“I want to be the first whisper first heard by a deaf man”

Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference
Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh
3 - 6 September 2008

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Abstract

The NAWE Writing Together project sets out to research the effectiveness of ‘writers-in-residence’ working in schools. The project involves the placement of writers in nine schools (four primary and five secondary) over nine academic terms across three English regions (North, Midlands and South) between September 2006 and July 2009.

The project aims to assess how encounters of writers by pupils and teachers in schools enhance the quality of writing and literacy of those teachers and pupils; whether existing models of arts education intervention relate to the development and implementation of an effective Writer in Residence engagement or whether there are alternative models emerging which are more appropriate for the specific field of writers in schools; to what extent will teachers be able to develop their own - and children’s - expertise once ‘the writers have left the building’; how the craft and creativity of writers is enhanced as a result of their relationship with the host schools and the possible effects on future policy.

This paper will provide the initial findings of the project which will be at the start of its third year in September 2008. Data has been collected through researcher observations, pupil responses, teacher responses, writer responses and artefact analysis. Themes which have arisen over this time include: the characteristics of effective writer in residence and teacher relationships; the roles teachers and writers perform when they are working together in the classroom; the awareness of writers’ own pedagogical styles; the importance for writers to be aware of current policy developments in education; the value of children working in settings other than schools (SOTTS); the features of children’s engagement in classrooms with writers; and how writers / teachers respond to the ‘I want to be the first whisper first heard by a deaf man’ moment; the moment when a child offers an insightful, considered and arresting response which surprises and temporarily stuns the adults in the room.

Introduction: they writted loads and loads!

Sean, a big Scouse presence appears as if by magic on the floor of an imposing, oaken school library dressed in the hybrid clothing of part teacher gown, part trainer top, part designer trousers and complete black and white brogues. The seats and tables are shoved back to the walls, giving him the floor space which he takes to like a duck to proverbial, slurping out of his bottle of noisy water, telling me about the fecundity of the group’s work from the previous week. An awkward gaggle of angular faces, beaks and folded arms look on and I’m reminded that despite all the experience in the world, you never know what you’re going to face: all the preparation, all the theory, all the lesson plans, all the tricks and tips and turn ons is fine but… in the end…. you’ve got a line of expectations, gazes, hopes, resentments, gaps, blank minds, active minds fidgeting just waiting for you, for someone, for something to switch them on….

He confides in the assembled teenagers that “this is a special day kid - chrimbo next week” and follows up with an impromptu solo improvisation about his own experiences of education and the resistances he encountered: “what are you going to night school for, you poof?” before launching into the session proper by reading some of his own poetry, a love poem about a boy and girl on Wigan Pier.

**Boy and a Girl on Wigan Pier**

He french kisses with his pelvis, young loves on the street to be made;
Whispers naughty in her ear, his tongue’s a flashing blade.
Smells soap inside her hair slide, the sweet perfume of her tan,
Thinks his aftershave is working, wants to prove that he’s a man.
But his nervous fingers, thicker than clothes pegs fumble at
His zip her red-faced bra and his confidence begins to crumble
And he feels a clown. Is this what it’s all about?
Her strap he can’t undo and she has to help him out. And
While the rhythm of the night grinds thick inside their veins
The sky greys with chimneys and he swears it’s gonna rain.
And if he can walk her to the corner he’ll swear to never tell
So he holds her hand, but won’t admit it was his first time as well.

And when they leave their teens and faded jeans, as
The rhythm that grinds thick is the night. It’s goodbye
To fashion, hot nights of passion thrills and the odd love bite.
For he grows a moustache, she has a baby
And a house and a job is only a maybe,
As the French kisses ceases, he goes to pieces and refuses to
Make love anymore.
Shot-gunned at 18, desperate at 19 his life’s a bloody bore.
Now he smells failure in his future, the stench of senile youth.
Grown old before his prime never got to know the truth.
But, his nervous fingers, thicker than clothes pegs despair
From the rusted rail as he jumps from the pier;
Through the night; to the ground, his only sound
An apologetic shout. Is this what it’s all about?
And as the blood leaves his brain she looks
Out the back door; and she swears it’s gonna rain.

(Caffrey, 1996)
He’s then straight into a flip chart exercise, the rule being to complete the phrase, ‘I want to be the first…’

“I want to be the first whisper first heard by a deaf man.”

Momentarily, we’re all stunned. But we move on and gloss over. How do we acknowledge, consider and value that moment produced by a young lad who looks as bemused as his contribution as those of us who have just registered it? A huge question but not followed through: have we forgotten how to follow through? For all the talk about personalised learning in the classroom, can we ever have the wherewithal to respond to moments of beauty that don’t entail ticking off an outcome within the confines of a cell in an excel spreadsheet?

**A lorra lorra reading**

The above notes stem from an observation of a poet, Terry Caffrey, at work in Foxglove College in Leek in December 2006. Whilst the sight of a writer of whatever genre working in a school is not particularly new, this observation of Terry is part of a relatively innovative programme developed by NAWE- the National Association for Writers in Education - entitled Writing Together.

*Writing Together* is the NAWE writers in schools research project which is exploring the effectiveness of writers working in nine schools through a three year programme funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the QCA. Despite the wealth of informal feedback regarding the success of writers’ residencies, it has become clear over the years that potential funders are reluctant to commit significant financial support without hard evidence of the differences being made by those residencies.

Consequently, *Writing Together* has been set the (perhaps unenviable) task of attempting to conclusively prove that the employment of writers in schools has a direct impact on children’s attainment, achievement, attitude to education and perhaps even their future marriage prospects given our ambitious, promiscuous times.

The project builds on existing research, (Robinson, 1982; Harries, 1984; Morley and Mortimer, 1991; Manser, 1995; Dooley, 1996; Sharp and Dust, 1997; Oddie and Allen, 1998 and Jones and Lockwood, 1998). Most recently, the Arts Council England report, *Writers in Schools* *(Wade and Moore, 2001)* described a one-year pilot study of the effectiveness of writers in schools and which concluded with a recommendation that a three-year, longitudinal and cross-sectional evaluation that studied pupil achievement over the long term and provided evidence from other age groups should be carried out. This project is thus one obvious - if not necessarily immediate - response to that recommendation.

However, this work has many recent companions (Griffiths and Woolf, 2008; Harland, 2005; Hall and Thomson, 2007; Ledgard, 2003; Owen, 2008; Pringle, 2002 and Galton, 2008) which attest to the characteristics and benefits of writers (and artists in general) working together with educators in classrooms - whether these be around the formal arrangements of desks, chairs, whiteboards and flip charts or the less predictable spaces of local beach, regional atomic power station or National Trust House. There are also many manuals, guidebooks and other publications which offer advice on encouraging, setting up, managing and evaluating the
interactions between writers and schools (Fincham, 1995; Sharp and Dust, 1997; Armitage, 2003; Arts Council England, 2006; Coe and Sprackland, 2005).

The Writing Together research programme is one more means of telling the old stories of writers working with children and teachers to the future audiences of very young politicians and academics albeit with its focus on how the pedagogies of writers working in schools can make a difference to children’s writing. The aim of the programme is to address three main research questions:

* Do sustained residencies of writers in primary and secondary schools enhance the quality of writing and literacy of pupils?

* If so, what are the conditions which stimulate or prevent enhanced writing and literacy?

* How is this enhancement demonstrated in pupils attainment, raised educational standards and attitudes to writing?

This project involves the placement of writers by the literature development organisation, NAWE, in nine schools (four primary and five secondary) over nine academic terms across three English regions (North, Midlands and South) between September 2006 and July 2009. Brief, inadequate identifiers of each school are presented below in Table 1:

**Table 1: Brief Details of Writing Together Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>No. on role</th>
<th>Pupil cohort involved</th>
<th>% FSM</th>
<th>% SEN stemented and on register</th>
<th>KS2 Literacy results or KS3 English SATs as appropriate at onset of project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ash Primary, Market Harborough</td>
<td>73 dfes05</td>
<td>20 ks2 56</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackthorn Infant and Junior, London</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>Yr4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>L4+ 89% L5+ 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cypress Primary, York</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>Yr 4 and 5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>L4+ 94% L5 + 75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elm Tree Primary, Penzance</td>
<td>Yr 3 and 4; withdrew after year 1 (being replaced by new school for year 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foxglove College, Leek</td>
<td>915</td>
<td>Yr 9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>L5+ 80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorn Secondary, Wallasey</td>
<td>1014</td>
<td>Yr 7 and 8 20 and partner primary schools, yr 5 and 6</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>L5+ 49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juniper Secondary (boys), Liverpool</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>KS3</td>
<td>Above ave</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>L5+ 68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larch Secondary, Southend</td>
<td>1279</td>
<td>Yr 9 and 10 boys and girls alternate</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>L5+ 75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnolia Secondary, Bognor Regis</td>
<td>1328</td>
<td>Years 8 and 9</td>
<td>Below ave</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>L5+ 73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The study is drawing its evidence from:

1. **Researcher observations**
   Field notes of observing children working with writers and teachers.

2. **Pupil response**
   Examples of work ‘before writer’ and ‘after writer’; Pupil evaluation forms; Pupils’ journals; Pupil interviews or forums.

3. **Teacher response**
   Teacher evaluation forms; teacher and head teacher interviews; discussions with CPD meetings

4. **Writer response**
   Writer evaluation forms; writer interview.

5. **Artifact Analysis**
   Critical analysis of artefacts produced as a result of residencies by writers, specialists and other advocates and critics: the journey of the artifact.

6. **Supporting quantitative data (to include base line data of relevant cohort)**
   SATS; PAND; FFT Data; Attendance records which measure:
   - pupils’ progress in skills and achievement
   - pupils’ quality of writing over time
   - Assessment of pupils’ motivation and confidence
   - Prior achievement data, available from the QCA subject to confirmation.

The Evaluation methodology is based upon the Creative Partnerships 4 phase stepped model of creative learning (Cutler, 2006).

**The purpose of this paper**

Findings of the research programme as a whole will eventually be produced in the form of a multi-panelled case study in which the following analyses will be used to address the research questions. Differentials between secondary and primary schools will be made explicit.

- Quantitative analysis of pupils attainment in literacy / English;
- Qualitative analysis of pupils attitudes to writing;
- Qualitative analysis of pupils personal development - confidence, esteem, motivation, risk taking, etc;
- Qualitative analysis of teachers experiences;
- Qualitative analysis of writers experiences.

This paper however aims to provide some initial findings of the project by focusing on the data arising from two sample schools: Ash Primary School in Market Harborough and Foxglove College in Leek who have each worked with 6 writers over the first two years of the project, listed in table 2 below. Rather than provide a list of features about each writer in both schools, the paper attempts to identify some themes which cut across both schools although where there are specific phase-related differences,
They will be drawn out too.¹

It will initially present the writers residency as an example of the educational action zone - a metaphorical space in which academic achievement and personal development is intended to be amplified through the introduction of simultaneously unreal and real actors and agents who are expected to bring about catalytic transformational change. It will then continue by identifying and discussing several themes which have emerged from the data:

i) the educational contexts and purposes behind establishing the residencies;
ii) the expectations of teachers prior to the residencies;
iii) the expectations of writers and the pedagogical techniques they use
iv) the characteristics of working relationships between writers, teachers and children;
v) the issuing and issue of knowledge;
vi) the roles and identities that teachers and writers perform when they are working together in the classroom;

and
vii) the legacy of a residency after the writer has left the school.

It will conclude with a cliff-hanger - a frequently used writers technique which leaves lots of unanswered questions and which attempts to bring the audiences back for answers and closure at a later date.

I. Educational Action Zones: Educational Contexts And Purposes

Set aims and objectives at the planning meeting at the National Gallery in July. Wanted to integrate Roy’s work with a unit of work on poetry planned for Autumn Term (new Primary Framework for literacy.) and possibly to add to work done on story writing already done in the first half of the Autumn Term. Explained to Roy that we are working to raise standards in writing across the school – we have a legacy of underachievement in writing in particular. We want to raise the profile of the craft of writing with pupils – using first hand experience / talk / visual literacy / drama / music to help capture ideas for writing within in a context of high quality teaching and learning in English teaching. Want children to see themselves as apprentice writers. Also a need to increase teachers’ subject knowledge in teaching all writing genres including creative writing.

(Head, Ash Primary)

There are perhaps three aspects to the term writer in residence we might briefly pore over before delving deeper in the practice that writers enact with children and teachers. The first is the act and physicality of writing; the second, the writing which is produced in the school before the writer sets foot in it; and third, the concept of the residency.

¹ Please note that this paper reflects the views of the author alone and does not represent the formal views or conclusions of NAWE itself.
The mechanics of writing are worth a brief examination, given that it is this physical activity that children are being asked to undertake. One the one hand writing implies writing by hand but may now includes typing now given the overwhelming preponderance of computers in the modern day school. We might ask ourselves whether the mechanics are incidental or not and perhaps whether they are an important part of the picture. Especially when we consider the emphasis given to grammar and spelling and the criteria used to assess ‘good pieces of work’? and the desire by some teachers for children to ‘write up in neat’ as part of their literacy pedagogies.

Eamon, whilst in residency at Ash Primary, also identified a tendency but some children not to want to write on the computer but resist the challenge of dealing with a rough hewn piece of content by keeping busy in the writing busi-ness of word art, line spacing, fonts, colours and tabs and the other 1001 forms of writing politesse.

The physicality of writing is flagged up in the early years / foundation work at Ash when OfSTED’s writing about the school is of punctuation, grip, posture and the first signs of the full stop. When we think about the mechanics of writing on a mobile, at a laptop, we might consider how grip has become marginalised as a condition for writing, about how touch and tap typing and wrist action have become more important and about the spaces in which children and young people write: on the bus, walking along the street, in the toilet, in the bar: almost anywhere except the classroom.

At Foxglove College, the physical effort of writing is noted by Chris, assistant head of the school. He describes stories coming out and regards teachers as equipping students with excavation tools to dig stories out. He see the residency process as getting pen to paper with confidence rather than terror - an experience recognised too by writers themselves, irrespective of how long they’ve been working. Dave also jests with children about the fear of the blank page, hinting at the terror of looking at the typewriter and nothing happens - not a mark, a jot or a squiggle, not even a meaningful typing response. Chris describes how he encourages pupils to physically engage with their exercise books: scribbling on them, adapting them, adding to them, and points to how they are idea-ed on: a significantly different experience to the one which expects pupils to copy off the blackboard.

He acknowledges that the process is an emotional journey and encourages pupils to start where they like and when they like. He talks not solely of writing up, but arguing that reading and showing is as important as writing - the physicality of writing is not just about a relationship with a pen, pencil or keyboard - it’s a whole body, mind and emotional experience engaging head, heart, voice, arms, legs, torso.

It’s writing, Jim, but not as we know it as Dr McCoy might have advised us in earlier editions of Star Trek.

Elsewhere in schools we encounter teachers marking work - which involves scoring certainly but is also about making marks upon that work, perhaps legible, perhaps
not, perhaps cursory, perhaps fully explained. A teacher's mark is a sign of a teacher's writing and a teacher's writing is a sign of how the adults in that school community write about themselves.

The physicality of holding a pen, typing a key board, collating a document is only a few steps away from the scrawled grunt of a mark-making teacher's response to a child’s work which counts as assessment. It is across this physical threshold of call and response that the writer crosses over on the first day of their residency.

**i.ii. Schools own writing**

Schools' communities own writing about themselves provides an understanding of what writing is important and valued, what is ignored and how the school authorities communicate with its children and families. The OFSTED report of 2001 for Ash Primary suggested that the school provides good quality written information (OFSTED, 2001) but tantalisingly doesn't state who the school is, what constitutes good quality, what information it is that they are referring to and what children and families are exposed to in the way of writing when they join that school's community.

They might see newsletters, annual reports, governors reports, scrappy A5 photocopies complete with comic sans serif typefaces which speak to the reader, gently, in slightly patronising tone - or with a faint air of authority, speaking to a vague, general audience with one eye on the local authority or OFSTED. The example below is a poster displayed in the public places of Hawthorne Secondary:

**i.iii. The nature of a residency**

The practice for writers residencies is not something that has been established in English Education for a particularly long time. Writers themselves have been reported to being resistant to the mini-residency model for some time: the Director NAWE himself has expressed ambivalence about the practice in the past:
A lot of writers dislike the resistance to the one-off visit. They feel that sometimes exciting a response is the most useful thing they can do. A shot in the arm is often just what’s needed.

(Munden in Jones and Lockwood, 1998: 202)

In recent years the writer’s residency has come to be understood in the following uncontroversial terms:

A residency is the period of time a writer spends working with a particular organisation. Residencies can last weeks, months or even a year and do not always require overnight accommodation. Many residencies are set up through literature development organisations. However, some are organised independently, following a direct approach from a writer or host organisation. Some organisations match two writers with complementary skills or artists from different disciplines together.

(Armitage, 2003: 1)

The Head of Ash Primary acknowledged at the start of the programme that her purpose was clearly to articulate the school’s involvement in the project to the standards agenda:

The overall aim of all the work we do in school is to raise standards across the curriculum through improving the quality of learning and teaching. For us this means that whatever we plan to do in the teaching of writing has to be with the aim of improving children’s ability to write.

She hypothesises that the introduction of a writer into her classrooms through residency would be about providing experiences that motivate pupils which would allow them to see themselves as writers with a real purpose and a real audience: the proposition of the ‘real world’ here is something which returns frequently. She argues that the involvement of professional writers in that process allows them to see into a writer’s world – it lets children see the point, it makes it real - and she particularly emphasises that this ‘realness’ will be of particular benefit for the boys in the school. Realness, she argues is particularly motivating for boys. In this case the children had a very real very practical reason for writing.

The phrase writer in residence suggests on the one hand a period of extended time in which writers are based in the school, perhaps on a continuous base maybe for a week or even up to a year, in practice the residencies at this school have worked out to be more fragmented and less uniform than might at first be apparent. Table 2 below shows the variety in delivery:
Table 2: Structures of Writing Together Residencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writer</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>½ days</th>
<th>Full days</th>
<th>Sequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ash Primary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eamon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 ½ ½ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 1 ½ ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 ½ ½ ½ ½ ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>½ ½ 1 ½ 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>½ ½ 1 ½ 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foxglove Secondary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronnie / Sean</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 1 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 1 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eamon</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eamon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 ½ ½ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 1 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst residencies may be intended as extended periods of time in which children and adults get exposed to a way of working, in practice the nature of this extension varies considerably intra-school and inter-school and is more a feature of the pragmatics and logistics of contracting freelance writers in employment conditions which are constantly changing from one day to the next, between terms and between years.

The second hypothetical aspect of the residency is based on the premise that exposure to a writer, should somehow be about exposing members of the schools community - children obviously but teachers too and possibly even parents and carers too indirectly to something new or unfamiliar from their usual, workaday lives in the school. This unfamiliarity is partially an unfamiliarity to the real - the external workplace - with the implicit acknowledgement that the school classroom is in itself a very unreal kind of place, something divorced from the real world. The classroom thus needs placing back in the real world and it is practitioners such as writers who can provide us with that real world experience. Not only that, but it is the practical, experiential learning that those writers are deemed to offer which is of critical importance to schools:

> the staff meeting on creative writing was inspirational because, by putting Roy’s connections and story sack ideas into practice teachers were able to see the practical implications for their work with children.

(Head, Ash Primary)

Practical implications presumably being short hand for attainment results.

Writers thus must be of practical benefit and must be of use. Quite who these practitioners are who are seen as representatives from the real world and how they become ‘useful’ by inhabiting magical, unreal and potentially ‘useless’ classroom time, we shall revisit later.
The third part of the residential hypothesis is that by extending time in the real, children are more able to extend their occupation of liminal time leading we hope, to an increased occupancy and heightening of imaginative time. By inhabiting what we might term the imaginative zone that a residency is expected to provide, it is expected that writing skills are amplified and heightened in ways which could not be achievable in normal workaday school real time.

The residency in this sense is zonal, a space of amplification where progression, achievement, and perhaps even good behaviour can be accelerated, brought more fully into being: it is the amplification qualities of the residential zone are the attraction for teachers and schools.

2. Educational Action Zones: packing it all in

The metaphor of the Zone is a recurring element of educational discourses in which space and time is boundaried in such a way as to generate a learning space whose properties are thought to magnify, extend, or transform a particular aspect of learning activities. Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978: 86) is acknowledged by many as being a means of understanding the process by which children learn with the support of significant others. Siraj-Blatchford et al (2003) suggest that this kind of Zone has a transformational effect on children's skills by the practitioner:

* drawing the child from their position of present understanding into the area or zone just beyond what the child could achieve alone. This zone is called the ‘zone of proximal development’ and is where the child, when supported by others, can make the most rapid progress.*

(Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2003: 2)

The transformational capacities of Zones in contexts of teachers and pupils learning together are elaborated by McGregor:

* The sense of exploration and co-construction, rather than learning pre-existing and pre-given knowledge, was very strong. Teacher and pupils were then operating at the ‘edge of their comfort zone’, where learning is arguably most likely to take place.*

(McGregor, 2004: 17)

The notion that zones generate additional, magnifying effects and produce outputs which are more than the sum of their individual parts correlates with predictions of complexity theory and is an aspect of the work, together with the notion of the comfort zone to which we will return later. The zonal qualities of this model however do not stop in the absence of the writer. There are several examples of where the school timetable is modified to encompass the residency and where the work that is initiated by the writer continues to happen out of school time and school space. As Polly Head of Ash Primary readily acknowledges:

* The most important thing is that its not written work that’s produced on the day that writer was there – its unreasonable to expect it to happen in this way – esp as teacher may be influencing product over a longer period of time – expecting writers to produce on the day flies against what we’re trying to do.*
So on the one hand, the writers residence is a space created for a writer to exert their magical, real life experience and bring reality to the non real school classroom - but on the other hand, this has a limited shelf life and there comes a time when all good things come to an end and what the school is trying to do has to be re-established.

3. The Purposes Of Education Action Zones: the boys are loving it!

English test results for the years 1996–2003 show that, at Key Stage 2, while reading results have improved since the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) (DfEE, 1998), performance in writing, particularly for boys, continues to be disappointing.

(Fisher, 2006: 204)

So what’s the purpose of time spent in zones of educational amplification? Polly at Ash Primary suggests it is fundamentally about contributing to academic standards through providing challenges to children - in particularly boys and challenges that are specific to the real world: higher achievers to be challenged to achieve; lower achievers have to be challenged to be socialised.

However, even the real world has its limits too: Dave, when discussing a project at Ash which was based on a cartoon thief taking over the world accepted that

The only issue was that one of the boys’ fathers had been prison so in consultation with the Teacher we agreed to steer devised drama away from a paradigm of prisons and real-life crime to the safer waters of fantasy capers and cartoon crime.

Obviously, whilst some real worlds are seen as being more likely to attract boys to them, some real worlds are more acceptable than other real worlds. If in doubt, resort to cartoon capers.

The attraction of the ‘real’ world is evident not just in the primary school but perhaps less surprising in the secondary school too. OfSTED noted in 2003 approvingly how the real world is brought to bear in Foxglove College upon Business Studies, Physical Education, Geography and History lessons and extended their view on the school’s future facing realism in 2007:

During the inspection, one student expressed the view that at Foxglove 'you don't just learn subjects, you learn how the real world works', and there is ample evidence to support this view. Because the college puts a clear emphasis on work-related learning and on careers and enterprise education, students continually learn skills from Year 9 onwards which are highly relevant to their future.

(OfSTED, 2007)

Writers within the programme have responded to the challenge of the real world in different ways. William introduces poetry about football as the means of getting engaged with the class, especially the boys:

Because I have written lots of books for teenagers about football, I often use these books as a way of making a quick initial connection with boys, and to make the world of writing, publishing and books seem a little less unfamiliar.
But other amplifications are also noted and appreciated. The benefits brought about by having a writer in residence include the civilising influence of developing children’s social and interpersonal skills. Eamon at Ash Primary noted:

The teacher, Mr. Oakly, reported back that that biggest challenge hadn’t been the actual writing and typing and planning, but working in groups. He said it was much a lesson in social skills, and getting along and learning to listen, share and compromise.

In the primary school, the programme’s zone allows children to increase the amount of fun they’re having within their educational non-real world experiences. In the case of Dave’s residency at Ash, the serious business of education was addressed in the morning, but come the afternoon, we’ll be able to relax and do some writing and put the fun back into it all. The expectation that the properties of the residential zone will also lead to more fun after the serious business of being educated to be had is very evident. As Polly put it:

Eamon challenged the children’s very poor attitudes to writing and convinced them that actually writing stories is meant to be entertaining and great fun – that’s actually the whole point! He showed them that even fragments of language can be fun to play about with.

The reference to fragments and fun here reinforces the need for fun at almost all costs - part of what Haberman suggests is part of the Pedagogies of poverty in which there is an emphasis on behaviour; on differentiation; on small things presented as important. Haberman suggests that the pedagogies of poverty are constructed from he calls the core functions of urban teaching:

* giving information
* giving directions
* monitoring seatwork
* giving tests
* assigning homework
* settling disputes
* marking papers, and

* asking questions
* making assignments
* reviewing assignments
* reviewing tests
* reviewing homework
* punishing noncompliance
* giving grades.

This basic menu of urban teacher functions characterizes all levels and subjects..... Taken separately, there may be nothing wrong with these activities. There are occasions when any one of the 14 acts might have a beneficial effect. Taken together and performed to the systematic exclusion of other acts they have become the pedagogical coin of the realm in urban schools. They constitute the pedagogy of poverty -- not merely what teachers do and what youngsters expect but, for different reasons, what parents, the community, and the general public assume teaching to be.

(Haberman, 2005, p 47)

So whilst the pedagogy of poverty may be an implicit methodology within urban schools teaching repertoires, the expectations behind the Writing Together are altogether more ambitious.

Chris at Foxglove suggests that Writing well matters for the emotional, intellectual and social wellbeing of children and adults: as well as working with children, he has involved the school’s NQTs and other teachers in the programme, and wanted to
extend the notion of residency across the Arts as a whole - ironically envisioning the
development of a department that writes. The programme for him was not
just about developing creative writing skills but about risk taking, about developing
transferable skills and about providing deep learning opportunities.

What is this programme expected not to provide? Why the ambition and enthusiasm
for an initiative which equates to 3 full days a term for 9 terms? Is there something in
schools constitutions that causes them to expect so much output from such a modest
input? Are there expectations of magic? Miracles? Or are we seeing a breed of
young teachers emerging who are required to, as Ball puts it, of organise
themselves:

as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations. To set aside personal
beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation. The new
performative worker is a promiscuous self, an enterprising self, with a passion
for excellence.

(Ball, 2003: 215)

The promiscuous school with its school gates open, its children and staff ready,
willing and desirous of external influence, funding and profile is perhaps one sign of
the performative culture which percolates the air and water of school cultures these
days. Its traces are everywhere and will continue to be noted as we look closer at
the work of the writer in the classroom: although we should also bear in mind that:

performativity produces opacity rather than transparency as individuals and
organizations take ever greater care in the construction and maintenance of
fabrications.

(Ball, 2003: 215)

This paper - this project as a whole - is one attempt to get beyond the fabrications.

4. Teachers Expectations

To us there is no conflict or difference between having fun and learning – and
no shame in focussing on raising standards (Once or twice it has felt as if
there is an implied shame…) – if children are learning, they will also be
enjoying and therefore/ergo standards will rise. Explaining that to Dave was
easy – he understood where I was coming from and so planning the project
went smoothly and it was easy and exciting integrating his work into the work
of the class either side of his visits. The pre- planning session was pivotal to
that process. It also helped to cement the very positive relationship by giving
us a chance to sound each other out before he came.

(Polly, Ash Primary.)

Frequently, the question arises in the planning for a residency as to whether the
school expects a writer to plan to meet educational structures such as curricula or to
plan for a looser, more freewheeling, open ended and indeterminable outcome -
sometimes shorthanded to the word 'creativity': whether this be in the form of
creative learning by children, creative teaching by teachers, a combination of the two
or just plain old creative writing.

This debate has become more complex in recent years with the development of the
national Creative Partnerships programme. Whilst none of the NAWE schools have
participated in CP programmes to date, a number of the writers have done - and so have engaged in the debate that CP promotes: that of whether a creative practitioner such as a writer is engaged in a process of creative teaching or teaching for creativity (Jeffrey and Craft, 2003; Jeffrey 2004).

Despite Polly’s assurance that creativity, fun and standards are not mutually exclusive, many other commentators are concerned that planning for structure, (predefined outcomes, safe bets) is a substantial hindrance to planning for creative practice. Whilst Fisher argues that there is no need to conclude that a prescribed programme necessarily excludes enjoyment and creativity (Fisher, 2006: 195) she also marshals some significant voices who are distinctly of the contrary view (Pullman, 2003, Hilton,2001: Barrs, 1994). Whilst the rhetoric in a school may be of providing children with fun-filled creative lessons, a keen eye is necessarily always directed towards the impending league tables and SATS results.

In the case of Ash , the desire for the residency extended into wanting children to enjoy the act of writing when all too frequently it is seen as a chore - a must-do, a have-to-do, as opposed to a want-to-do. Polly’s desire is for children to view writing as a desire, not as a demand imposed on them from outside. The threat of pain with its tantalising promise of pleasure is a constant undercurrent in discourses which attempt to persuade children to write, write and write again: something that Anne Fine was particularly scathing about in 1996:

I feel extremely distressed at the moment about watching some children being expected to draft and redraft on the grounds, the very spurious grounds that that is what a real writer does. That is not what this real writer did when she was young. When this real writer was young she was allowed to sit down, write it, hand it in, get a mark and never come back to it again. And if she had been going back to it, she would have hated redrafting it more than I can say. I do think there is as serious problem here: art is the product and not the process. I hope this fashion for re-drafting will die out very fast because it’s putting an awful lot of really bright, cheerful, happy children off English.

(Fine: 1996, vii)

The performative aspects of self-transformation from external demand to internal desire shine through this pain-pleasure axis and the constant presence of fear in the popular press about children’s inability to read and write at ever increasing ages helps catalyse this transformation.

That debate has been conducted within a political context in which public services, including education, are redirected from a culture of service to a culture of scrutiny, characterised by performativity. Performativity is defined by Lyotard as a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation, or a system of ‘terror’ that employs judgments, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change. (Lyotard, 1984) and the effects that this technology has within the education sphere has been well documented (Alexander 1993, Barker, 2005; Ball, 1990, 2003, 2004; Jeffrey and Woods, 1996).

Anecdotally at least, school staff will readily reel off the pleasure that children find in work with musicians, visual artists or cricket coaches - something they ‘like’ doing - and will as readily confirm that one of the most difficult things to teach in primary school is writing, perhaps alluding to the pedestrian nature of much of the writing that children are expected to perform: notes from geography text books, paragraphs from...
history work-sheets - letters complaining about a holiday that went wrong for example.

As this culture of performativity is watermarked on most if not all aspects of schools actions and initiatives these days, Polly has consequently great expectations of the writers who come to work in Ash Primary school:

To demonstrate how talk is such a crucial part of ‘being a writer’
To demonstrate how to enjoy words and language for the sake of it,
To demonstrate how to enjoy the sound of language, develop playfulness…
to visualise their stories and develop planning and drafting skills.
To inspire the children to enjoy the story building process,
To develop imagination through visual literacy

And it is against this backdrop that writers enter the school to ply their trade.

5. What writers (say) they do: techniques, tools, tips

The wish of the school to bring in an external writer because of their perceived links to the real world has to be demonstrated by writers by the way they talk about the ‘industry’ they work in. In doing so, they discuss their school work juxtaposed against their ‘professional’ practice - as if somehow schools work was unprofessional or had a slightly less professional quality about it. Dave talks about how his work in schools is reflected in his professional practice although it is not clear as yet as to whether the mirror that the school provides to his professional work offers a grey tone shadow of that work, is a true-to-life reflection or perhaps even offers some kind of distorting mirror to his ‘professional’ expertise. What is missed in this reflection and what is exaggerated is something that we need to spend some more time looking at and through.

How much a writers work in a classroom ought to be a reflection of their work place is another matter all together. In another primary school, for instance, one writer decided to treat her classroom as a quasi newspaper editor’s studio in which she role played the editor, issuing demands and deadlines to a group of year 5 children with the intention of producing a school newspaper by the end of the residency. Whilst the newspaper was eventually produced (although not completed within the terms of the residency, and many children enjoyed the tension and challenge that this writer offered, there were other stories of children becoming quite distressed at the pressures they felt and subsequently withdrawing from the exercises they were participating in.

The innervating nature of a performative culture is again evident in how writers see their roles in schools. Dave talks about professional practice being mobilised to develop creativity and imagination in children: with the assumption that somehow the world of the professional, the real, the world out there, out of the classroom is more valid, has more things to offer than the return journey of educational practice daring to step out into the ‘real’ world of the professions, the workplace. Sharon is even more explicit about the need to respond to the performative demands that are made of the school and rather touchingly refers to the needs of OFSTED in her rationale for her work: I try and fit in with the school's curriculum or OfSTED needs and build a programme around that.
This is not to suggest that writers see themselves as passive agents who compliantly respond to the agendas and desires that schools set for them. They are explicit about the values that underpin their work and encapsulate these values in frequently short and pithy mantras or heuristics:

Concentration, Cooperation, Construction (Ray)
The Rule of 3 (Ray)
There are no wrong answers (Sean)

This is a frequent exhortation which Sean at Foxglove uses and elaborates upon, albeit with an element of contradiction built into the modus operandi:

Rule 1: it can't be wrong, whatever you write.
Rule 2: the last word starts the next line: but remember Rule 1: all answers are equally valuable
Rule 3: the first line and last line have to be the same, ironically meaning that the final rule negates the principle of Rule 1.

Once in the school, writers talk about themselves taking on far more roles than just being a writer would suggest. Most writers acknowledge they play the role of an enabler and facilitator (Eamon), facilitator, a performer, a director, a writer, catalyst for imagination and change, and I am also a co-learner, (Dave) and Teacher, co-learner, facilitator, encourager, classroom manager, catalyst for inspiration and change (Ray) along with his multiple identities of writer, Scriptwriter, dramatist, and lyricist and children’s author. Teacher, instructor, creative mentor and hopefully a role model. (Sharon)

The significance of the role model is an interesting question particularly as it begs the question of what kind of role it is that writers are offering either wittingly or not. Various media commentators argued earlier this summer that the danger with arguing that Dwayne Chambers shouldn’t have been allowed to run at the Olympics because he was a poor role model was not a reason for upholding his lifetime ban for running: he was needed to run very fast, not to become a role model for the nations youth. A similar issue arises with expecting to see writers as role models. Role models for what? Louche individuals with poor bank balances? Apprentice writers?

6. The purpose of writers in residence: to produce apprentice writers?

The concept that children are ‘apprentice writers’ has been described in earlier Writers schools projects (Harries 1984: 4). More recently, the apprentice model has been elaborated upon - albeit within a Creative Partnerships context - in which Griffiths and Woolf describe an Apprenticeship model where everyone learns from everyone. (Griffiths and Woolf, 2008). This is demonstrated in a three columnar matrix and supplemented with a cycle diagram which indicates how a learner (in this context, the child) develops towards independence (Figure 1 below):
However, this model of Apprenticeship is not a model of apprenticeship that traditional ‘master - apprentice’ relationships would mirror particularly closely. Griffiths and Guile provide an analysis of pedagogy in Work Based contexts and in particular a review of the literature on apprenticeship. They point out that apprenticeship:

> encompasses such disparate schemes as the Modern Apprenticeship…. but also company initiatives aimed at postgraduates… now being broadened to include the idea of a Graduate Apprenticeship.

(Griffiths and Guile, 1999: 155)

Common across this range of initiatives is the notion that apprenticeship involves some aspect of work based activities such as work experience, work shadowing, work visits, work simulation, which in themselves constitute a larger spectrum of activities under the title of work related curriculum. They go onto suggest that these developments in apprenticeship models have become invested with assumptions, traditionally associated with apprenticeship, about rites of passage, initiation and completion rituals and learning how to become an independent adult (ibid; 156). Whilst Griffiths and Guiles’ notion of the independent adult has an echo in Griffiths and Woolf’s independent learner, this is where the similarity of the apprenticeship model ends.

Their use of the term apprenticeship not only raises the question ‘who is the apprentice?’ but also suggests that the CP model being tested in Nottingham has less to do with developing creativity of children, and more to do with importing work based values and practices into the school’s learning space. The surprise in this model is that the protagonists who are offering a model of employability are the artists whose working practices are more erratic and less stable than those of the teachers they work with. Although Griffiths develops her argument that an apprenticeship model most closely reflects learning through creative practice she also highlights several ambiguities which arise from the seemingly straightforward process of an artist working with children in a classroom:
The children are not learning to be artists; they are not studying a curriculum focused on producing professionals. Yet, like apprentices, they are expected to observe and take part in practical activities. It is not surprising if there is ambiguity about what kind of learning is going on.

(Griffiths, 2008)

So perhaps this is where the limits of the apprenticeship model are to be found: the concept of the master whose working practice is to be emulated is frail given the nature of the ‘master’s’ working practices; the ‘apprentice’ is in a learning space which they have not intentionally chosen; the pedagogy of the writer in this model is the one of freelance individuals who work for no one organisation but who are engaged as and when required within a volatile and unpredictable market place: a trainee urban creative who, to acknowledge Peck: can not only cope with, but positively revel in, this environment of persistent insecurity and intense, atomized competition (Peck, 2005: 764) or trainee cultural entrepreneur who, according to McRobbie:

becomes his or her own enterprise, sometimes presiding over two separate companies at the same time… (and for whom…) social interaction is fast and fleeting, friendships need to be put on hold, or suspended on trust and when such a non-category of multiskilled persons is extended across a whole sector of young working people, there is a sharp sense of transience, impermanence and even solitude

(McRobbie, 2002: 519 - 529)

If writers are to be role models for children, then we best take care of which attributes are being role modelled: transience, impermanence and solitude would not rate highly on many teachers or parents lists.

7. The expectations of writers and the pedagogical techniques they use

Whilst there are questions over the nature of the role that writers perform in the classroom, the different pedagogical moves they make which bring about the effects they aim to inculcate are more clearly observable.

Eamon for example talks of restructuring the classroom, not so much in the usual sense of rearranging the furniture, a common enough approach by many writers but by restructuring classroom metaphors, or by moving the classroom from the indoors to the outdoors, with all the concomitant problems that the real life outdoors poses when children and teachers encounter it. As Sharon points out: the environment of an open plan classroom was very challenging. She suggests that there is always a danger of real life and real spaces upstaging the human intentionettes. The plays, the learning, the classes are liable to be dwarfed by the gigantisms the realisms of the outside.

Eamon’s work offers explicit connections of global, historical and mythic proportions to local specificities, reinforced with suggestions of sharing children’s stories with family members out of the classroom. Whilst boundaried by the physical confines of the classroom places, the learning takes place in different mental, geographical, intellectual, temporal and cultural spaces. It involves making connections between those other spaces - an intellectual network of connections, nodes and web like filaments, thin and tenuous on their own but tenacious when linked; there is resilience in this web which can absorb weighty concepts and approaches and
challenges and absorbs the weight through its complex suspension mechanisms. The web is deceptively innocuous but powerful.

So, equipped with a set of values, heuristics, approaches to space and time, the writer eventually focuses on getting the children writing and this invariably means getting them to generate new material from which new pieces of writing are forged.

8. **Scaffolding zones: from comfort to discomfort**

Whether consciously expressed or not, many writers intuitively provide a Zone for Proximal development - or scaffolding - for participants as part of the process of generating material which can be subject to later editing. Writers provide scaffolding upon which children build ideas, what ifs, imaginations, images, hypotheses, originations - sometimes reflecting popular culture motifs too as demonstrated by Dave:

> Thomas was stealing landmarks - they didn’t know his motive, his accomplices, or his means. They had to come up with super-leftfield ideas. Together they came up with this theory: Thomas is hiding under the Dead Sea in a lair, he is tunnelling underground to steal landmarks or zapping them with a laser. Pretty divergent. They came up with new anthems, new language, theories on how he will brainwash us all. A new flag. Theories on his relationship to other suspects. He was building a palace made of gold, stealing landmarks using giant metal spiders. Really imaginative and original. Okay, maybe some ideas came straight from TV and film or books, but some ideas I would not have come up with. I created a strong central character for them to battle with but the project succeeds because of their fresh ideas.

Scaffolding however is not solely about providing a safe space which participants inhabit at their leisure and at ease. There is something intuitively unsafe about scaffolding; something shaky, impermanent, risky about working with scaffolding structures which can be blown down by an intemperate puff of wind or unexpected visitation from an OfSTED official who may bluster into a classroom when they are least expected. Whilst scaffolding is part of a zone of proximal development - a safety zone, it also provides opportunities for children to be exposed, to be placed in a space of not knowing, of ignorance and uncertainty. Dave again describes what being out of the comfort zone entails:

> It forced them to share their ideas, to not think ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, to suspend their disbelief, to perform in front of peers, to work fast against a ticking clock, to not have answers just theories, to justify their ideas and beliefs. I would say they’ve never worked in this way before and this made some of them uncomfortable but we helped them adjust, to feel safe and respected and that above everything we’d protect their right to explore.

The Scaffolding zone paradoxically provides both a space of heightened and amplified safety - as well as discomfort, insecurity and challenge. Polly also elaborates on how children’s approach to writing changes in a way which suggest they have experienced the dual nature of a safe yet risky scaffolding zone:

> All pupils were motivated to redraft and improve their work – including children who would traditionally be happy to be finished after the first attempt.
Finishing after one attempt; not redrafting or improving; the signs of participants inhabiting their comfort zone; all are altered by working with writers.

Inhabiting one’s comfort zone is something that is frowned upon these days in this performative world of excellence and achievement. Figure 2 below describes a proposed relationship between a comfort zone and a learning zone (and its extension, a panic zone) and is used in both management training programmes (Rapport, 2008) and in Creative Partnership consultants across England. The idea behind it is comfortably simple:

Most people live in their comfort zones, doing what feels familiar. While this is comfortable, no real learning or creativity takes place. When people move into their discomfort zones, they use their courage and begin to act on new possibilities. It is here that exploration and learning begins to take place. When people push into the adventure / panic zone they take risks, they form new relationships with more trust and more teamwork. This is where new business ideas are born. People who actually get into the adventure / panic zone have great teams with them, and get the support and trust that allows them to venture into new territory. Moving outside our comfort zone creates a sense of being fully alive, of having unlimited options, and of being capable of great creativity. that the middle zone – the ‘learning’ or ‘creative’ zone would expand both ways to reduce comfort and panic zones. Comfort zone being an area of complacency.

(Rapport, 2008)

Polly acknowledges that inhabiting a comfort zone is not the sole preserve of children but that staff also have their comfort zones which are tested by this type of work: Mrs Smith had to learn how to use digiblue cameras from scratch and is now training
colleagues. In doing so, she identifies another feature of what can happen once the comfort zone has been lived through: by learning new skills or experiences, the successful initiate is able to pass on the learnt skills themselves to their peers.

Learning itself is recast as a process in which all participants are able to learn from other participants, not solely one source of expertise who happens to be located at the front of the classroom. In one sense this is another form of apprenticeship, which is more closely aligned to the work of Lave and Wenger who reconfigure apprenticeship with their concept of Situated Learning or Legitimate Peripheral Participation, a concept which understands learning in a manner which

provides a way to speak about relations between new-comers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice.

(Lave and Wenger, 1991: 29)

Situated learning allows for pedagogical relations to develop which are decoupled from schooling or other aspects of operationalised educational practices and are perhaps resonate more strongly with the work of the writers involved in the Writing Together programme.

9. Bringing forth material

Eamon bases his work on the Variations on a Theme model and in doing so demonstrates that many stories have a common heritage. In a movement taken straight from the ZPD handbook with its emphasis on scaffolding, Eamon uses elements from different stories, adapting their structures and changing as necessary. His use of existing knowledge with new knowledge from children produces an ongoing, evolving interplay of traditional and modern forms and content.

Whilst using a selection of pedagogical moves - repetition games which trick listeners into making a response, the use of riddles as means to exercise the imagination so that a story can be made, remembered and then told, Eamon using story telling as a route to narrative and eventually to the written word. He frequently reverses the roles of listener and teller within his audience. He demonstrates that story telling doesn’t just lay in the hands or the voice of one teller but in the hands and voices of the listeners too. He advocates for a democratic story telling process - tellers can be listeners and vica versa; audience can be producers and vica versa; knowledge lies in all hands and voices, not just a privileged few experts. Pupils become instrumental in shaping the narrative: not merely receiving or mining for it but co-construction it.

Eamon proposes the idea of stories coming from memories and memories being stories themselves - a sophistication which asks a big challenge of its participants, based as it is on the premise of the interchangeability of story and memory - and subsequently what constitutes knowledge and how we know that story is a memory and how we know that our memory is a story.

Eamon uses layering and delayering approaches as part of his portfolio of editing skills. A story is offered first of all (A) without movements and then he advises pupils to add movements to the story (A+B) in order to heighten the expressivity of the narration. In doing so this opens up other story line possibilities. A story is built up through re-tellings, thereby re-creating, re-visioning, editing and re-writing; the notion that the act of story telling is somehow a one-off activity, in which the created form
emerges unscathed into the daylight is given a good shaking by this approach which echoes other writers mantra’s that writing is all about re-writing. Alternatively, Eamon also uses this approach in reverse, occasionally asking participants to strip away unnecessary content to reveal the power of underlying material at the heart of the story.

He also demonstrates a democratic approach to structuring generated work in two ways. Firstly by taking pupils through a story mapping exercise which acts as a visual aid to understanding story structure and secondly by sharing the editing across the group he is working with: reinforcing the idea that the story is not the sole preserve of the gifted individual but is thrust out into the market place of authors, making the material subject to further social interrogation and rough and tumble, thus generating further rude awakenings within the story.

10. A caveat: narrative vigilance

However, when it comes to the significance of telling stories in educational contexts it might be wise to heed Goodson and Hargreaves’ caution against the narrative effort and the tendency to take stories at face value:

Lost in translation, stories and narratives are Janus-faced. They may move us toward new insights, or backward into constrained consciousness, and sometimes they may do the same thing simultaneously.

(Goodson and Hargreaves, 1995)

And note Carter’s warning:

Anyone with an even passing familiarity with the literatures on story realizes, however, that these are quite turbulent intellectual waters and quickly abandons the expectation of safe passage towards the resolution, once and for all, of the many puzzles and dilemmas we face in advancing our knowledge of teaching.

(Carter, 1993: 5)

The turbulent intellectual waters that stories stir up stem from acts of interpretation. Given that stories can be read in a multitude of ways, that they do not succumb to one, authoritative reading, that they do not express one unequivocal point of view which lends itself to being interpreted as the definitive voice is a methodological weakness if the provision of correct responses to SATS tests and high SATS scores are sought: but it is also perhaps a strength.

Human lives themselves do not succumb to one reading, a single, simple act of interpretation and closure which can be summarily analysed and classified. Stories, because of their multiplicity are perhaps the most appropriate means to talk of the multiplicities of human beings lives. A point that Goodson and Hargreaves acknowledge albeit with a consistent warning in the background:

Narration, then, can work in many ways, but be clear-- it can give voice to a celebration of scripts of domination.

(Goodson and Hargreaves, 1995)
11. **Story Scrap Stores**

Ray uses another set of heuristics which graphically describe his intentions: his notion of *The shed in your head* summarises his belief that the raw material for creating stories can be found in one's mind from the unlikeliest of sources and which stem from the sensual experiences children will have gathered in their past. The shed in the head is:

\[
\text{where all the things you've sensed go, you can see what's lurking around'.}
\]

With its emphasis on junk and the sensual detritus of everyday providing the raw material for the generation of material, Ray follows in a tradition of writers, artists and academics who place significant value on the use of scrap, junk or mess as an imperative towards creativity. In discussing mess-theory in Western fiction and painting, Wright relates the significance of mess to both:

\[
\text{Baudelaire, who described the metamorphosis of raw reality into crafted artefact, as the transformation of mud into gold... (and) Samuel Beckett's use of the term, in his 1961 interview with Tom Driver, when he spoke of seeking in art "a form that accommodates the mess".}
\]

Wright (2001 - 2002: 179)

Similarly, in Sternberg’s Propulsion Model of Creative Leadership (Sternberg, 2004) scrap materials are powerless and yet powerful in their potential for catalysing change in a system. Scrap’s lack of determinedness and specificity provides the agents who work with it the conceptual space to make decisions about it, to determine its character and identity, rather than being confronted with a predetermined identity. Ray also - perhaps inadvertently - stretches the need for mess into how he explains the need for basic story structure which he writes as *Beginnings muddles and ends.*

12. **Structuring the brought forth material**

\[
\text{It's not beginnings and endings that count, but middles. Things and thoughts advance or grow out from the middle, and that's where you have to get to work, that's where everything unfolds.}
\]


Whilst Deleuze places his faith middles and Ray places his in muddles, other writers address the question of structure - and particularly the question of endings by simply avoiding the issue through a common technique of using cliff-hanger endings: unresolved, open story lines which require an audience to come back another time in the hope that resolution will be found, climax achieved and the story closed - a common enough structure in contemporary film and soap opera (Vogler, 1992). The cliff-hanger has the advantage of extending the residency beyond school hours by tapping into that perhaps primal desire for closure. Much of the evidence from popular culture however is that closure is impossible: stories continue to regenerate, to morph, to set out new questions, to perpetually test an audience’s patience and desire for answers. As Dave offers: *We didn’t set homework, just gave them cliff-hangers they could think about or ignore.*

Learning by stealth is perhaps part of the smoke and mirrors that writers bring to the party and in some instances is accompanied by the use of secrets, mystery and opacity: holding back information, disassembly and refusing to provide ready
answers is one of drawing participants into the generative and editorial process albeit with a slight air of fishiness about the whole business, capitalising as it does on those deep seated desires for closure and answers.

I play the Head of the Taskforce team. I inform them of new ransom demands and new photo evidence, I tell them I don’t know what the clues mean or where the game will lead. I take a positive interest in all their ideas and theories, and because I pretend not to know any more than them, I reinforce the notion that every theory is valid.

But in this netherland of smoke mirrors and illusion, of Dave’s pretence is there some truth in the artifice? What kind of knowledge exists in the illusion of ignorance? If I pretend that I know nothing, when I know everything, how valid are the ideas explored or imaginative leaps taken? How can there be no wrong answers if the foundations are so shaky in the first place? What are the questions to which there are no wrong answers? Is this all a rather over elaborate game of smoke and mirrors? Or does this work open up unexplored boxes of knowledge and comprehension which go beyond the SATS scores and reading tests?

13. The writers toolbox

Ray worked with the whole school on the first half day – ‘Shed in your Head’ session… On the second day he worked with 16 x Y5 children in the morning on poetry. This started with a walk round the village to collect ideas and impressions to put into a class poem. Pupils used clipboards and their five senses to amass a huge list of impressions (including the taste of a tree trunk…) which they then brought back to school. Ray then lead a shared writing session where he modelled teasing out ideas and putting them together into a collaborative piece of work, using the ‘writer’s toolkit’.

Polly, Ash Primary

It is perhaps not surprising that in times of progress and modernisation, in discourses of transformation, of educational regeneration, of delivery of education and other performative motifs that we should so readily talk about the writer’s toolbox. Visualising such an apparatus helps make the process of writing somehow more craftsman like, less mysterious, less subject to subjectivity altogether a more objective, quasi scientific approach to encouraging writing. If after all we can use tools to build beside cabinets that don’t fall over, why on earth can we not have a writers toolbox to help us build stories that are coherent, compelling and magical? That are emotionally charged? Spiritually uplifting?

We might ask what set of instruments might be found within such a toolbox, what kind of mental lathes and saws, pick axes and sanding paper are needed to do the intellectual and emotional job of honing a piece of work from rough stuff? Does it work? What use is it? are questions looking inside that toolbox - good performative questions again which shape the kind of questions we ask in the search for the knowledge of how to develop techniques which will help our children and teachers to write better.

Ray had more success in five minutes teaching the children about using similes in poetry than I’d obviously had in eighteen months – since they all disclaimed any knowledge of the term when he broached it with them! They were all able to improve their poems later when he had gone by introducing a simile – and can still explain very articulately what a simile is to a friend now –
three weeks later. They responded very positively to the concept of the toolkit – and can see that a simile is something that a good writer can choose to pull out of the toolkit to have a particular and precise effect on his/her reader.

Polly, Ash Primary

Both Adey et al (1999) and Craft highlight the need to consider the pragmatism of teaching through conceiving of a skillset as a toolbox of strategies. Craft refers to the advice of Perkins (1999) when he suggests that teachers need to adopt a pragmatic approach to enabling pupils to construct their own understanding of knowledge, which further enables them to express creativity. He urges teachers to consider their repertoire of skills as a ‘toolbox’ given that no one situation in teaching is ever identical to the next. His advice reminds us of the complex artistry involved in teaching, documented by many (Dadds, 1993, 1995, Woods & Jeffrey, 1996, Halliwell, 1993).

(Craft, 2001: 22)

In suggesting that output outweighs belief, Ball suggests that techniques - such as tool boxes - become important performative assets in the drive for educational reform:

The activities of the new technical intelligentsia, of management, drive performativity into the day-to-day practices of teachers and into the social relations between teachers. They make management, ubiquitous, invisible, inescapable, part of and embedded in everything we do. Increasingly, we choose and judge our actions and they are judged by others on the basis of their contribution to organizational performance, rendered in terms of measurable outputs. Beliefs are no longer important - it is output that counts.

(Ball, 2003: 223)

But writers unsurprisingly describe their toolboxes in different ways. Sharon’s is located in her body: she writes of the writer’s hand – based on the 5 senses and adaptable to any type of writing. Eamon too stresses the use of the five senses in his storytelling and especially makes use of his voice in diverse and entertaining fashion: his voice becomes a polyphonal instrument instead of a monotonal instrument of dictation and instruction:

There’s complete concentration for twenty minutes is significant for following just a voice. Except it isn’t just a voice. It is the voice of a story-teller and the voice used as an instrument with the range and subtlety of any other wind instrument. There have been whispers and shouts, archaic words like banished and current slang like gob-smacked.

(Fincham, field notes)

William too emphasises the sensual nature of his work, explicitly linking the senses with the imagination:

I spent the first day showing the pupils how to ‘write with your ears’, the second Day how to ‘write with your eyes’ and the third day how to ‘write with your imagination’.

The sensual nature of the work is reinforced by Ray too, stressing as he does how the use of the senses make characters and places come alive. Perhaps optimistically, this reliance on knowledge gained from all five senses is an interesting
counterpoint to knowledge which a performative culture might more easily accept and desire because in performative knowledge, as Ball points out:

*Effectivity rather than honesty is most valued in a performative regime.*

(Ball, 2003: 226)

What a performative regime can’t begin to understand is the world of magic - another concept which might be described as a tool to be found in Ray’s toolbox. He describes the use of the word *suddenly* as being a magic word in a paragraph because, after its use, anything becomes possible. *Suddenly* - the magic invested in one small word. Magic is a firm, infirm footing for Ray throughout his time with children. He claims the magic of stories needs imagination too (which he describes as a word with a silent letter c - imagination so children can visualise the connection between imagination and magic thus: i-magic-nation which he demonstrates helps cause a shift in the story from the ordinary to the extraordinary; a resistance to the performative pressures of accountability, counting the ordinary, managing the manageable and controlling the uncontrollable.

Dave too, demonstrates to children that their imaginations - perhaps in the classroom subject to ridicule and intolerance - are not alone and out of kilter with the rest of the world. They too can be part of a larger picture although perhaps one not in the immediate vicinity:

*I googled images from the web of a hotel in Hong Kong built from gold and when I presented her with this evidence she was chuffed. I could see she was proud to have used her imagination in such a useful way.*

The writer, perhaps, in their reliance on magic, and their knowledge brought through all the senses may mean that they may be the least trusted technician in the performative arsenal. Quite how long they can be relied upon to bring about the performative demands of educational reform is open to debate.

14. **Relationships**

Ray notices the difficulty children have in working constructively in groups and sees this as part of a climate that the writer comes into. Ball refers to this as the desocialisation of knowledge brought about as part of the demands of a performative culture:

*It is not that performativity gets in the way of ‘real’ academic work or ‘proper’ learning, it is a vehicle for changing what academic work and learning are! At the heart of Lyotard’s thesis is his argument that the commodification of knowledge is a key characteristic of what he calls ‘the post-modern condition’. This involves not simply a different evaluation of knowledge, but fundamental changes in the relationships between the learner, learning and knowledge, resulting in ‘a thorough exteriorization of knowledge’ (Lyotard 1984: 4). Knowledge and knowledge relations, including the relationships between learners, are de-socialized.*

(Ball: 2003: 226)

However, Ray stresses the need for children having to learn to work together, rather than as individuals or within established friendship groups and in doing so he encourages the formation of new links, personal connections and relationships. New networks form, new webs are spun and surprising new opportunities emerge and are
captured in the web spun by the writer in residence. Whilst Ray sees himself as part of a team led by myself, as a professional writer… in order to bring a different perspective he also witnesses a teaching assistant seize hold of her own training targets which he interpreted as being empowering for that staff member and which led to her being given permission to manage the class for the first time. Group learning is not restricted solely to the children or teachers in the room too: he talks about how he has become more confident in directing group activities, particularly in the use of physical and ‘brain gym’ type games.

Eamon’s work is particularly noticeable at extending learning linkages over and beyond the immediate protagonists in the classroom. With his emphasis on sharing newly born stories with wider communities and groupings - family, friend - he extends the links and networks that the residency brings about and offers a picture of a complex web of links, networks and webs evolving as the residency progresses.

Complex linkage is evident in many aspects of these residencies: whether they be cross subject, cross year group, cross school or cross community: the residency catalyses anything and everything other than a single, monovalent direct link to a text book or a teacher or a classroom. The extent and depth of this form of multi-linking - much more than the tired cliché networking suggests - indicates a vigorous activity which generates connections, links, new ways of thinking and responding and expressing. The process is undirectable, uncontrollable and frequently produces new and unexpected outcomes and surprises.

But this elaboration of connection, web and net is always taking place in the context of a working school which has a firm eye on its purpose, desires and targets:

\[I \text{ think it is very important to be clear about school priorities – we cannot afford to deviate from the school’s core purpose – which is teaching and learning. We have to be able to justify everything we do in those terms – especially with a long term project of this kind – it’s important for the writers we work with to understand their crucial role in that ‘masterplan’! They come to help us be even better – not to give the children a break!}\]

(Polly, Ash Primary)

Polly is clear that the relationships she wants with the writers are to be of the friendly relationship based on collegial professionalism type of relationship. However, collegial professionalism in education has a fraught history and reputation as means of establishing relationships between different sectors, interests, communities and desires. As Hargreaves points out:

Collegiality is rapidly becoming one of the new orthodoxies of educational change and school improvement. … (It) forms a significant plank of policies to restructure schools from without and reform them from within. … (W)hile collegiality is not itself the subject of any national, state, or provincial mandates, its successful development is viewed as essential to the effective delivery of reforms that are mandated at national or local levels. Among many reformers and administrators, collegiality has become the key to change

(Hargreaves 1991, p. 48).

In arguing that the term collegiality has remained conceptually amorphous and ideologically sanguine (Little 1990, p. 509), Warren Little points to the complexities of relationships built upon the shifting sands of collegiality. These shifts are all too
visible in the way that Polly refers to her relationships with her writers too. When writing about how Eamon has interacted with her children she writes:

> Familiarity of stories provides an accessible way into story telling….adapting known structures for their own purposes means they can achieve something they recognised as successful and entertaining.…

There is an interesting, performative quality to this sentence, structured as it is around the premise of:

> Familiarity - accessibility - adaptation - achievement - success - enjoy

She writes of Sharon:

> Sharon is a professional secondary English teacher as well as a writer and brought a well organised scheme of work, meticulously planned and inspirational. She used the language of film making to really spark the children’s creativity and combined with the first hand experience of the visit to Rockingham castle, supported their visualisation/descriptive development in the context of a unit of work on classic literature (Dickens).

Which again, if we strip back to the skeletal structure of this paragraph reveals:

> Teacher and writer - organised - planned - inspired - spark creativity - experience - support - development - context - work unit

She continues about Dave:

> Dave has been totally original. His ‘Landmark Robbery’ project has gripped the children, and although there has been little in the way of written outcome I am sure that the progress they have made in exploring how to develop an enthralling plot outweighs that. It has been a great way to loosen up after SATs and I feel sure will have an impact well into the Autumn term

One translation of which reads as:

> Original - gripped - outcome? - progress - explore (!) - loosen - impact….

Suggesting that the doubtful outcome of this gripping work is offset by the possibility of future impact coupled with some well needed loosening up. However, later on she revisits this view:

> The teachers job is to link writers with the curriculum / this is her jobs – Sharon’s went really well – cos she was a teacher and understood what we were trying to get out of it – you do this, I’ll do that, she understood instinctively – Dave wanted to do his own thing, and we couldn’t see how we couldn’t follow up in other times

So, Dave, from being in a place which was:

> Original - gripped - outcome? - progress - explore (!) - loosen - impact….

is now in hindsight
Own thing - unfollow-up-able

It is clearly a short distance from original to own-thing and explore to unfollow-up-able and clearly not stayed within the bounds of collegial professionalism.

15. Pupils’ voices, words and other outcomes

Children’s views of the work they experienced are wide ranging and correspond agreeably with the co-intentions of writers and school staff. They frequently expressed their sense of pleasure and enjoyment in the process especially when it refers to them being able to give voice to their own desires and interests and make decisions about their own writing, rather than being a ventriloquist’s puppet to some other voice:

I have enjoyed writing because we have been able to write what we want

I have enjoyed working independently

I have enjoyed being able to write something instead of copying off the board here we are told how to do the writing

I have enjoyed every lesson I’ve had so far. I like it how we haven’t done sheets with questions on.

They also welcome learning new techniques:

I think reading books or other people’s work has helped to improve or even start our work... Also having our books knowing we are able to make mistakes and adjust them

Keeping things away from the audience and gradually telling them (I have learnt to be able to do this)

You don’t have to give everything away in a piece of writing

I liked the way we were given an example from a book first

or being able to share their work in a social context:

I have enjoyed being able to share ideas with my partner

showing my work to my friend

or developing new relationships with writers or re-casting relationships with teachers:

You have fun in his lessons and he can make you laugh

He makes us read each others work and it makes us find our mistakes in what we have done

He has taught us well by getting us to model our writing on a very good book
I want to be the first whisper first heard by a deaf man
initial findings of the NAWE Writers in School ‘Writing Together’ Research Programme

I feel like I have learnt more in the last 5 weeks than in one year at St Edwards. Because here we get straight into it because the adult Mr Owen treats us like adults. Also because his lessons are fun, he doesn’t drone on and he’s good at literacy. Also because he doesn’t bore me.

In the first year, Polly at Ash was initially clear about the effects the project was having on her attainment data:

Tracking shows clear evidence of accelerated progress in writing across the school – but especially in Y5 – average points progress across the cohort of 7 points (twice the average for one year)

Whilst this was in Year 1, it is less easy at the end of year two to discuss the quantitative difference the programme has made to pupils attainment, not least because of the SATS marking fiasco which occurred in England over the summer. It becomes apparent too that a crude figure of 7 points accelerated progress is all very well but its significance depends heavily on the schools starting points; they CVA values, the social milieu in which they are based, the cohort of the children entering the school, whether the school has been deemed to be underperforming beforehand and indeed any plateauing effects the school is experiencing. As a recent National Literacy Trust newsletter acknowledges:

August saw the annual publication of the key stage 1 and 2 Sats results. Fortunately, the picture for literacy is that the high levels of attainment achieved through initiatives over the past ten years, such as the National Literacy Strategy, have been maintained. However, over the past four years the impact of these programmes seems to have plateaued... Yet the challenge remains: how do we improve the literacy skills of what Lord Adonis this month referred to as the “stubborn 20 per cent of eleven-year-olds”?

(Douglas, 2008)

Polly wrote lucidly about how the writers she employed related to the important and serious matter of delivering the curriculum:

The work of Eamon and Sharon was integrated into ongoing literacy units of work, introduced before they arrived and continued and extended after they had gone.

In this metaphor, Literacy units of work are part of an assemblage or assembly line that is in the business of shaping of children into readers and writers and literate human beings. When the writer is integrated, machine-ically, into the units then we are happy - especially if the work can continue and extend - where the writers zonal qualities are still present around about the machine room floor, hovering about the production line like a ghostly spirit.

17. The Way ahead: collapse of the Zone

However, some months into year 2 of the project Polly acknowledges that attributing cause and effect to a project like this is a not so straight forward:

it (The project) hasn’t done any harm, sure it has made a contribution but how much, I’m not sure – they were the cohort who had the most progress to make, the most problematic group of boys in it (year 6s now).
A slippage from a certainty about cause and effect to something a bit more troubled, uncertain, less causal and hence more complex. She also cites an example of some writing from a pupil - a clipped piece of work which is written in phrases with unconventional sentences and phrasing which she sees as powerful writing but admits that its not seen as other teachers as being ‘good writing’. She expressed her frustration at about markers who were seeing the grain of writing but not the whole voice of the writer and so were marking to a formula - but marking something that was not formulaic writing.

The question of outcomes is as elusive and as exasperating as ever: other models of intervention and transformation thus need discussing before the outcomes, outputs - intended or otherwise - of the Writing Together programme can be fully assessed. How writers and teachers respond to the “I want to be the first whisper first heard by a deaf man’ moment; the moment when a child offers an insightful, considered and arresting response which surprises and temporarily stuns the adults in the room will need following up at some same later time, some later place.

Dr. Nick Owen
September 2008
Edinburgh, BERA

NAWE Researcher, Writing Together

Thanks to Prof. Richard Andrews, Dr. Teresa Cremin, Jane Evans Woodason, Liz Fincham, Prof. Maurice Galton, Sue Horner and Paul Munden.
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This document was added to the Education-line database on 23 January 2009