professional thinking. The purpose of Section One therefore, is to revisit and highlight these ‘critical milestones’ and ‘gems’ so that readers are reminded (or indeed for some, learn for the first time) that the theory and pedagogy of writing teaching of today have a sound theoretical basis in the seminal researchers and writers of the past. Some chapters in this section are edited chapters that were written in 1980s, others were written for this book, some are written by published children’s authors and others by academics and teachers of writing. All have a similar thread of looking back in order to capture what we need to know about the teaching of writing today.

In Chapter 1 Mem Fox shares her memories of a great researcher and writer of children’s writing, Donald Graves, and identifies five key principles from his body of work that are important for teachers of writing today. Mem expands on these principles with examples from her own writing as well as some she has received from children and adults. Mem leaves us with a challenge: to be effective teachers of writing, teachers need to become writers.

R.D. Walshe (Bob) first wrote Chapter 2 in 1981. It was Part Two in his book Every Child Can Write. Bob edited the original 40 pages into a stand-alone article in 1999. It has been edited once again here in 2015. It is a clear succinct exploration of ‘writing as a process’: a concept that many today take for granted without fully understanding what it means. It is a must read for all teachers of writing.
In Chapter 3 Brian Cambourne reworked a chapter from his 1988 book ‘The Whole Story: Natural learning and the acquisition of literacy. In this revised version, Brian shares key messages that focus on the nature of effective writing and its relationship with reading, language, and learning, grounding his findings in research undertaken over a forty year span.

Chapter 4 is a chat with Ralph Fletcher from the USA, a writer and a teacher of writing. Ralph shares many insights into his own writing and experiences he has had with children in classrooms during their ‘writers workshops’. He focuses particularly on the importance of using ‘mentor texts’ to support young writers, and provides ideas for supporting boy writers.

In Chapter 5 Teresa Cremin from the UK discusses the challenge of teachers positioning themselves as writers in a classroom setting. Teresa explores a model for conceptualising teachers’ writing identities and developing teachers’ potential for becoming ‘writing teachers’.

In Chapter 6 Beverly Derewianka traces the history of genre theory and pedagogy in Australia, its current status and reflections on future prospects.

Finally in Chapter 7 Lisa Kervin and Jessica Mantei explore emergent writers and the importance of drawing and talk in their development as writers.
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1 Sense and sensibility in the Donald Graves writing curriculum: An exploration, a remembering, and a plea

Mem Fox

In this inspiring address, Mem shares her memories of a great researcher and writer of children’s writing, Donald Graves, and identifies five of his key principles for teachers of writing.

Introduction

Once upon a time – in 1992 – I found myself in Donald Graves’ house in New Hampshire with Linda Rief, a friend of mine, who was also a friend of his. There we were at his place, taking tea with God himself, and his wife, Betty. To put me at my ease, since I was so clearly awestruck, Don said lovely things about my book *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* and asked what I was working on. I told him it was a picture book called *Time for Bed*, due for publication the following year.

‘Can you recite it?’ asked Betty. ‘Let’s hear it!’

I began to recite it but was too nervous to remember the words. I asked if I might write it down. So they set me up in Don’s office with a little computer that was hot stuff at the time but can now be found only in museums.

‘OMIGOD,’ I thought. ‘I’m in Donald Graves’ actual office, typing on his actual computer.’ My fingers could barely find the keys. I came downstairs again and, feeling abnormally shy, read them the words that became the book: *Time for Bed*.

Why was I so in awe of Donald Graves? So honoured to be talking about books and writing with him, and about the teaching of writing? Who was

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1 This chapter is an edited version of the inaugural Donald Graves Address at the ALEA National Conference in Sydney in 2012, jointly sponsored by ALEA and the Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA).
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this kindly, inspiring, researcher, professor, and writer of 26 books, whose methods had had such a profound and lasting effect on Australian teachers in the early 1980s, me included? What did he ask us to do? And how was it so different from what we had done before? As I worked through the many drafts for this talk, in honour of his influence and his passing, I decided on five key points or principles that best respond to these questions.

Before Don Graves entered our heads and our classrooms we used to regard writing as a one-shot act, undertaken by students sitting in silence, and completed from beginning to end in one lesson, perhaps once a week, sometimes once a day, or for one piece of homework. The teacher gave a topic such as: ‘A day in the life of a button’; or ‘Finish this story,’ after supplying the first line. The purpose was to hand it in to the teacher for correction and grading, rather than for a genuine response to the meaning. This method of teaching writing had been around for many generations, was accepted entirely as the way things should be, and was rarely questioned, although there always existed gifted, enlightened teachers working on their own, who taught writing differently.

In the early 1980s Donald Graves visited Australia several times and managed, with his famous tact and grace, and his evidenced-based research, to yank us out of our comfortable rut. He presented his research, told us a few home truths, gave us strategies and dared us to be different. We took up the challenge. In what follows I identify and explore the five key principles that I believe underpin Graves’ legacy to the teaching of writing.

Only writers should teach writing
The first principle is about the pedagogy of writing and this was the truth that threatened us the most. Don’s research clearly demonstrated that only writers should be allowed to teach writing because writers alone understand the circumstances of creation. They know first-hand how writing happens and why. They have valid reasons for writing. They know about choosing a topic; they know about the early hunting and gathering of ideas and notes before pen finally hits paper or thumbs hit the i-Phone; (well, he didn’t actually mention texting, but he would have, had he known about it then.) Writers, he said, know about the sorting out of random information and how long it takes to get it settled into well-ordered paragraphs; and
the necessity of rewriting draft after draft to get the right meaning across; and the work involved in writing an irresistible first line and a perfect set of syllables in the last line; and the anxiety over the possible response; the hope and terror involved; the intense conversations with others; the struggle to find what is called our ‘voice’; the precise choosing of words; and, the desire to achieve every aim successfully, to change the reader through the reading. Writers, he said, understand the difficulty, the joy, and the power. And with that inside knowledge writers are better able to teach writing with empathy and success.

Which meant, he said, that all of us who thought we were teaching writing had better become writers ourselves: not published writers necessarily, just writers.

**What did we do as a result?**

Although it terrified us, we set out to discover the difference between real writing and the stuff we had been trying to teach. We did become writers ourselves. We went to writing courses, and created writing groups of our own, and met in friends’ houses once a week, and wrote for real people whom we wanted to impress. We chose our own topics. We took the time we needed. We wrote in our own voices so our individual personalities could shine through. We chatted with each other about what we were writing or had written. We read our writing aloud to each other. We experienced highs and lows, and the surprising difficulties in getting writing right. Yes, we discovered writing is difficult. We had previously scoffed at that idea when we asked our students to ‘write’. We rejoiced in having real audiences and couldn’t wait for their responses. Becoming writers ourselves was the best professional development ever. It changed our lives; it changed our teaching; and it radically changed the outcomes of the students in our classes.

**And what should we be doing now?**

So if we ourselves haven’t written anything lately for an audience that makes us excited and nervous at the same time, we might have forgotten not only how to write or why, but also how to teach writing. Might it be time to start a writing group, I wonder? Many of us belong to a Book Club so why not belong to a Writing Club too?
Real writers are eager for collaboration

Becoming writers helped us to remember another of Don Graves’ insights, my second key principle: that real writers are eager for collaboration. They use other people’s brains to help them get their writing right: family members, friends, colleagues, editors, children, neighbours, writing groups, formal writing courses, other writers’ texts and so on. They seek out others in an informal sort of ‘conference’ to bounce their writing off, to ask advice, to check for confusions in their writing, or things they might have left out, or ways of structuring a piece, or proof-reading, or even spelling, or – secretly – in the hope of a little praise and encouragement. We learnt all this by writing ourselves. We practically dragged people off the street to read our writing to, to beg for help, for ideas on how we might improve it.

What did we do in classrooms as a result?

We tried to forget we were in classrooms. We set up pleasantly furnished physical spaces (I remember a lot of old baths with cushions in them) – social spaces that allowed children to feel more as if they were in a writer’s studio, working among friends. We allowed children to talk to us and to each other about what they were writing and why. We organised writing conferences with each child to discuss the writing in hand, allowing the child to lead the conference conversation, not the teacher. We wrote in front of children to show them our thought processes; we wrote collaboratively, with the whole class throwing in ideas; we modelled the ways writers talk about their work in progress:

• What do you think of my lead? Would you want to read on or not?
• Which part did you like the best?
• What if I break that sentence into three sentences? That might work better.
• Oh, that’s so sad. I’m so sorry. Thank you for sharing.

And what should we be doing now?

But if we ourselves haven’t written anything for a while, anything public, that is, for an audience that causes our stomachs to flutter, how will we know the power of the of-the-cuff writing conference? We won’t be able to teach writing well unless we understand the need for such chatting in our
own classrooms. So let’s do something alarming such as writing a light-hearted poem that sums up the term’s work – a poem to give to the parents on the last day of term. Now *that* might teach us about writing and how to teach it.

**Writers choose their own focus**
Donald Graves also alerted us to the fact that writers, on the whole, choose to write about their own current focus. They choose their topic. They choose their own genre. In other words, they know what they want to write and why: a journal, a letter to the paper or the Pope, a novel, a protest speech, a blog – well, *he* didn’t actually mention a blog but he would have, had he known about blogs at that time – an appeal for funds, a family history, a child’s bedtime story, an application for promotion, to name a tiny few of the hundreds of genres available.

**What did we do as a result?**
It was revolutionary, but we allowed children to write what they wanted to write about, what they knew about, what they cared about. We didn’t tell them the formulaic text-type they had to use, so we could all feel calm about the persuasive writing section of the NAPLAN tests. None of us, let alone eight year-old children, can write persuasively unless we have *real* steam coming out of our ears about the matter in hand. Manufactured steam just doesn’t cut the mustard. Because we were writers ourselves we remembered that kind of thing; we knew it; we felt it first hand. So we drew out from the children what the children wanted to express instead of imposing our topics on them.

**And what should we be doing now?**
But what if we haven’t been writers ourselves lately? What if we’ve forgotten how awful it is to be told what to write and exactly how to write it, if we can’t recall the importance of an excited, inquisitive audience ourselves? We might like to sit back for a cool moment and take stock once again, and ask ourselves earnestly what the practice of writing really is. And whether it bears any relation to the manufactured horrors we’re currently inflicting on the youngsters in our classrooms in the name of literacy
education – deadly formulas on the ways of writing different text-types such as the persuasive, descriptive, narrative and so on. That’s not real writing. It bears no resemblance to writing. Teaching text-types outside the context of passion and purpose, audience and response sucks the lifeblood from natural, vibrant writing and kills it stone dead. Teaching text-types is not teaching writing and never will be, and we’re kidding ourselves if we think otherwise.

**Real writing is a complex process**

Another important lesson that Donald Graves taught us is that real writing is a much more complex process than a one-shot act; that it is literally ‘a process’, a predictable series of stages and drafts that most writers undertake between their first thought and their final piece, whether the piece takes an hour, or weeks, or several years to write.

**What did we do in classrooms as a result?**

We said to children: ‘You don’t have to get it right first time.’ ‘Have a go. Write something, anything?’ ‘No, there’s no special length. You can’t re-draft a blank page so get something down and go from there.’ ‘I’ll chat to you about it, never fear. I won’t let you sink.’ ‘Are you ready to try it out on the class? OK, let’s do it and see how the others can help.’ ‘No, you don’t have to finish it right now. Put it away for a while, and try something else if it’s not working for you. That’s what I do.’ ‘Can’t spell that word? Invent the spelling. Write it anyway and we’ll get it right later.’ ‘Say what you want to say’ – as this child did, in a letter to me:

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I want to talk about Willford Gordon whatchamacalit oh you know what. I like your book because a little boy did a big thing like Mr. Drysdale because Mr. Drysdale is big. That’s all. By Roderick
```

**And what should we be doing now?**

If we are not writers ourselves we will not know, we will not be able to understand, we will not remember that writing is a process, a slow process, an arduous process at times, requiring draft upon draft. And we might therefore teach in an asinine fashion, making ridiculous demands such
as: I want this handed up by tomorrow; or: why don’t you sit this NAPLAN writing test, and do your ‘best writing’ in the time set? To become a writer in order to be a better teacher of writers, we don’t need to go crazy and meet our writing group once a week, although that’s fun: wine, carrot cake, gossip and all. But we do need to write a minimum of one or two things a year for an audience that terrifies us. Imagine one or two staff members each week, reading a piece to colleagues at the end of a staff meeting. Imagine that sweat!

Writers need a purpose, an audience and a response
Another of Don Graves’ key points is that writers don’t write well or willingly without an interested and inquisitive audience. He emphasised the requirement for a real audience but told us there are three key elements in the creation of every piece of successful written communication, from cave paintings to tweeting. (Well, he didn’t actually mention Twitter but he would have, had he known about it then.) The three elements are audience, purpose and response. Without an audience to care about the meaning being expressed, he said, real writers don’t write: what would be the point? And if the purpose is merely for grading, again real writers don’t write: what would be the point? And if writers are hanging out for a genuine response to what has been written and receive no such response, they’re reluctant to write for that audience again, since what would be the point?

Can you see therefore, the heart-breaking pointlessness of battering children with text-types, none of which develop passion or competence in a young writer? Audience, purpose and response: nothing else matters: text-types are chosen naturally, they arise organically, as passion and purpose surface in a writer’s brain. I ask myself – and I ask you – how I am able to write in any genre I please without ever having been explicitly taught a formulaic text-type.

Those of us who were writing real things for each other on a weekly basis in writing groups back in the 80s understood exactly how important audience, purpose and response were, especially response. We lived and died for the response, not only to the meaning we were trying to get across, but to the way we had constructed it.
What did we do in classrooms as a result?
We made sure that children knew their writing would be read to or by others – to a real audience of live and lively listeners so that they would write with much more care and aching and attention and excitement. We had a writer’s chair for our young writers to sit in while they read aloud their work and asked for comments or questions afterwards. We helped the writers choose their best writing and published it in little books that other children could borrow in class or take home and read to their parents. We had celebratory days for the launch of first publications with party food and a speech of congratulation from someone who mattered to the children. Audience was the spur, the purpose was for a response, and response was the reason for writing. We had no tests. We tried not to grade although, of course, we quietly and constantly assessed.

And what should we be doing now?
Perhaps we could ask ourselves, if we haven’t written anything lately, why that might be? Apart from journal writing which – as a solitary act of stream of consciousness written mostly for our own old age – lacks an immediate audience, we are probably not writing because we don’t have an interested or inquisitive audience in own lives, an audience that might awaken a desire to write, to write often and to write to the best of our ability.

Perhaps we should think of something we want badly for our school, something that will have our own voice heard so loudly and clearly that the response will deliver our dreams. Like this email for example, which came to me earlier this year from a parent in a remote school in Queensland. It’s a brilliant piece of persuasive writing, filled with voice. But first let’s ask ourselves if this adult writer knows the formula of persuasive writing that we are now all obliged to teach. I bet she doesn’t even realise that such a sterile formula exists, yet what could be more successful than this?

Dear Mem

This is most likely your first letter from Ero******a – The furthest town from the Sea in Australia. We are far, far, far away from the big smoke in South Western Queensland and we have a very small school with five wonderful big hearted kids.
Like most Queensland children, they have now seen firsthand the effects of flood (the entire town was submerged to varying degrees) and unfortunately they have also seen the effects of drought.

In October, these five children are hoping to travel on camp to Brisbane and visit the Qld Museum, Science Centre, spend a day on one of the Queensland Police Boats etc. To make this possible, we, like all schools, have to fund raise but with only five kids, it makes it a little bit hard and let’s face it, door knocking in an area like this is not really possible unless you have a pilot’s licence. Now, the kids don’t always miss out living out yonder, let’s take the end of year Christmas play, the kids not only get a lead role but five or six ...

A brainstorm was had by the parents and it was decided that a one-off monster raffle would be held. We plan to start the raffle in late April with the raffle rounding up in early June. We have planned various avenues of advertising including email, social media networks and flyers at local venues such as post offices, grocery stores, etc. (These local venues are 106 KM from us ...)

So here is the big ask ... donations ... Anything that could be raffled for example a mobile phone, vouchers, products (large or small), seconds/old stock and non productive staff members ... well you get the drift ... We are in need of a big item to draw in the crowds and I don’t really want to auction my hubby (the local cop, well I do, but have been told it is illegal and then there will be a fight when the winner wants to return him and for some strange reason the house has been packed up and I can’t be located)...

We hope to hear from you soon and should you require further information, please contact Mel on (That is Mel ... on ... not Melon but if you are willing to donate, I am fine with being called just about anything) ****** alternatively, the P and C email address is ******************. Contact can also be made via the Ero*****a State School on ***********.

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider our request and we hope to hear from you soon.

Warmest regards,

The Ero*****a P and C Association
Mel must have loved writing this piece. I certainly loved reading it and was spurred into immediate action on her behalf. Every macro and micro thing that Donald Graves taught us about writers and writing can be found in her hysterical and successful email.

Concluding Comments
This talk, too, though very different, has all the hallmarks of Donald Graves’ teaching. I found it difficult and challenging and took almost a month to write and re-write it. A friend asked me once how it was going and I said, ‘Fine, really – it’s sort of finished, but it’s boring. All I have to do now is make it interesting.’ OMIGOD, I thought: ‘All I have to do now is make it interesting.’ The task seemed enormous.

What I had forgotten, in the creation of this presentation, as I forget almost every time I sit down to write, is that the writing process never changes. I had forgotten that it’s never quick. It’s never easy. I had also forgotten that it never fits comfortably into this text-type formula or that, whether it be, picture books or tub-thumping convention-centre protest pieces about the teaching of genre outside the context of a reality that has meaning for the child. I had forgotten, in my anxiety to get things right, the essential writers’ maxim of: ‘Why would I write if I knew what I were going to say?’ By writing this talk, harking back to the core of Donald Graves’ work, I re-learnt what writing really is, and rediscovered a key insight as to how it might be better taught: by teachers becoming writers themselves.

I could not have written this talk had Donald Graves not touched my writing and teaching life so deeply. But here I am finally, at the end of my talk, having been carried on his wings as I paid grateful homage to his work, hoping that I have made a small difference to my audience’s thinking, your teaching, your students, and your own varied lives. Thank you so much Donald Graves.

Mem Fox is a retired Associate Professor of Literacy Studies (Flinders University, South Australia), and Australia’s most highly regarded picture-book author. Mem has presented at many ALEA Local Council, State and National Conferences over the past three decades. Contact: sfaxfox@bigpond.net.au
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Berry School Book Club: Engaging readers and writers

Jan Turbill, Susan McAuliffe and Brett Sutton

This chapter reports on the work of three educators (Jan, academic partner, and class teachers: Susan & Brett) as they engage Grade 4, 5, 6 children in the two classes to learn to ‘read like writers’ through their involvement in the in-class run Berry School Book Club.

Background

The Berry School Book Club began in 2011. While the initial focus was to extend the reading experiences of a group of avid readers, from the very beginning we incorporated writing experiences. We wanted our young reader/writers to read in a particular way; we wanted them to engage in the texts they read as potential writers and to read knowing that the authors they read can teach them the craft of writing (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2007). We wanted them to learn what it means to ‘read like a writer’ (Smith, 1983).

Many have researched the links between reading and writing, taking up Smith’s (1983) notion of the importance of ‘reading like a writer.’ Abadiano and Turner (2002) argue that there is ‘substantial evidence to suggest that a ‘mentor relationship’ can develop between authors and children’ (p. 1). Certainly Corden’s (2007) extensive research in the UK revealed that a ‘critical evaluation of literature and an examination of literary devices can help children become more reflective writers’ (p. 12).

More recently, Griffith (2010) carried out an ethnographic study, observing a Grade 4 teacher as she helped her students ‘read like writers’ (p. 49). Guided by Smith’s (1983) words, that ‘it can only be through reading that writers learn all the intangibles that they know’ (p. 558), the research focused on ‘What role does the teacher play in helping students learning to read like writers?’ (p. 50). Griffith’s (2010) findings revealed that this Grade 4 teacher:
was a writer. She understood the process and nature of writing and perceived herself to be a writer.

was able to identify the ‘writer’s craft’ and draw this to the attention of her students.

modelled how to use ‘craft writing’ for her students.

gave students opportunities to try the writing technique discussed.

A strong message that emerged from Griffith’s (2010) research is that:

*Teachers who engage in the practice of reading like a writer themselves are better able to help students read like writers. These teachers notice well-crafted writing while reading for pleasure, while reading the writing of their students and while reading aloud to the students in their class (p. 63).*

**The Berry Public School Book Club**

Berry Public School (enrolment 300) is located approximately two hours south of Sydney in the rural and picturesque township of Berry. The town and surrounding communities comprise farming, business and professional families. There is strong community support for the school and its many projects.

Throughout 2012–2013, Jan ran Book Club as a pullout program from 2.00–3.00pm on Mondays in the school library with twenty children who worked in four teams led by one of the four student leaders. Children who were avid passionate readers were specially chosen from Years 4, 5, 6 by their teachers. With parental permission the children came out of class for this special event, organised and facilitated by Jan, with support from teachers.

A key focus for Book Club is to engage all readers in:

- reading, reflecting and critiquing novels, poems and picture books
- exploring the writing devices of the authors they read
- reading like writers and thus improve their writing
- teaching children to get inside the author’s head.

We were particularly guided by Smith’s (1983) assertion that when reading:
The author becomes an unwitting collaborator [teacher] ... Bit by bit, one thing at a time, but enormous amounts of things over the passage of time, the learner learns, through reading like a writer, to write like a writer. (p. 564)

Book Club structure

The one-hour pullout program was broken into three sections. Each had particular purposes and expected outcomes, which were clearly articulated to the team-leaders and their respective teams. Children purchased their own books and were expected to read their book at home or during any spare time during the school day. A set number of chapters were to be read for each week, although children could read the whole book once they had their books. Jan reminded the children at the end of each session, the number of chapters to be read (or reread) for the following week.

Setting the scene (15 mins)

Setting the scene served two main purposes. Purpose one was to provide background to the current literary focus. For instance, when we read White Crane by Sandy Fussell, we visited her website and listened to Sandy sharing how she chose to write the Samurai series. We were even able to organise a computer video conference with Sandy and ask her our own questions during one meeting.

Author background is important for the children to begin to ‘know’ the authors they are reading; not just know their names, but to know who these people are, what their likes and dislikes are. We wanted them to become ‘fellow writers’ to the children.

Purpose two was to share with the children the particular literary focus to be discussed during their team discussion of the book. For example, when an excerpt from Sandy Fussell’s Owl Ninja, (chapter 4, Hell Valley, p. 57), was read aloud, children were asked to close their eyes and listen for the words and phrases Sandy chose that helped us see, hear, feel and smell that Hell Valley. The excerpt was then shown on the Interactive White Board.

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and particular words and phrases were highlighted that ‘caused’ us to see, hear, and smell Hell Valley. The questions for team discussion were then designed to take this focus further.

**Teams at work (30 mins)**

Discussion time: Team-leaders moved with their teams to a table and posed the questions especially designed by Jan for that day’s literary focus. Her role was to move around teams and ‘eavesdrop’ on the discussion. If needed, prompts were given to further guide the children’s discussion.

An example of the questions posed is shown in Table 1.

**Mahtab’s Story** by Libby Gleeson:

Look at p. 45. Libby begins with a short sentence; she then ends the paragraph with lots of questions. These are called rhetorical questions. How do these make you, the reader, feel? Find other examples. Why is Mahtab’s gold bracelet so important in the story? What happens to it? Mahtab’s family’s journey takes them many months. How would you feel if this had been you? Find some sentences that describe how Mahtab felt.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Example of questions to prompt discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power-writing and Sharing: Power-writing is an adaptation of Macrorie’s (1985) ‘writing freely’ (p. 18). After approximately 15 minutes of discussion, we prepared for Power-writing. Children knew they were to write freely on whatever came into their heads once the topic was given. We began with two minutes, quickly moving to four minutes of writing. Topics were usually broad and chosen to provide opportunities for the children to experiment with the literary devices that they discussed earlier. Sometimes there was a choice between several words or phrases. For example, after the discussion of Mahtab’s Story above, the topic choice was: fear, boredom. Instructions were simple; once ready the topic is announced, ‘You have four minutes to write on the topic, “the sea”. Go!’ And the timer began. Silence descended as the children wrote. After four minutes children were told to complete ‘that thought.’ The team-leader then took over and invited individual children to share his or her writing. A child could choose not to share. Once all had shared, the team-leader negotiated with their team to choose the person who would share in the Wrap Up session.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Sharing and Wrap Up (15 mins)**
The children came together as a whole group with Jan in the lead. The team-leaders indicated those chosen to share. We listened and children were asked to comment. Where appropriate Jan (and teachers who came along when possible) identified examples where the writer had used literary devices or structures ‘like we read in Libby’s writing’. Table 2 provides some examples of the children’s writing from the Power-writing sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear is a dreaded devil that creeps up alleyways in the night. It is innocent children having delicate sobs about secret things that terrify them. Fear knows all. Fear can come from anywhere: some from our imagination, some are real. You have to learn to fight fear. Everyone does eventually.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Night</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The dark night fell early on the arena. Something was expected to happen. The birds fell silent and so did the surroundings. All was eerily quiet until a deathly scream shattered the leaves on the trees. Footsteps were pounding the dry earth, coming closer and closer until a figure crashed through the trees. Behind them, shadowed by the night some kind of animals emerged from the shadows into the moonlight.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Examples of children’s writing from the Power-writing sessions**

**Embedding Book Club into the classroom**
After the success of Book Club as a pullout program, we decided to expand the concept into the normal 2014 teaching program, in order to provide not only the avid readers the experience of learning to ‘read like a writer’ but extend the opportunities to the wide range of readers and writers in Grades 4, 5, 6.

We had read the previous Book Club children’s writing, listened to them becoming even more confident readers of a wider range of authors and reviewed the evaluations of their experiences. We were convinced that ‘reading like a writer’ is a concept that does and will engage our children as writers, and encourage them to read with new purposes. In particular we were excited at the increased confidence and desire to read AND write that was clearly evident in the children who had been part of the pullout program.

Thus with the support of the Principal, Bob Willetts, the organisation
began. Sue asked to teach a combined Grades 5, 6 and Brett, Grades 4, 5. They negotiated to teach in adjoining rooms so they could open up the partition and team-teach the morning literacy block each day. Book Club was scheduled to run on Monday mornings between 9.30 and 10.30 a.m. with three Clubs, each of us facilitating a Club. We met during summer holidays before school began to organise the three groups of approximately 18 children: avid readers (Jan), average readers (Brett) and those less likely to have read a complete novel (Sue). Each group had a mix of children from Grades 4, 5, 6.

We knew that Book Club as it had operated would need to be adapted, but we wanted to make sure that the same key philosophy and drivers underpinned Classroom Book Clubs. We agreed that our overall aims were for all children to develop confidence in their ability to read and write, engage in a range of reading and writing activities, learn strategies that could be transferred to new reading and writing tasks and above all, enjoy the experiences and want to share their opinions and writing with their peers.

It was to be quite a learning experience for us too. We knew we would need to reflect, share and learn from each other and the children in order to improve our teaching and facilitating of Classroom Book Clubs. The following questions framed our ongoing reflections and sharing:

- What skills and knowledge do I need in order to ‘teach’ students to ‘read like a writer’?
- How do I choose the most relevant ‘literary devices’ and the language within the text to bring to the attention of the children?
- How do I best phrase the questions that will guide the children in their teams to explore the text closely, identify with the author’s language choices used to build tension, develop characters, describe setting and so on?
- How do I ‘teach’ the children to not only read but to ‘read like writers’?
- And many more …

The pullout program had shed a great deal of light on how Classroom Book Clubs might operate, particularly with respect to the teacher’s role. Jan’s reflections reminded us:
Berry School Book Club: Engaging readers and writers

A critical part of my role as the facilitator of Book Club is to read the chosen book several times. First I read the book for the story line. I then revisit it, reading the chapters ‘as a prospective teacher of writing.’ I make notes as to the literary devices the author has used to develop characters, setting, plot, imagery, tension, fear, humour and so on. Before each meeting, I have to reread the set chapters yet again in order to design activities, and pose questions that will lead the children to begin to explore the design and construction of the text, the linguistic choices made by the author, how such choices allow them to see, smell, feel, hear what is happening in the story. In other words – to read like a teacher of writing – so I can discuss the literary devices used by the author. (Turbill, 2013, p. 35)

Classroom Book Club schedule

Book Club was scheduled for one hour each Monday and part of the two-hour literacy team-teaching block that ran from 9.30–11.30 am each day. We needed to strictly adhere to the scheduled times in Table 3 below so there was silence during Power-writing and so each Club finished at 10.30 am. Each week we had to prepare by rereading the set chapters and developing questions that would enhance team discussion and focus children on the language choices used by the author. There was no time to ‘wing it’. With three Book Clubs in the two rooms, it could be rather noisy, and while this did not seem to affect the children’s progress, some found it ‘too noisy’. In term two Sue took her group to the library. This provided more space as well and decreased noise level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>What Teacher Does</th>
<th>What Children Do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.30–9.40</td>
<td>Setting the Scene</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Send children to their respective Clubs.</td>
<td>Get book and writing journal and move to their Clubs with Jan, Brett or Sue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Share focus or any other points.</td>
<td>Team-leaders collect questions for discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hand out questions to team-leaders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.40–9.55</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Begin team discussion on questions. Teacher roves and eavesdrops. Prompt if needed. Listen to questions read by team-leader. Respond to questions and share ideas and opinions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.55–10.00</td>
<td>Power-writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00–10.05</td>
<td>Organise children to prepare for Power-writing. Give topic. Begin timer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.05–10.20</td>
<td>Roves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.20–10.30</td>
<td>Wrap up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Classroom Book Club schedule and roles

**Team selection and operation**
Following our pullout Book Club model, we decided that within each of the three Book Clubs there would be four teams of five children, one of whom would be the team-leader. While some children had been involved in the pullout Book Club with Jan in previous year(s), for most, working in small teams led by a team-leader was a new experience for the children in both classes. Moreover teams would have a mix of children from both classes and all three grades.

Thus before Book Club officially began, Sue and Brett organised Book Club ‘rehearsals’ in the first three weeks of term one. Children were placed in 12 teams of five. Effective teamwork was explained to the
children, supported with a handout that explained the responsibilities of roles of leader, reporter, timer and observer. Children were grouped in ‘possible teams’ mostly based on their reading abilities. Over the three weeks, ‘possible’ team-leaders were rotated and asked to lead the team in discussion of provided questions once team members had read or viewed different multimodal texts.

These rehearsals gave Sue and Brett the opportunity to observe children, noting those who would make effective leaders when Book Club officially began. During this time children learned to operate in the larger team-teaching environment with two teachers, move to different spaces quickly, keep within the set times, listen to each other, share their opinions and, generally take ownership of their own teams’ effectiveness.

By week four, teams were organised and team-leaders chosen. It was time to begin. Jan introduced Book Club to all children in both classes. She explained the Book Club concept: the hour schedule, the tasks to be carried out, the role of the team-leader and our role as facilitators (Table 3). Jan explained they would be given a novel and be required to read a set number of chapters each week from the provided novel. And while they would discuss the book’s themes and story, they would particularly explore the way the author chose language in order to engage them as readers. They would ‘read like writers’ so they could write like writers.

Children moved off to their respective Book Club groups with their facilitator to a selected space within the two rooms. Novels were handed out with the request to read the first 3–4 chapters for the following week (they could read the whole book, but would need to revisit the set chapters each week). Team-leaders then took their respective teams to tables and the Power-writing books were given out. Finally, Jan led all the teams in the first Power-writing session. Selected children were chosen to read their writing to the whole group.

We had begun. And while it was now week four of the term, this prior background organisation and rehearsals proved to be imperative. Children were now aware of the procedures, their roles and our expectations of them. Over the year they took strong ownership of Book Club, its structure and purpose. If the leaders were absent, another child would step in and know exactly what to do and the team members followed.
Book Club text selection
Many factors needed to be considered in order to select the genre focus for each term. Sue and Brett needed to demonstrate how Book Club experiences fulfilled particular NSW English Syllabus learning outcomes for their students. School events and other happenings (such as Jan being in the US for three weeks in term two) had to be taken into account. And since the school had agreed to purchase bulk sets of books, finances were also a consideration. Taking these factors into account we decided on a novel for terms one and three. In term two, poetry was chosen and term four, picture books. An overview is provided in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Jan’s Book Club</th>
<th>Brett’s Book Club</th>
<th>Sue’s Book Club</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term 1 Novel</td>
<td>Shaolin tiger</td>
<td>White crane</td>
<td>Toppling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sandy Fussell</td>
<td>Sandy Fussell</td>
<td>Sally Murphy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 2 Poetry</td>
<td>Poems included the following</td>
<td>List Poems (Shel Silverstein, Kenn Nesbitt, Bruce Lanksy), Bush Ballads (Banjo Patterson), Rhyming Poems (Roald Dahl)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 3 Novel</td>
<td>The goat who sailed the world</td>
<td>The night they stormed Eureka</td>
<td>Matilda Roald Dahl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackie French</td>
<td>Jackie French</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 4 Picture Books</td>
<td>Sets of five books by following authors and illustrators: Mem Fox, Colin Thompson, Gary Crew, Jackie French &amp; Bruce Whatley, Anthony Browne, Pamela Allan and Libby Gleeson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Overview of Book Club genres chosen for each term

Book Clubs in practice
From the beginning, we were thrilled at the children’s enthusiasm for Book Club. We three facilitators met regularly to share our observations and concerns. It was the first time the teachers and children had participated in a team-teaching environment so children kept a Reflective Journal to record what ‘worked’ or didn’t ‘work’ for them as learners in such a space. From time to time they specifically reflected on their views about Book Club. It was from reading these that we decided to take one Club to the library as many felt it was ‘too noisy’. Otherwise comments were mostly positive. They loved Power-writing and being able to share their writing with each
other. They enjoyed providing their opinions and listening to others. Many commented how it surprised them that there were often differing views.

Not all enjoyed the novels we chose and we know that not all children read the novels from beginning to end. However, most enjoyed the books and being introduced to authors they had not read before. For instance, the Jackie French’s books we chose are both historical novels. *The goat who sailed the world* is one of a series and several children went on to read all the books in that series. Brett found that his group began to get bogged down in details in Jackie French’s historical novel, *The night they stormed Eureka*, so he read excerpts each week to keep the teams engaged and want to read on. Sue also found it necessary to read excerpts with her group. In doing so she was able to highlight Dahl’s use of descriptive language.

We all drew on the respective novels to choose a topic for Power-writing. For instance,

*The goat who sailed the world* is written from both the perspective of a Goat, and a Boy (Isaac). Jan asked her group to use this device and take on the perspective of an animal – a dog, a cat or any other animal. In the following excerpt from Wendy, she uses several devices that she had seen used by Jackie French: the hyphen, and a sentence without an apparent verb.

The Worm

*It’s hard being a worm in the Gold Rush — so much dirt being dug up. So many worms losing their homes, or worse, their lives. Digging down deeper doesn’t work either, we just get caught in a mineshaft ...*

Brett often used sentence starters in Power-writing. For instance, early on in *The night they stormed Eureka*, Sam and the Puddlehams are bailed up by a bushranger while on their way to the goldfields. The bushranger yells, ‘Your money or your life!’ This is the beginning of Sam’s experiences on the diggings and the beginning of the build up of tension for what is to follow. Brett asked his group to start Power-writing with this demand. In the following excerpt from Leanne, she uses short sharp sentences and exclamation to build up the tension and urgency of the situation.
'Your money or your life!'  

_The bushranger chased them up the hill. He was whipping his horse. He yelled, 'Your money or your life'! All three of them hid behind a tree. The bushranger sped past. He lost them from sight. They were safe._

Many of Sue's group of inexperienced readers were also reluctant writers. Sue's primary focus for these children was to encourage them to get their ideas down on paper and simply want to write. Power-writing enabled them to do this without being restricted by the many conventions of language, including handwriting.

When studying _Matilda_, Sue wanted the children to enjoy the magic of Roald Dahl's words. After talking about description and imagery, John attempted his own description of _The Trunchbull_.

_For some reason everyone looked at the Trunchbull ..._  

_The woman's face had turned as pale as a bookpage and her hair stood on end as if it had been zapped with a taser. She collapsed and was down for the count._

Power-writing also encouraged Sue's group to experiment and to take risks with their writing. Amy often wrote in verse. This is her response to the word _Revenge_.

_Revenge_  

_Revenge is sweet_  

_Revenge can't be beat_  

_Revenge is fun_  

_Once it's all done ...._  

_Revenge is punishment!_

When we worked with poetry in term two, we began with List Poems. We read these to our group and gave them copies to read aloud to each other. Questions for discussion focused on rhyme and rhythm, alliteration, similes and other poetic devices. We were amazed at the list poems that the children then produced in five minutes. Anna wrote,
On my way to school
On my way to school
I see a hustle, a bustle and big swimming pool
A train, a car, a bus and a plane,
A crab, a kebab, a crane and a train,
A pub, some drugs and tennis racquet
A bag, a nag and a big warm jacket
On my way to school I see
A building, some books and a big bumble bee.

Using picture books in term four was a challenge. How were we going to have some 58 children reading and examining picture books? After a great deal of discussion, we decided to focus on five authors of picture books, some who write for young children, others for older readers; some who are author and illustrator and those whose books have various illustrators. For example, Mem Fox writes for young children and her books are illustrated by different people, whereas Anthony Browne writes and illustrates picture books for older readers. We gathered up five books from each of the five authors and placed these sets in respective boxes. Book Club ran only five weeks in term four so we rotated the authors around the groups (See Table 5). For example in week four, Jan’s group had Gary Crew’s books. She began by reading Watertower to the four teams, particularly drawing attention to the possible meanings that the illustrations provided. The team-leaders then chose one of the Gary Crew books in the box and the team either went to a table or remained seated around the book on the floor. Someone in the team was chosen to read the text as all listened and viewed the illustrations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Jan’s Book Club</th>
<th>Brett’s Book Club</th>
<th>Sue’s Book Club</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Gary Crew</td>
<td>Jackie French &amp; Bruce Whatley</td>
<td>Mem Fox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Anthony Browne</td>
<td>Gary Crew</td>
<td>Colin Thompson</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mem Fox</td>
<td>Colin Thompson</td>
<td>Anthony Browne</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Colin Thompson</td>
<td>Mem Fox</td>
<td>Jackie French &amp; Bruce Whatley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Jackie French &amp; Bruce Whatley</td>
<td>Anthony Browne</td>
<td>Gary Crew</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Picture book rotation
Generic questions were designed to lead discussion each week.

- What is the book about? Who is the author? Who is the illustrator?
- What age group is the book aimed at? How do you know?
- What story are the words telling you?
- What story are the illustrations telling you?
- Are they the same or different? Talk about this.

Reflections and final comments
Throughout the year we gathered data as to the success of bringing Book Club into two classrooms across three grades. We have our reflective notes, photos and video clips, children's writing, children's reflective journal entries and survey data. When all these are examined, it is very clear that our initial broad aims were achieved. All children read and wrote and enjoyed doing so. There is strong evidence that they began to understand what it means to 'read like a writer'. They surprised themselves and us with many of the Power-writer pieces in which they used the many writing devices and language choices, the author they were reading had used. They all read (or almost read) at least one novel, wrote poetry and explored the relationship between language and visual images in picture books. In the final survey almost all children indicated they were more confident writers and enjoyed writing. And they learned to operate effectively in teams led by a student-team-leader. There is still more to try and as we move into 2015 we will continue to develop and strengthen our Berry Classroom Book Clubs.

There were so many magic moments that we could share. Here are just a few.

During term four when we were studying picture books Brett was amazed to see the way the children behaved when sharing the books. First the team-leader read the book to the team without allowing them to see the pictures, as one of the things we had discussed about picture books was the power of the illustrations and how much of the story they may tell that wasn’t included in the written text. Each team listened intently as the story was read. However, the children weren’t completely satisfied by the reading alone. On the second reading, without exception, each team huddled around their leader so they could enjoy the story and the pictures. It was
incredible to see a group of five Grade 6 boys gathered around *Piggybook* by Anthony Browne totally engrossed in the story and animatedly discussing the illustrations and their intended meaning. This was indeed powerful evidence of the success of Book Club. The children were reading like writers because they were aware of the messages the author was sending via the illustrations, which was adding to their enjoyment of the book at a much deeper level.

Sue was likewise delighted with the literacy learning of her inexperienced readers. Not only were they more confident when tackling new material, their verbal responses were often equal to those of their more articulate peers. One child who experiences great difficulty in both reading and writing was one of the most perceptive when unlocking multi-layered picture books. His ideas were both original and insightful. Furthermore, none of the children was intimidated by the more complex language they experienced. They supported each other and unlocked unknown words as a team. When writing, everyone was willing to produce something and to share this with the group. They were happy to give and to receive feedback on their efforts.

The atmosphere that was established early in the year had unlocked a lot of the children as writers. They now perceived themselves as writers, confident to write, share their ideas, listen to, and comment constructively about the writing of others. This is evident in the reflections below from just a few of the children.

*I liked Book Club because of the leaders. They were really nice and helped us when we were stuck on a question. I also loved Power-writing. I always had good ideas. Sean had great ideas as well. He always had funny stories.*

Chris²

*I love doing Power-writing since there are so many things to write about.*

David

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² Pseudonyms are used for all children’s names
Book Club is awesome. I just love it, especially Power-writing. When I got up to read my story to everyone, I was so scared, but when I got down [from the small dais in the room] I wanted to do it again and again.

Bianca

I’ve learnt how to use short sharp sentences to create tension and that writing from different perspectives makes my writing more interesting.

Ziggy

Where to next?
Brett and Sue would like to see Book Club continue in their classrooms. In 2015 they are continuing their team-teaching approach with plans to extend the time. Both classes will be Grades 5/6 and a number of children will have already experienced Book Club. They want to dedicate a Book Club ‘reading time’ in class for children to read the prescribed novel. This will also allow an opportunity to assist some children with their reading, understanding and enjoyment of their novels. They are excited about the further development of children as writers as they build on the knowledge they now have. With continued support from Jan, they want to extend their knowledge of writers’ techniques in order to further guide the children. They hope to launch Book Club with a day-long creative writing workshop. They plan to provide further time for children to choose a ‘best’ piece from Power-writing and develop it to publication, possibly using technology such as Pebblepad. This would ensure more accurate record keeping for both children and teachers.

So far it has been a successful and exciting learning journey for us all, with certainly more to come.

References

3 The school plans to trial Pebblepad as an e-portfolio to be used by teachers and children (http://www.pebblepad.co.uk/l/pebblevision.aspx).
Berry School Book Club: Engaging readers and writers


**Children’s books**


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This chapter explores whether or not common traditional monolingual and monomodal approaches to teaching English are sufficient for EAL/D learners. Multimodal teaching strategies reflect the human predilection to learn through multiple semiotic systems, whilst multilingual approaches acknowledge and utilise the substantial repertoire of linguistic skills that EAL/D learners bring to the task of learning to write in English.

Introduction

Although digital and visual literacies are increasingly prevalent in our everyday lived experiences, traditional print literacy remains highly valued in schools. The National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, Teaching Reading Report, (DEST, 2005), the public reporting of national standardised literacy tests (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, (ACARA), 2012) and a ‘back to basics’ curriculum review (Australian Government, 2014) are all evidence that traditional print literacy occupies a privileged status in schools in Australia and will probably do so for the foreseeable future. Traditional literacy practices are not replaced by alternative literacies, but rather co-opted into service in more multimodal communicative texts (Unsworth, 2002). Thus, the challenge is to support traditional literacy whilst acknowledging the rapid technological changes that are changing our understanding of how literacy operates in the real world (Ajayi, 2010; Jacobs, 2012).

Achievement at school is predominantly measured through students’ writing. National and international benchmark testing in traditional print literacy indicates a significantly long tail of learners in Australia

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1 This chapter has been formally refereed through a blind review process.
who do not meet basic benchmarks in writing (Thomson, De Bortoli & Buckley, 2013; Thomson, De Bortoli, Nicholas, Hillman & Buckley, 2010). A substantial proportion of these learners speak English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) (Creagh, 2014; Demie, 2013). This chapter focuses on these EAL/D learners, and considers the ways in which they can be supported in learning to write in English. I begin with a description of EAL/D learners, their unique learning biographies and why the strategies we use with monolingual speakers of English are insufficient for EAL/D learners. I then provide two instructional approaches to support EAL/D learners into the academic writing of school. These approaches, which are situated within a multiliteracies framework, draw upon two resources these learners already possess but which are rarely activated in classrooms – their multilingual and multimodal repertoires. From these repertoires I focus most particularly on the use of students’ mother tongues in learning English, and the use of the visual mode, via their drawings, to support the development of their writing skills in English.

Who are EAL/D learners?

In Australia the term English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) is applied to a specialised field of education concerned with teaching English to learners who do not have English as their first language and who require support with the English language in order to participate effectively in the school curriculum (ACARA, 2012). As such, not all learners who speak other languages or dialects are EAL/D learners, because they may already be proficient users of English. Learners are identified as ‘EAL/D’ until they reach full proficiency in English and are able to participate effectively and independently in the school curriculum. This can range from 5 – 10 years, depending upon their previous life and school experiences (Collier, 1995; Demie, 2013). The most accurate variables for identifying EAL/D learners and predicting required supports are: visa category, length of time in Australian schools, length of time in mother tongue schools, levels of first language print literacy and education levels of parents (Creagh, 2014).

Until recent years this field was commonly known as English as a Second Language (ESL). However the new nomenclature recognises many of these learners already speak two or more languages, so English is not
their ‘second’ language. It also includes the many Aboriginal students who speak a dialect of English, Aboriginal English, which has a fundamentally different linguistic structure to the Standard Australian English taught in schools (Malcolm & Truscott, 2012; Truscott, forthcoming). EAL/D learners first become proficient in social English language, but success at school is achieved through proficiency in academic English language. The difference between social and academic proficiency is significant (Cummins, 2000). Academic writing, in particular, comes to play an important role in a learner’s success at school. It is through this writing that learners are requested to demonstrate their understanding of learned concepts and share their understandings of those concepts. It is therefore important to identify ways in which children can be successful writers of academic school English.

EAL/D learners are multilingual learners. Multilingualism is most usually defined as the regular use of more than one language in day-to-day living (Cenoz, 2013). Care must be taken not to define EAL/D learners as non English speaking, as often this is interpreted in practice as equating to ‘non language’ speaking. This conflation of ‘English’ with ‘language’ reflects a broader monolingual mindset (Clyne, 2005) amongst teachers, schools and curricula where learning is framed by the unquestioned assumption that ‘language’ is ‘English’, and vice versa. Truscott (2015 p. 29) describes this as submerging EAL/D students in deficit discourses, and as a consequence these learners’ multiple linguistic assets are also rendered invisible (Adoniou, forthcoming; Allard, Mortimer, Gallo, Link & Wortham, 2014; Smolin & Lawless, 2010).

The difference between first language instruction and additional language instruction

Strategies used for the literacy instruction of monolingual English speaking students are, in themselves, not sufficient for EAL/D students (de Jong & Harper, 2005). They require different pedagogies because learning an additional language is not the same as learning your first language. The EAL/D learner is both advantaged by the existing metalinguistic knowledge they bring to the task of learning English which native speakers don’t, and disadvantaged by the headstart on English language learning the
native speaker has. Native speakers begin to develop their intuition around what sounds right, grammatically and phonologically, from their earliest months of life (Kuhl, 2011). Therefore EAL/D students require more explicit instruction than may be considered necessary for native speaking English students, for example, understanding what is possible in English syntax, or building their vocabularies in English.

The EAL/D learner has additional cognitive resources that they can bring to the language learning task (Higby, Jungna & Obler, 2013) because they have already developed a range of metalinguistic skills in the learning of their mother tongue. Tapping into these resources increases the efficacy of learning an additional language. When we ignore the existing language resources of these students, we risk positioning them instead as learners who do not have English, and therefore do not have ‘language resources’ (Allard et al., 2014). As a result, we use teaching strategies that are not cognisant of the linguistic resources of our multilingual students and favour instead monolingual instructional practices (Coleman, 2012). These monolingual instructional practices are typically the remedial interventions developed for monolingual students who have cognitive dysfunctions that inhibit their capacity to process language. These approaches are often at the core of back to basics approaches; see, for example, the Direct Instruction roll out in Indigenous communities and the moves to implement this approach across the country (Walker, 2014). However, these are inappropriate interventions for students who do not have language processing difficulties – the vast majority of bi and multilingual learners, and indeed, the vast majority of monolingual learners. The cognitive challenges of the monolingual English speaker with a learning difficulty are not the challenges faced by a multilingual speaker learning English (Allard, Mortimer, Gallo, Link & Wortham, 2014).

There also persists a belief amongst many teachers that a learner’s first language is of no significance to the learning of English, and that it may be a hindrance (Coleman, 2012; Naidoo et al., 2014). In contrast, educational linguists have argued that not using the children’s home language to teach English contributes to educational disadvantage (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009). Certainly we know that when the home language is not supported
in some way in the school context there is a rapid loss of the home language (Cummins et.al., 2005; Allard et al., 2014; Kim & Pyun, 2014). If the mother tongue is allowed to decline, family and community relationships are jeopardised as communication breakdowns become more likely. Research also indicates that EAL/D learners’ own sense of identity becomes confused, further affecting their learning in the school environment (Kibler, Salerno & Hardigree, 2014).

The multiliteracies framework as a means for describing effective writing instruction for EAL/D learners

In 1994 a group of academics met to consider why it was that there remain inequities in educational success. The group, which became known as the New London Group (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000), reflected upon existing understandings around multimodality and multiculturalism, and considered rapidly developing technologies. They developed the notion of ‘multiliteracies’ as a new organiser for thinking about what needs to be taught in schools in order to give all students equitable access to learning, but also prepare them for the realities of a changing world. To meet this challenge, Cope and Kalantzis (2000) offered their multiliteracies framework as both an ‘epistemology and a pedagogy of pluralism’ (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000, p. 130). A key aim of this praxis framework is to make active and meaningful use of the cultural, linguistic and multimodal resources of students.

The ‘multi’ within ‘multiliteracies’ represents two fundamental components of the framework. The first is a multiplicity of modes for communication, i.e. a recognition of the multiple symbol systems such as linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial and multimodal. The second ‘multi’ component of multiliteracies is the multiple cultural and linguistic resources that exist within groups and between groups (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). As such, the multiliteracies vision describes not only a place for multilingual students, but in fact it determines that such students should be the norm – a true reflection of a multilingual, multiliterate and multicultural world. As Cope and Kalantzis observe in their 2009 review of the original multiliteracies manifesto, ‘Diversity, in fact, has become a paradoxical universal’ (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009).
Multimodality
The New London Group was particularly interested in the multiple ways in which we make sense of the world. They described this multimodality through the following symbol systems: linguistic (written and oral) visual, gestural, tactile, audio and spatial (Cope & Kalantzis 2000) – each with equal potentials for making and sharing ideas with others. The symbol systems also operate in collaboration with one another, which they describe as an overarching mode – described as multimodality in their early work (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) and more latterly described as ‘synaesthesia’ (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 179). This semiotic collaboration is also described as intersemiosis (Kress, 1997), or what Dyson terms ‘symbol weaving’ (Dyson, 1990, 1991, 1992). Dyson describes children as natural symbol weavers. However, schools increasingly show tendencies to treat symbol systems as independent rather than naturally interrelated (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Moreover, they privilege the linguistic symbol system over others (Gardner, 1993; Greenaway, 2002; Wright, 2002). This preference for the linguistic is further narrowed by an almost exclusive focus on English language. As a consequence, schools in Australia are essentially logocentric, monolingual and monomodal institutions, in stark contrast to the multimodal and multilingual lived experiences of the students, and the multilingual, multiliterate future described by the New London Group.

The intersemiosis between drawing and writing
Of the symbol systems, the visual and linguistic symbol systems are identified as particularly significant in the development of literacy (Hubbard, 1989; Olson, 1992; Vygotsky, 1962). Drawing and writing are graphic manifestations of the visual and linguistic systems. Both inform each other in a dialogic process (Vygotsky, 1962). Writing development is strengthened when supported by drawing (Caldwell & Moore, 1991; McConnell, 1993; Adoniou, 2013).

Multiple studies over the decades have described the mutually beneficial intersemiosis or parallel synaesthesia between writing and drawing. Research has found that drawing is an effective preplanning strategy for writing, allowing for easier revision and expansion of ideas (Brooks, 2005; Caldwell & Moore, 1991; Hubbard, 1989). Drawings help
children make their ideas visible and act as ‘a common point of reference that can be shared amongst others’ (Brooks, 2004, p. 47). This provides a concrete artefact that allows opportunities for ‘discussion, reflection, reconstruction and comparison’ (Brooks, 2004, p. 49). Drawing is an overt and immediately evident representation of a shared experience and this can provide the teacher with insight into the unseen inner processes of the learner’s thinking (Coufal & Coufal, 2002), and this is particularly useful when the learner does not have communicative proficiency in the English language. Brooks (2005) also notes that the permanency of drawing allows engagement with its content to happen over time, offering learners with less oral fluency (like EAL/D learners) ‘a viable mediating role for communication, meaning and problem-solving’ (Brooks, 2005, p. 82).

Despite these benefits, drawing disappears from most classroom practice, in general, and as an integrated activity with writing development after the early childhood years (Anning, 1997; Coates, 2002). There is a perception amongst practitioners that the disappearance of drawings from children’s writing is a positive event, or conversely that the persistence of drawings at writing time is a negative event (Bridge, 1985; Millard & Marsh, 2001).

Children learn new symbol systems from the security of old ones, therefore accessing new symbol systems through systems the children already have control over and experience with is a useful strategy (Dyson, 1992). Suhor (1994) in Vincent (Vincent, 2002) claims that by moving from one symbol system to another, learners are not merely making a choice to communicate with different tools, but that they are also value-adding to their knowledge systems. They are deepening their understandings of concepts through revisiting them via different symbol systems – intersemiosis – or what McLoughlin and Krakowski (2001) refer to as cognitive pluralism.

**Multilingualism**

A corollary to this intersemiosis is the process of inter-linguistic transfer, which describes how different languages support one another. We could describe this as ‘intrasemiosis’, as this ‘translanguaging’ (Creese & Blackledge, 2010) occurs within the one semiotic mode – the linguistic. In 2000, Cummins recorded 150 studies over 40 years confirming the
English language learners, multimodality, multilingualism and writing

mutual reinforcing benefits that learning one language has on the other (Cummins, 2000). Many more have been reported in the intervening years (Myers, 2014) with the conclusion, namely that English is learned more efficiently as an additional language when the first language is maintained (Kiernan, 2011).

When we learn a new language we are constantly making connections with the languages we already know. This means children’s first languages are an aid to learning English. As competent language users, EAL/D learners already have some cognitive advantages over monolingual learners. Their brains are more flexible, more creative, and better at problem solving (Higby et. al., 2013). Importantly, they have highly developed metalinguistic awareness (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009), so when they are encouraged to use their home language knowledge, they are able to think, talk and reflect on how languages work (Cummins, 2000).

Therefore, an important part of supporting EAL/D learners in English is supporting their home languages as well. However, the supporting of home and community languages has not been a feature of schooling in Australia. Despite its multilingual status – over 250 languages are spoken in homes around the country (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012), Australia remains institutionally monolingual (Adoniou, forthcoming).

Whilst Australia’s schools and educational bureaucrats have always shown some commitment to the study of languages, these have been ‘foreign’ languages rather than community languages. Thus not all multilingualism is valued equally (Ellis et al., 2010). Some forms are ‘strong and socially additive’ (Lo Bianco, 2010) for example, the student who studies and achieves proficiency in a foreign language, whilst other forms are ‘fragile, unstable and fading’ (Lo Bianco, 2010, p. 23). Home languages fall into the latter category, essentially because they fail to find a use or recognition in the wider society, particularly education, and hence, are not valued (Hatoss, 2005). It is not just the EAL/D learner who loses when their multilingual resources are not utilised and nurtured in the school, their monolingual peers and the wider society lose as well. We lose the opportunity for a positive societal transformation that pluralism allows (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000, p. 124).
What might multilingual multimodal teaching practice look like?
As described earlier, ‘good teaching’ for monolingual English speaking students is not sufficient for EAL/D learners. Neither is mainstream curriculum, in and of itself, sufficient for EAL/D learners. In any school context there are at least two semiotic histories at counter-play, the students’ personal semiotic profiles and capacities, and the school’s institutionalised semiotic profiles and capacities. The role of the teacher must be to construct an environment that makes use of children’s personal semiotic repertoires to access the semiotic profiles enshrined in schools. In this section I describe the ways in which teachers can use drawings and home languages as ways into the privileged school semiosis of academic writing.

Drawings
As recounted earlier, drawing benefits all learners, but is particularly supportive of EAL/D learners. Drawing is therefore an important ‘player’ in a repertoire of teaching strategies for writing. It not only achieves improvements in writing but gives the children experiences with different meaning modes and grows their understanding of the affordances each system has (Edwards & Willis, 2000). Drawing represents a parallel mode to writing, providing a useful rehearsal space for writing. This parallelism between the modes can be seen in Figure 1, a drawing done by a Year 4 newly arrived EAL/D student, as a visual representation of how to cook pancakes. The drawing is part of data collected for a study examining the ways in which drawings may support the development of writing in EAL/D students (Adoniou, 2013). The study revealed that drawing before writing improved the students’ writing at the,

- text level – their writing was more coherently structured
- sentence level – more use of expanded noun phrases, more use of imperative sentence structures typical of procedural texts
- word level – more use of technical and specific vocabulary.
You don’t need to be an art teacher to promote EAL/D children’s use of the visual in the classroom. A classroom that places equal emphasis on the different semiotic systems might look like:

- students drawing routinely within different curriculum areas. For example drawing the science experiment prior to writing the report. A focus on drawing as process rather than product will bring about a change of thinking about the purpose of drawing in the classroom.
- plenty of drawing tools available – including fine point markers for detailed work, a wide range of colours to allow learners to adequately represent their content, and blank paper of different sizes

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2 This figure is used with permission and ethical clearance. It was collected as data for a MEd (Hons) thesis.
• lots of ‘source’ material – for example, images of the topics under study, photos of the recent excursion etc. This allows EAL/D learners to reference these images as they produce their own drawings.

A classroom that places equal emphasis on the different semiotic systems might sound like:

• everyone can draw. There are no student laments of ‘I can’t draw’ accompanied by a teacher’s sympathetic agreement ‘Neither can I’. Just as all children can write, all children can draw. The ‘I can’t draw’ stage can be overcome with a different attitude around the purpose of drawings (Flannery & Watson, 1991).
• teachers talking to learners about their drawings and ‘the focus of the discussion around drawing should be about the meaning and information it contains, rather than on drawings skills and aesthetics’ (Brooks, 2004, p. 49)
• teachers encouraging drawing during writing lessons, rather than offering it as reward for finishing writing.

A classroom that places equal emphasis on the different semiotic systems might feel like:

• drawing is as important to learning as any other part of the curriculum. If teachers don’t value drawing, children won’t value it either.

Home languages
Teacher attitudes to home languages reflect general attitudes towards drawing. Home languages are often seen as having no role in the teaching of writing in English, or perhaps an ‘instrumental’ role (Coleman, 2012, p. 18) as a crutch to be removed as soon as possible. Unfortunately this benign ignorance of learners’ home languages is quickly metabolised by EAL/D learners who ‘understand very quickly that the school is an English-only zone and they often internalise ambivalence and even shame in relation to their linguistic and cultural heritage’ (Cummins, 2005, p. 590).

One doesn’t need to be a bilingual teacher, or speak the languages of
the students, to promote children’s home language in the classroom. A bilingual friendly classroom values and incorporates the skills of all its learners. The ACT Education and Training Directorate (2015) provides the following advice to teachers in a series of fact sheets for the teaching of EAL/D learners.

A bilingual friendly classroom might look like:

• displays of books in different languages, all the time, and not just once a year for special events
• examples of print in the students’ languages around the room e.g. labels for classroom objects, greetings
• learning activities that activate the students’ home languages e.g. in early childhood classrooms, sending home a soft toy who speaks and writes all the languages of the world, and brings back letters from the children’s homes in the languages of the children.

A bilingual friendly classroom might sound like:

• students speaking other languages and teaching other students new words
• parents and other community members visiting and using their languages e.g. making audio recordings of bilingual books to support literacy in other languages
• teachers actively interested in the languages of their children e.g. making the child the expert and asking ‘How do you say this in your language?’

A bilingual friendly classroom might feel like:

• it is safe to be yourself and to share your language and your culture
• all the students have positive attitudes towards learning other languages, not just the EAL/D learners.

Teacher professional learning
The ‘good teaching is good for everyone’ discourse can lead school leaders to mistakenly believe they have no need for EAL/D specialist teachers and programs (de Jong & Harper, 2005). As a consequence we lose valuable teacher expertise in our schools, and reduce learning opportunities for
EAL/D learners. Teacher professional knowledge, and teacher attitudes towards their EAL/D learners are crucial to their achievement (Allard et al., 2014). Any classroom ‘pick up’ of the strategies recommended in this chapter requires teachers to i) more deeply understand the symbiotic relationships between symbol systems in order not to see drawing as a decorative extra, and ii) understand the fundamental differences between first and additional language acquisition in order to utilise students’ home languages and not see them as irrelevant or a hindrance. Currently, whilst teachers recognise the importance of transformative practices for EAL/D learners, they are less equipped to implement appropriate teaching strategies (Adoniou, 2014; Ajayi, 2010).

This teacher knowledge is also crucial in helping teachers resist reductionist educational policies focused on homogeneity rather than diversity. When first released, the Australian Curriculum described intercultural understanding as a general capability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) as a cross curriculum perspective. And the Arts were included as a F-10 mandatory content area. A government review of the curriculum (Australian Government, 2014), recommended the removal of intercultural understanding and ATSI as cross curriculum threads. It was recommended instead that cultural knowledge and ATSI be studied as content within the curriculum in specific year levels. When treated this way, diversity becomes a study of ‘others’ rather than a reflection of ‘us’. Similarly the Arts were recommended for removal altogether from early years curriculum, reducing the opportunity for the intersemiosis so compellingly described by researchers (e.g. Dyson, 1990; Gray, 2006; Macken-Horarik & Adoniou, 2008) as crucial for strengthening conceptual understandings in learners.

Conclusion
The prevalence of standardised testing of traditional English literacy skills across all states and territories in Australia, and a persistent call for back to basics approaches to teaching, indicates reductionists are currently winning the curriculum battle. This is to the very great disadvantage of all learners, and especially EAL/D learners, who are denied important learning resources as a consequence.
The multiliteracies framework developed by the New London Group (New London Group, 1996) and further developed after implementation in classrooms around the globe (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009) reminds us that students’ learning resources include both multiple semiotic modes and encompasses multiple linguistic modes. Cope & Kalantzis (2009) observe that the parallelism between modes ‘means that the starting point for meaning in one mode may be a way of extending one’s representational repertoire by shifting from favoured modes to less comfortable ones’ (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, p. 180).

However this parallelism is not always recognised or utilised in classrooms. Instead, the disappearance of drawing is too often seen as a positive development in the writing process. It is celebrated as an indication that the writer is ready to ‘move on’ to serious writing and no longer requiring the crutch of the visual. Similarly, the disappearance of the home language is often celebrated, and the use of English only in the classroom is seen as a marker of achievement. However, both these events are markers of loss – loss of valuable resources. They are not just intrinsically valuable for their own worth, but they are resources that would strengthen the very skill they have been sacrificed for – English language proficiency. In order to redress this situation, mainstream teachers need more knowledge about the ways semiotic systems work together for mutual benefit. This chapter has sought to make some contribution to this knowledge, and to describe teaching practices that utilise EAL/D learners’ capacities to work with multiple semiotic systems, in particular their drawings and their home languages.

References


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