

Successful writing programmes and the ways teachers use assessment information and data to enhance student writing.

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A lot of the content of this report is based on classroom observations and the interviews with the principals and teachers who willingly shared their beliefs, expertise and programmes.

Purpose

As a teaching principal I was interested in looking at and understanding what successful writing programmes looked like in the schools I visited. I wanted to gain an understanding of best practice for the assessment of student writing and the ways teachers use assessment information and data to enhance student writing. I believed this was important to enable me to further my leadership and pedagogy. I expected my findings would enable me to better support and assist teachers to enhance student learning in the classroom through best practice of teaching and assessing writing.

The opportunity to visit a school near Holbrook, Arizona was available to me. This is a successful school on an Indian Reservation. The roll is growing quickly and is 100 percent Navajo. I wanted to look at what a successful writing programme looks like there and to visit schools with successful writing programmes in New Zealand.

Overall, the expectation was to increase my capability as a leader in the teaching of writing and to apply any new-found, relevant knowledge at Kimbolton School.

Background

Kimbolton School was in the second year of a four year 'Extending High Standards Across Schools' (EHSAS) contract focusing on student writing when funding was withdrawn. We had begun our journey toward improving student writing, and writing samples taken twice a year since the start of the EHSAS contract have shown huge gains for some, but not all, students. Writing remains a priority at Kimbolton School as we want our students to become confident, capable writers who write successfully using a range of genre. Good quality writing programmes, along with teacher expertise in writing, assessing student work and how assessment information is used had been seen as crucial to ensuring our students have the best possible learning opportunities.

We considered a successful writing programme to be one where students enjoy writing, produce quality writing, write well to convey meaning using interesting vocabulary that is relevant to the genre and that enables the reader to 'see' what the writer is saying. Based on work done within our EHSAS cluster teachers at Kimbolton School had decided quality writing would:

- Capture the reader's interest, and make sense to the audience
- Have personal voice: express feelings, sound like the writer
- Be sequenced or organised in such a way that the reader can easily access the information, and the organisation would suit the purpose for writing
- Create an image and build up a picture in the reader's mind. It would show rather than tell the reader
- Fit the purpose: the reason for writing and the audience
- Come from motivated, engaged and enthusiastic students
- Sound like a story/text
- Be focused: 'cameo' – small and beautiful, and aim for quality not quantity
- Have been drafted, drafted, drafted and edited, edited, edited
- Have interesting vocabulary, and the writer would have used resources to increase the precision of words used
- Have a range of sentence structures and starters
- Have appropriate language features that fit the writer's audience and purpose (e.g. direct speech, metaphor etc)
- Be modelled by teachers
- Be modelled on other excellent writing
- As a final piece of writing, be accurate grammatically, and the punctuation and spelling would be as good as it could be for the stage of the writer, not necessarily the age of the writer!

And that...

Teachers of successful programmes would:

- Model quality writing, thinking aloud to show the students strategies that they could use
- Make links to oral language, and use students' prior knowledge
- Make clear links between reading and writing
- Focus on teaching particular skills and strategies
- Use a range of approaches to cater for the needs of students
- Provide scaffolds that help students
- Understand the writing needs of students
- Have flexible groups to cater for the needs of students
- Provide real/authentic reasons to write
- Show that writing is valued
- Motivate students
- Show enthusiasm about reading and writing themselves
- Share their own writing with students
- Ensure there are plenty of opportunities for students' writing to be read
- Value sharing time and celebrate ideas
- Make resources available so students can access new vocabulary e.g. word walls
- Use, and show they value, self assessment strategies
- Ask 'why' questions to develop metacognition: e.g. "Why is this my best piece of writing?"
- Show they value peer assessment and peer tutoring
- Set learning intentions and co-construct success criteria
- Allow time for students to write
- Show they value 'free choice' writing time
- Teach different genre to give students more choice
- Have a clear idea themselves of what is required in a good writing programme
- Have a clear idea of each step of the writing process

Because assessing writing is subjective it can be challenging to make accurate assessments. Our goal is to focus on what our students need and to suggest next steps for them. We had already defined what we believed to be quality writing and now it is time to go that step further and create a plan to describe what we think is best for our students.

While the teaching staff at Kimbolton School firmly believes that formative assessment is the best assessment for quality learning, the introduction of National Standards has highlighted the need for more in-depth understanding of the assessments available for teachers to use,

how they are best used and the need for quality analysis of data collected. It is understood that good quality analysis of student writing leads to improved and more focussed teaching and learning for students. High quality analysis enables teachers to effectively plan next steps for students as well as report clearly to parents/caregivers, the principal and the Board of Trustees.

Methodology

Bruce Hammonds said in his article “Reflecting On What it Has Been All About” (New Zealand Principal Volume 25, Number 2, 2010) “...the most powerful professional development is gained by visiting other teachers.” I believe he is right, and school visits and professional discussion were a priority for this project.

- Indian Wells School in the Holbrook Education District of Arizona, USA was visited. Professional discussion was held with a kindergarten teacher (equivalent to our Year 1), a Grade 1 teacher (equivalent to our Year 2), a Grade 5 teacher (equivalent to our Year 6), a teacher who has returned to university to complete her PhD and the school principal.

Indian Wells School is of special interest as it is on a reservation, the roll is 100 percent Navajo and one of the kindergarten teachers is New Zealand trained and taught New Entrants to Year 2 in New Zealand before taking up her current position at Indian Wells in 2005.

- Observations were carried out in the Kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 5 classes.
- I met with the principal of Holy Trinity School, a private Catholic School in Washington DC, for general introduction and discussion.
- I spoke in some depth with a pupil from Holy Trinity School regarding what his class did for their writing programme in their 2010/2011 school year.
- Four schools within New Zealand were visited – two in the Manawatu region and two in Taranaki. I observed writing lessons and discussed how student writing was assessed and how the teachers and principals made use of the assessment information.
- Professional readings
- Extensive internet research.

Findings

As we all know learning to write is a complex process and skills are built up over time and with experience.

There is a huge amount of literature around writing programmes, the teaching of writing and assessing writing. This creates a need to sift through and decide what is best for our students and teachers to ensure quality programmes.

What is reassuring is that on the whole teachers, both in New Zealand and the United States, strive to do the best they can for their pupils and willingly share resources they have found useful.

The teachers visited want to teach young people to write to enable them to survive in the world as they grow up and in their adult years. What clearly stood out was that teacher knowledge and passion were extremely important.

Successful Writing Programmes

So what is a successful writing programme? It seems to be different things to different people and appears to depend on the purpose of the programme.

- To the schools visited in the USA, successful programmes were those that had all of the content required for students to pass the state tests. Indian Wells uses a commercial programme that is clearly set out and teachers follow it step by step. In some grades the teachers considered to be the most successful were those who had significant numbers of students who passed the state tests.
- In New Zealand successful programmes and teachers are those that teach students to write to a high level for audience, for a specific purpose and in time, to pass tests.

In ‘Assessing Writers Assessing Writing 1995-2002’ www.ttms.org Steve Peha states that teachers must focus on the following six instructional areas to achieve best practice in writing:

Writer’s Workshop - Writing lessons are held daily, there is frequent teacher modelling, students have authentic reasons for writing and authentic audiences, students choose their topics and share their writing, and student conferencing takes place.

Writing Process - Students are taught to write the way real writers write. Their writing is planned, drafted, redrafted, edited and published. Students share their work and get feedback. Next steps for improvement are set.

Writing Strategies – Students receive help with their planning, organisation and writing.

Six Traits - The six traits of writing – ideas and content, organisation, voice, sentence structure, word choice and conventions are taught.

Authentic Forms – Students learn the skills to enable them to write many genres, e.g. letters, narrative, expository, persuasive, information and reviews

Reading-Writing Connection – Students are taught the connection between reading and writing and to understand conventions in writing and reading, and also to evaluate other students’ writing.

From my visits it was clear that teachers in all schools were aware of the need for instruction in these six instructional areas. It was also clear that teachers understood the need for students to develop a rich vocabulary to enable them to write well.

A successful writing programme – Arizona

In Arizona, I looked at the programme ‘Step Up to Writing’ by Maureen Auman, now known as ‘Write Tools’. This, along with other similar programmes, is considered to be a successful writing programme. Auman explains in the version of ‘Step Up to Writing’ that I read that she created the programme because “...in 1985, as a middle school teacher, I was faced with the task of preparing my students to reach proficient or advanced levels in district and state writing assessments. The assessments required students to write expository paragraphs and essays. Because of my competitive nature, my desire to keep my job, and my belief that all students can learn to write, I looked at the assessment challenges and took the role of coach.”

Auman’s writing programme has a huge focus on expository writing. The purpose of this genre, which is the type of writing most used by adults, is to inform, give information, explain or describe. Her belief is that expository writing is the type of writing most needed for “high-stakes testing” and that it is more important for children to learn than narrative writing as most adults don’t write narrative unless they are authors.

Teachers received thorough training in the use of ‘Step Up to Writing’ and now, ‘Write Tools’, and use it with confidence.

Auman believes that from the start students need to know what good writing sounds like and looks like before they start writing and she suggests that 5-6 year olds should be taking part in writing of some type for 30 minutes a day. This writing can be built around social studies, science and maths. Older students’ writing time may be up to an hour a day. Writing time for all students should consist of oral work, group work with modelled writing and some partner writing.

In her programme Auman says the best way to learn grammar, punctuation and sentence structure is authentic writing and this includes writing to, writing by and writing with students. Students need to attempt approximations of unknown words, writing the sounds they can hear and recognise. They must learn to plan their writing from the start and this may be as simple as brainstorming a topic orally with the class or a group. At Level One (Kindergarten to Grade 2) of the programme students are taught to use transitions (words like first, second, third and last) between ‘big’ ideas. These words should disappear from writing as students progress. Level One students are expected to plan before writing and to include a conclusion in their writing. There is a lot of teacher modelling and support at the early stages of the programme.

Students are taught to use colours to help them organise their writing. In the classes visited this is done by giving students strips of coloured paper. Green paper is used for the topic sentence, yellow for ‘big ideas’ and green for the conclusion. Red is used for additional information/detail in each of the big ideas.

An example of Grade 1 writing

I like three lunches at school.

First of all pizza is good.

Also nachos are tasty.

Last spaghetti is my favourite.

Definitely I like three foods for lunch at school.

The grade one teacher shared how she works to the programme.

Step 1 planning

Step 2 more planning

Step 3 writing – colour coded

Step 4 edit, redraft and publish

This is modelled many times before students start their writing and each step becomes a lesson in itself. An example of how the programme works can be seen at <http://www2.pylusd.k12.ca.us/glk/jlaurich/StepUpToWriting.htm>

Learning intentions are on display in the classrooms and students are expected to be able to articulate them. My understanding is that the learning intention is for the whole class.

Video clips showing how the programme works are available on line at

http://www.soprislearning.com/cs/Satellite?c=CLG_Content_P&childpagename=Sopris%2FSopris_Layout&cid=1277940919484&pagename=Sopris_Wrapper&rendermode=previewnoinsite

Deliberate acts of teaching were obvious and students have lots and lots of practice using the same format with different topic focuses. Indian Wells students have to publish one piece of writing per term and this piece is graded against the school rubric, which is similar to the one the moderators use for the state tests. Writing is included in the state tests in Grades 5, 6 and 7. Samples of part of the state test format can be viewed at

<https://www.ideal.azed.gov/p/aims>

and the state standards at

<http://www.ade.az.gov/standards/language-arts/writing/articulated.asp>

Some teachers I talked with love the programme because it clearly sets out what must be taught, the progressions for teaching, and it is designed to help students pass the state tests. The programme is repetitive which makes planning easier, and it teaches students to be organised in their writing. Others believe that while it is good in some ways it stems creativity and a lot of students have difficulty writing any other genre beyond expository. Once students have mastered the format required for expository writing they move on to other genre such as persuasive writing, narratives and creative writing, poetry and public speaking. Older students learn to write summaries, reviews and to take notes. Guidelines for each of these are included in the programme.

The development of oral language is considered important by all of the teachers interviewed; their message being that if students can't say it they can't write it. They all believe it is important for classroom teachers to build student vocabulary through reading and other

language based activities. They also recognise a very strong correlation between reading and writing.

‘Step Up to Writing’ (Write Tools) is aligned with the Six Traits Writing Model and the school’s own rubric reflects this. The Six Traits of Writing being:

- ***Ideas and Content.*** This is where the student develops their main idea and establishes the purpose for their writing
- ***Word Choice.*** Words that fit the purpose of the writing, establish and maintain the tone and enhance the meaning are chosen
- ***Conventions.*** Punctuation, grammar, spelling, capitalisation and paragraph structure are carefully chosen to make the piece easy to read
- ***Voice.*** The personality of the writer shows through giving the reader a sense that a real person is writing
- ***Sentence structure.*** Varying sentences are used to fit the topic and the tone of the writing
- ***Organisation.*** The clear structure of the writing: the beginning, middle and end

The Arizona Department of Education uses a rubric to assess students’ writing based on the Six Traits Writing Model as their official scoring guide.

Expectations at each level vary under these headings but students are taught to write using these six traits and their writing is graded accordingly. Teachers are expected to give clear feedback to students as they work and also to grade the students’ writing. Suggestions on appropriate feedback are included in ‘Step Up to Writing’ (Write Tools).

A successful writing programme – New Zealand

What is seen as a successful writing programme is different in some ways in New Zealand but I believe the expected final outcome is similar. Students do need to write to pass their exams and other assessments but here we expect a larger degree of creativity and student voice right from the start. We want to set young people up for life to ensure they are valuable citizens in our country, as do teachers in the USA.

School programmes

No commercial programmes were seen in any of the schools visited and there are none used in the cluster of schools Kimbolton School works with. Two of the schools visited are investigating ‘Solo Taxonomy – Hooked on Thinking’ and, through this, the language students need to have to pass NCEA Level 2.

I did not see any specific in-school programmes that teachers had to follow but the New Zealand schools visited do have overviews to guide teachers. Teachers use a range of strategies to develop student writing including individual writing, shared writing, partner writing, group instruction and class instruction. Some believe teaching genre is beneficial to

students from early on and others disagree. In some classes visited there seemed to be a renewed focus on the teaching of handwriting and spelling, and computer skills were being taught as part of the overall writing programme.

The Role of the teacher

The lessons observed in New Zealand were rich and varied and deliberate acts of teaching were obvious during the classroom observations. As in Arizona the classes visited were organised, teachers encouraged students to do their best, guided them and most importantly teachers had a good understanding of the steps needed to develop their students as writers.

The teachers visited factor a writing time into their classroom programmes each day. Teachers used some method, mostly scrap books, to record lessons with children and these are referred to regularly. Class learning intentions were clear as were learning intentions and success criteria for each group/student.

Students have their individual learning intentions on display. One junior class teacher has the current learning intention for each student on a label on the front of their draft writing book and another has the learning intentions on a duck shape in the front cover of students' books. These are added to as the students achieve their goals. Teachers of older students had lists or rubrics inside the students' draft writing books or on their desk tops.

Varied lesson formats

The writing lessons were started with class activities that included celebrating student writing success and reading examples of good writing to the class. Lots of teacher modelling was apparent in the classes visited and an emphasis was placed on planning for writing. Children were grouped or paired for their writing. There were groups where students were working independently while others worked with partners to create one piece of writing. As in Arizona, it was recognised that students need time and one piece of writing may take several days.

Writing success is celebrated

In each class visited, importance is placed on improving student writing. One teacher displayed the students' first drafts along with their published work. Students in this class used the exemplars to guide them. In all classes the students shared their writing and feedback was received from both the teacher and other students. Praise was given appropriately and students were recognised for their great writing. Published work is displayed on classroom walls, in class books, in school newsletters, read at assemblies and in some cases published on the internet on class blogs.

In all classes real audience is seen as important in the teaching of writing, as is writing for authentic reasons.

Assessment

Assessment is about student learning and gathering data for student learning. There are, as all educators are aware two main types of assessment:

- Formative Assessment – assessment to help students improve their learning
- Summative Assessment – assessment for the purpose of data collection, tracking students and in some cases, to enable education departments (USA) to rank both schools and teachers.

The primary purpose of assessing writing is and should be, of course, to improve student learning and to develop quality learning programmes that suit the students' needs. The teachers and principals visited have a good knowledge and understanding of assessment, especially formative assessment. They understand the relationship between assessment, learning and teaching and do their best to ensure the validity and reliability of the assessments they carry out. They understand that to enhance progress students need to play a part in assessing their own work. The students are, on the whole, aware of their progress and they are able to self assess against success and/or process criteria.

One of the major purposes of writing assessment, and the most important, is to provide feedback to students as it is crucial to the development of writing. The teachers visited provide constructive feedback and feed forward to their students. Assessment data for other purposes, such as grading or levelling student work, is collected over time in order for teachers to make fair and accurate judgements.

In 'Assessing Writers Assessing Writing 1995-2002' www.ttms.org Steve Peha reminds us that grading students' work is actually a form of evaluation, not assessment.

He says that grading is a judgment of a single performance or a group of performances averaged over time. He believes that grading fails as an assessment tool because human learning cannot be reduced to a single value; different teachers assign different grades in different ways, the interpretation of criteria can be subjective and students cannot use grades to improve as they provide no information on how to improve.

Assessment - Arizona

The 'No Child Left Behind' policy was introduced in the United States in 2002. This policy requires assessments to be mandatory, and for all states to have standardised tests and assessments. Student test results are used to rank both schools and teachers. In Arizona, AIMS (Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards) tests are carried out at the end of the school year, usually in April. The data created as a result of the tests goes to the school district superintendent as well as to the schools in the district. Schools with students who do well in the tests are labelled 'Performance Plus Schools' and those that do not are labelled 'Under Performing'. Schools considered underperforming have a 'warning year' to improve and then if they have not improved on scores they become part of an intervention programme. Status can change from year to year, with a school being labelled performance plus one year and underperforming the next or the other way around. Factors in this fluctuation can include the students at a particular grade level and staff changes.

All schools in the district meet at the beginning of the school year and the superintendent shares the data from the highest performing schools in the district and data from other schools in Arizona. The superintendent makes it clear that all schools in the district are expected to improve on the previous year's scores.

Teachers are very aware that one assessment on one day does not give a true reflection of a student's ability. There is some concern that schools in higher socioeconomic areas tend to achieve better results than those in very low socio-economic areas but Indian Wells teachers know that this is not always the case as their school, on an Indian Reservation, has the Performance Plus label.

Teachers must teach toward the tests in order to achieve the school and education district targets but they said they didn't know the exact content of the tests or genre to be tested. Students have a whole day to complete the test, which is quite comprehensive. Some prompting does happen to keep students focused. Examples of practice prompts given to a Grade 5 (NZ Year 6) class to prepare them for the AIMS test are:

- Write a story about your adventure in a secret cave
- Your school is planning a field trip. Write a persuasive essay about where you think the trip should be. Include reasons to support your idea, and give details to support your idea. Use persuasive word choice and persuasive techniques.
- Write an expository essay on one special person in your life. Explain why this person is special.

Booklets are supplied for both the practice prompts and the AIMS tests and include a page for prewriting/planning, two pages for the draft, a page with a checklist for students and two pages for the final copy.

Emphasis is placed on ensuring students gain the highest scores possible. This, of course, has had a huge impact on how teachers teach and how they assess student work. One teacher commented that she had noted that there was a huge improvement in students' scores in the AIMS test once they had 'Step Up to Writing' (Write Tools) up and running.

Teachers understand that the writing test in Arizona is moderated by a team of 'markers', and they said that at times students who have performed well all year fail the state tests. Self esteem then became an issue for many of these students. Teachers commented that they were aware that there are many factors that influence a student's performance on any day including ill health, lack of food and family situations. Once the tests are sent off for marking they are not seen again by the students or teachers. Schools receive their class results, school results and rankings.

Assessment for learning is part of the writing programme and teachers do their best to assist students by making suggestions about what they need to do to improve. Even so, student writing is graded within each class. This is probably important there, to some degree, as it prepares students for the grading system of the state tests. At present different states have different sets of standards but teachers understood that work was being done toward having the same standards over 48 states.

A rubric based on the Six Traits of Writing is used as assessment tools at Indian Wells and another version is used for assessing and grading the AIMS test. Below is a copy of the official scoring guide based on the six traits of writing used to assess writing by the Arizona Department of Education.

Official Scoring Guide: Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards

Arizona Department of Education August 2010

HOLISTIC RUBRIC BASED ON 6 TRAITS OF WRITING

<p>SCORE POINT 6 Response is sophisticated and skilful in written communication, demonstrated by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exceptional clarity, focus, and control in topic development and organization that often show insight. • in-depth and/or creative exploration of the topic using rich, relevant, and credible details. • a strong, perhaps creative, beginning and a satisfying conclusion. • specifically and carefully chosen words that are skilfully crafted into phrases and sentences that enhance meaning. • intentional and committed interaction between the writer and the reader. • effective and/or creative use of a wide range of conventions with few errors. 	<p>SCORE POINT 5 Response is excellent and skilful in written communication, demonstrated by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clarity, focus, and control in topic development and organization. • a balanced and thorough exploration of the topic using relevant details. • an inviting beginning and a satisfying sense of closure. • a broad range of carefully chosen words crafted into phrases and varied sentences that sound natural. • awareness of the reader and commitment to the audience and topic. • effective use of a wide range of conventions with few errors. 	<p>SCORE POINT 4 Response is appropriate and acceptable in written communication, demonstrated by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ideas adequately developed with a clear and coherent presentation of ideas with order and structure that can be formulaic. • relevant details that are sometimes general or limited; organization that is clear, but sometimes predictable. • a recognizable beginning and ending, although one or both may be somewhat weak. • effective word choice that is functional and, at times, shows interaction between writer and audience. • somewhat varied sentence structure with good control of simple constructions; a natural sound. • control of standard conventions although a wide range is not used; errors that do not impede readability.
<p>SCORE POINT 3 Response is inadequate in written communication, demonstrated by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • broad or simplistic ideas that are understood but often ineffective. • attempts at organizing that are inconsistent or ineffective; beginnings and endings that are underdeveloped; repetitive transitional devices. • developmental details that are uneven, somewhat predictable, or leave information gaps; details not always placed effectively in the writing. • reliance on clichés and overused words that do not connect with the reader; limited audience awareness. • monotonous and sometimes misused words; sentences may sound mechanical, although simple constructions are usually correct. • limited control of standard conventions with significant errors. 	<p>SCORE POINT 2 Response is poor in written communication, demonstrated by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overly simplistic and sometimes unclear ideas that have insufficiently developed details. • sequencing of ideas that is often just a list; missing or ineffective details that require reader inference to comprehend and follow. • missing beginning and/or ending. • repetitive, monotonous, and often misused words awkwardly strung into sentences that are difficult to read because they are either choppy or rambling; many sentences that begin with repetitive noun + verb pattern. • lack of audience awareness. • little control of basic conventions resulting in errors impeding readability. 	<p>SCORE POINT 1 Response is inferior in written communication, demonstrated by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of purpose or ideas and sequencing. • organization that obscures the main point. • an attempt that is too short to offer coherent development of an idea, if it is stated. • extremely limited vocabulary that shows no commitment to communicating a message. • sentences with confusing word order that may not permit oral reading. • severe and frequent errors in conventions.

Sourced:

<http://www.azed.gov/wp-content/uploads/PDF/HOLISTICRUBRICBASEDON6TRAITS.pdf>

Assessment – New Zealand

It is well understood by teachers that students learn more when assessment is an integrated part of the writing programme and that assessment which provides regular feedback is the most useful to students. All schools visited use Assess to Learn strategies to some extent.

New Zealand teachers use a range of assessment strategies and teachers' professional judgement (OTJ) is, thankfully, still considered a valid assessment. It does however; need to be backed up with reliable data. All of the teachers and principals met with in New Zealand believe the most effective assessments for student learning are formative assessments. Shirley Clarke (Unlocking Formative Assessment 2001) says that research shows there are five factors that contribute to improving learning through assessment.

These are:

- effective feedback to students. This should help students recognise their next steps and understand how to take the next step
- students being actively involved in their own learning. This includes understanding the learning intentions
- teachers adjusting their teaching according to the results of their assessments
- recognising the influence assessment has on student motivation and self esteem
- students' ability to self assess and their understanding of what they need to do to improve

Teachers recognise the importance of these factors, particularly the benefits of effective feedback. When providing feedback and assessing student writing, teachers focus on deeper features as well as surface features. They try to relate their comments, either written or oral, to the learning intention. Some record next steps for both themselves and students to focus on. Teacher modelling is used to assist students to understand and improve their writing. Most assessments are carried out on a daily basis during the writing lesson. Some of these are noted for future reference and some dealt with as the lesson progresses.

Writing is particularly difficult for teachers to level and it is necessary to moderate with colleagues to find a best-fit level for the purposes of summative assessment. Data collected enables teachers and schools to develop programmes suitable for their students' needs and to manage the necessary resources that enable them to run their programmes.

Teachers willingly share ideas with each other and moderate students' writing for assessment purposes. While some expressed concerns about National Standards all schools are working hard, with limited training, to align the assessments they already carry out with the National Standards and to make valid, reliable professional judgements.

Some schools have created their own rubrics for both teacher and student use. These have been designed to guide next steps for students and as a tool to guide teacher instruction.

Implications

The most important factor in the success of any writing programme is the teacher. That is, the teacher's competence, skill, passion and expertise. This is the same everywhere. Effective teachers of writing are always examining and refining what they believe makes a successful writing programme. They are reflective and think about what they need to do next, what they would do differently next time and what they have learned. They believe in the importance of reading and re-reading as the writer writes. They carry out deliberate acts of teaching, and they make sure their students have the chance to write about things they want to write about. They ensure there are authentic purposes for writing and students know who their audience is. They also recognise the importance of students meeting and working with real authors.

It is very important for teachers to be competent, capable writers themselves in order to confidently teach students to write. It is often assumed that teachers will have the necessary skills to write well themselves but this is not something we should take for granted. Neither should we expect that these skills or the skills to teach writing are learned prior to a teacher's first placement. We need to remember that it is not the length of time spent training to be a teacher that makes the difference, but what student teachers are learning and their opportunities for ongoing training. It is important that teachers have access to quality professional development, not just to up-skill as teachers of writing but also to improve their own writing skills if they feel they need to. The depletion of our advisory service is cause for great concern especially as we are teaching students to write competently throughout the curriculum. This may well be more of a concern for rural schools as the few advisors available are very busy people and visiting rural schools usually means a good deal of travel.

While teachers willingly share their knowledge and expertise we must remember that they are also very busy people and their first priority is to their own students.

School Leaders

School leaders need to have a clear picture of what they expect in their school writing programmes and guidelines need to be firmly in place. We need to remember that assessing and assessing alone will not make any difference to student learning. It's the old story – you can weigh an elephant over and over but it won't get any bigger if you don't feed it.

We certainly may not like National Standards but compared to the state testing carried out in the USA they are a better option. We need to focus on ensuring that our National Standards do not become National Testing. We need to ensure that our students remain creative and confident in their ability to improve as writers. We need to keep providing students with an education and not revert to just schooling to pass tests.

Conclusions

Similarities were noted in all of the programmes and in the classes visited. Teachers were all passionate in their desire to teach student writing. They had all willingly taken part in professional development, including courses and workshops after school, in their weekends and holiday times. Teachers want their students to succeed whether success means making huge improvements in their writing, passing state tests, or reaching National Standards. All schools used some form of rubric to assess student writing. All students were given some degree of feedback and most received some form of next step advice. All teachers shared their expertise in some way and in bigger schools teachers planned together.

Teachers in New Zealand can enjoy freedom to design their own programmes whereas commercial programmes are highly favoured in Arizona.

Teachers and Successful Programmes

Successful writing programmes all featured knowledgeable, competent teachers who have a passion for teaching writing. These teachers plan carefully, considering their students and their own teaching and learning needs. They allow time on a daily basis, no matter what Year level/Grade, to teach writing and they provide good quality feedback that is relevant and focused on the students' learning goals. Feedback starts early in the piece and may be oral, written, teacher or peer feedback. A huge variety of strategies are used and students generally understand that their attempts are valued. Effective teachers of writing are reflective and are constantly assessing their own practice, often in the form of reflective notes or diaries. They are very willing to undertake professional development and strive to attend good quality workshops and on-going initiatives. Teachers have clear expectations and know what they want to achieve and, as a consequence, so do their students. Learning intentions are understood by teachers and students alike.

Teachers know what they must teach and when they must teach it to ensure their students' progress. Teachers in Arizona, on the whole, enjoy having a set programme as they are in no doubt about what and how they must teach. All teachers use a range of resources, motivators, activities and strategies, and teach different genres. There are class activities, group activities, peer activities and individual writing opportunities. Deeper features are important but so are surface features such as spelling and handwriting because if the reader can't read what is written it cannot be considered good writing. Great teachers of writing know that quality writing doesn't happen in one lesson. Students need thinking time, planning time – the better planned the better the outcome, and time to write, rewrite and edit. Writing is modelled by teachers regularly and is shared in many ways. This sometimes includes the teachers sharing their own writing.

Very strong links are made between reading and writing, students are given meaningful interesting and authentic contexts for writing and teachers respond to students' writing as readers and not just judges.

Teachers and Assessment

Teachers of successful writing programmes use a variety of tools to assess and evaluate. This includes using their expertise and knowledge of writing. In order to make fair and accurate judgements about students they gather assessment information from a variety of sources,

including self assessments, peer assessments, activity based information and previous oral and written assessments. Rubrics are popular assessment tools as they can be designed for teachers and also for students to use. They provide an indication of where students are on their writing journey, next steps to take and descriptors of what good writing looks like. Formative assessments are a large part of a successful writing programme especially when students are taught how to peer assess and self-assess, and exemplars and rubrics are made available to them.

Schools with successful writing programmes collect and carefully analyse student achievement data. Information gained is used to plan school resources including staffing and future professional development. Professional development on good quality analysis of data would be beneficial to many but so far this has been elusive for most.

Visiting other schools with successful writing programmes was valuable for the continued development of my knowledge and pedagogy, and visiting schools outside New Zealand has allowed me to better understand just how fortunate students in New Zealand are. I believe that I will now be able to increase my capability as a leader in the teaching of writing at Kimbolton School.

Good things take time!

Below is an example of one New Zealand student's writing journey.

When Beau first arrived at school his 'stories' were lines of scribble.

After five months at school Beau wrote

Gertrude ema Beua htert rudem had two She did Walkonhertails dao
(Gertrude had two tails. She did walk on her tails. She walked home.)

After eighteen months at school Beau wrote

My animal is a Koala it is a maresopl that maens it did have pouch The bade did canr on the muns bac
(My animal is a koala. It is a marsupial. That means it did have a pouch. They baby did get carried on the mum's back.)

Aged 11 Beau wrote

THE GARDENER

As he pulled the weeds out with his gnarled bony hands, he started to cough. He stood up and muttering to himself, walked over to a new patch of weeds. His clothes were sticking to him with sweat.

He reached behind him and pulled a trowel and started to dig. Then he pulled out a grubby handkerchief and mopped sweat from his brow. He also took off his tatty old straw hat which had been covering his nearly bald head and the wizened skin around his big brown nose. He had eyes a light blue, full of garden knowledge.

As he stood up you could hear his back protest with loud crackling noises. Muttering, "I'm too old for this," he slowly shuffled inside. But he would be gardening again tomorrow and the next day and the day after that.

**Aged 13 Beau wrote
MEMORIES**

“Istanbul is great city” my taxi driver says in heavily accented English. I mumble something unintelligible and wince as my headache skyrockets. He babbles on about the food and tourist sites while I groan and clutch my head, wishing I was anywhere but the back of scorching hot taxi that smelt of vomit and smoke. I take a deep breath and try to settle my nauseous stomach, while asking how far to go. “Not far; next corner.” I sigh with content.

Four years I’d been away. Four years to build up my fortune, or trying to. But here I am crawling back with nothing but a head full of unwanted memories.

“We have arrived” my taxi driver says his loud coarse voice shattering my thoughts. He slams on the brakes and we slide to a halt on a jaunty angle. “You visiting friends?” He asks curious. Now that we have stopped moving my headache has subsided a bit and I manage “Sort of”

Now uncomfortable in his presence I quickly pay the fare and step outside only to be harassed by the sun and noise. I watch him careening down the road whereas I stumbled into the cool shadow of a nearby alley, and through my lurching vision my eyes are drawn to a patch of brightness in the dim light.

I fall to my knees like I’m worshipping it and I gently pluck it from its hidden crevice. It was a small girl’s locket damp from my tears. When did I start crying, does it matter?

“I want to see the world” her soft voice caresses me. “Remember it’s a dangerous place, little girls can get hurt” I tell her. “I’d be fine. You would come and protect me. Wouldn’t you?” She asks in a soft pleading tone.

“No I won’t come with you, you won’t go anywhere either. Will you?” I say trying to gently drown her dream. Now I wish I’d tried harder.

I’m back in the present. “I didn’t know, how could I” I wail against an invisible jury. Tears pour never ending down my face slowly disappearing down the cracks in the alley just like my hopes and sanity.

“Teresa where are you? Time to get up.” I call out and stumble into her room. The bed is unslept in. The room is barren of life. More worried than I have ever been before I rush to her bed and disturb a letter and locket cradled in her pillow. My unsure hands slowly reach out and pick up the letter and with a shake of my wrist I unfurl it.

To my darling brother

I wish to see the world whether you want me to your not. I wish you were coming with me but you have shown me your will.

So you never forget my heart is with you here is my favourite locket.

Loving you forever

Teresa

She can’t have been gone long there should still be time. Somewhere in the back of my mind a small voice whispers. A small twelve years old girl wandering the streets at night. Someone would have taken advantage of her. “No. No she can’t have been gone long.” I cry out.

Knock. Knock. Knock. “I’ll get it” I call out and rush to the door a small hope rekindling inside me. “Hello” I open the door in a cheery hopeful tone. Two policemen are standing there. “Hi son. I’m afraid we must call off the search it has been two weeks.” One of them says in a gruff voice in what he thinks is comforting. “No, No she’s still out there” But some part of me knows it’s untrue and that part vows never to stay here again. I sprint out into the night tearing off her locket leaving everything behind but a wallet full of cash.

My knees are beginning to hurt after kneeling for so long. I wish I’d never come back, begging on the streets was better than this.

“You’re back. Oh my god you’re back.” A high pitched shriek echoes around inside my skull piercing my thoughts. My body is yanked into a massive rib crushing bear hug. Then we’re

both crying and I'm mumbling aunty over and over. She's saying she came back. She. I glance over her shoulder and another figure emerges from the shadow.

Teresa.

I have come home.

Isn't this the sort of progress we want for all our students?

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