

# A Writing For Pleasure Manifesto

## Introduction

As literate adults, most of us would have little difficulty in defining what we mean by reading for pleasure. Cremin (2014) states: “At the core of reading for pleasure is the reader’s volition, their agency and desire to read, their anticipation of the satisfaction gained through the experience and/or afterwards in interaction with others”. Or, as the thirteenth century Japanese monk Kenko reflected: “It is a most wonderful comfort to sit alone beneath a lamp, book spread before you, and commune with someone from the past whom you have never met.” Although the act of reading is very often solitary, it is clearly also deeply social. So it is with writing. If it is true that young people who read for pleasure also tend to enjoy writing (Clark 2013), then perhaps *Writing For Pleasure* can be similarly defined as a volitional act, undertaken with the anticipation of gaining satisfaction from effective communication with others.

## What Might Writing As Pleasure & Writing For Pleasure Mean?

What comprises pleasure for a writer? This is not a simple question to answer. The specific *sources* of enjoyment (writing *for* and *as* pleasure) must be many and varied, and will be different for individual writers in different contexts.

The writing of a dissertation about a particular aspect of working-class children’s education in the late nineteenth century gave me immense pleasure over and above my usual satisfaction in chipping away at the sentences; I felt the writing connected me to my grandparents and their generation in an original and highly personal way. In another example, my colleague found pleasure in reliving, for the briefest of moments, a childhood adventure with his friends up on the South Downs and sharing it with his class. He hoped that the children would sympathetically understand why he felt the need to write it and would relate such feelings to their own lives, which indeed they did.

**Writing as pleasure.** Pleasure can be gained from practising the craft of writing, from engaging in the process, or in a particular part of the process, whether it be generating ideas, getting the words down on paper or screen, editing to perfection or publishing with care. Carol Joyce Oates and Ernest Hemingway both recorded that, for them, the pleasure was all in the revising.

**Writing for pleasure.** Pleasure can be anticipated and then felt in the sense of a purpose fulfilled and in the expectation of a response, in sharing something (knowledge, feeling, experience) with a specific audience, in the gradual discovery of your own writing voice, in saying what you mean to say, achieving what you want the reader to feel. Or, as Alan Bennett recently said, in “*talking to yourself*”. Of course, the crafting may often feel difficult and not enjoyable, but perhaps the writing *for* pleasure aspect can carry a writer through to completion.

## Why The Need For A Writing For Pleasure Curriculum and Pedagogy?

There is no reason to suppose that children and young people cannot experience these same kinds of pleasures in writing. However, a recent survey conducted by the National Literacy Trust (2016) makes it clear that there has been a decline in children’s enjoyment and motivation in writing both in and out of school. This obviously begs the question as to whether we in school are currently acting to nurture a generation who will write for pleasure and at leisure. It seems that we are not, although this is perhaps unsurprising in the context of a prescriptive writing curriculum and a formal assessment procedure which emphasises form over substance and makes no mention of ‘authentic’ purpose. Yet there are potent reasons why we should be developing a curriculum and a pedagogy which has writing *for* and *as* pleasure at its centre. Research consistently tells us that there are significant academic benefits to be gained alongside the personal and affective. The most important pointer to high attainment in writing is motivation (Alexander 2010, Beard 2000, Hillocks 2001, NLT 2016) and that the best motivator is agency (Au & Gourd 2013, Dyson & Freedman 2003, Ketter & Pool 2001, Watanabe 2007). Both agency and motivation in writing have very clear links to the experience of pleasure.

## A Working Definition Of A Writing For Pleasure Curriculum

*Writing For Pleasure* is any research-based curriculum which seeks to create conditions that promote writing as a pleasurable experience. It has as its goal the fostering of a love of writing which will be continued into children's personal and working lives long after they leave school. It will have the following components:

Agency will be ensured through the shifting of control from teachers to children, allowing them the time and the space to write for their own chosen purposes, at their own pace, in their own way and in their own chosen forms, on subjects they care about and using their own cultural reference points, values and interests.

The importance of grammatical and transcriptional knowledge will be balanced by attention to composition, beginning with generating ideas and establishing an authentic purpose and writing process.

Writing will be seen as a highly social process, led by a writer's desire and choice, with meaning-making at its centre and an awareness of the potential impact on a reader.

It will create a research-based pedagogy, based on fourteen principles, which ensures interconnection between agency, motivation and self-regulation, and, importantly, leads to high achievement in writing.

### **The 14 Interconnected Principles That Make Up A Writing For Pleasure Pedagogy**

We believe that there are many teachers who subscribe to a writing for pleasure philosophy and who need a pedagogy which will be instrumental in cultivating a desire and an enduring love of writing. The ambition is for children's writing to match (both in composition and transcription) the standards of writing which are achieved out in the real world, and for children to experience the kinds of pleasure available to engaged adult writers through personal and artistic expression, effective communication and the possibility of making changes for themselves and others. The principles identified below are grounded in educational research into effective writing instruction, and are ones we have put into practice in a real working primary classroom context.

#### **The Writing Environment (1)**

When writers see their teachers as positive, caring and interested in pupils' lives, they are more likely to engage in writing at a high level of achievement. The aim is to create a community of writers, in which teachers write alongside children and share their own writing practices, and children are shown how to talk about their own and their peers' writing in a positive and constructive way.

#### **Positive Expectations: Seeing All Learners As Authentic Writers (2)**

Effective writing teachers hold high achievement expectations for all writers. They see all children as authentic writers and give early writers strategies that lead to greater independence. They also promote peer support in their classrooms.

#### **Talking About, Reading and Sharing Writing (3)**

Children are given regular opportunities to share and discuss with others (including teachers) their own and others' writing in order to give and receive constructive criticism and celebrate achievement. This happens best when the writing environment is positive and settled in tone, and has a sense of fostering a community of writers.

#### **Plan Purposeful & Authentic Writing Projects Which Allow Children To Write About Their Own Interests and Lives (4)**

Meaningfulness affects learner engagement and outcomes to a considerable extent. Writing projects are most meaningful to children if they are allowed to generate their own subject and purpose, write at their own pace, in their own way, in a self-chosen form, and with a clear sense of a real reader. Given these circumstances, writers are likely to remain focused on a task, maintain a strong personal agency over their writing, and produce something significant for themselves and in keeping with teacher expectations.

### **Explicitly Teach The Writing Process & Scaffold New Learning Projects (5)**

Effective writing teachers give direct instruction in the different components of the writing process (how to generate an idea, plan, draft, revise, edit, publish). They scaffold children's learning and understanding of the process and of the features of new genres through demonstration, discussion, modelling and sharing exemplars which they have written themselves. Other resources, such as genre booklets and displays, help the children towards independent writing.

### **Split Up The Writing Process Into Discrete Chunks (6)**

Setting one short-term process goal in a lesson (generating an idea/ planning/ drafting/ revising/ editing./publishing) benefits learners in terms of focus, motivation and achievement. Understanding strategies for each process means that children can be self-regulating and have a greater independence and agency.

### **Reassuringly Consistent (7)**

Good classroom organisation facilitates learning, ensures focus and builds writing confidence. Children need the reassurance of knowing how the writing lesson is expected to proceed.

Teachers can plan to work with the whole class, groups or individuals (via conferencing).

A well-organised classroom will direct children to the act of writing regularly and often. Children will know the routines for starting and finishing work, and that they may free-write often and on their own. Resources will be visible and will communicate strategies clearly.

### **Opportunity For Sustained and Purposeful Writing Every Day, Including Free-Writing (8)**

It is essential that children are given time to write for a sustained period every day to work on both class writing projects and particularly on personal free-writing. Free-writing is seen as an important part of the writing curriculum since it is here, through exercising their own choice of subject, purpose and form, that they have true agency and come to see writing as an empowering and pleasurable activity which they can use now and in the future.

### **Balancing Composition & Transcription (9)**

Schools will have their own policies for the teaching of spelling, punctuation and handwriting. We would emphasise, however, that writing skills are obviously best learned in the context of a child's purposeful and reader-focused text. Invented spellings are acceptable in the composition stage, and handwriting skills are best practised when publishing a completed piece. Mini-lessons take place at the beginning of the writing time, and spelling and punctuation are self-monitored as children write, marking their text for items to be checked and corrected at the editing stage. Research shows that there is no evidence to link the formal teaching of grammar and improvements in children's writing. Successful writing teachers know that, if grammar is to be understood in a meaningful way, it must be taught functionally and applied and examined in the context of real composition.

### **Build Self-Regulation (10)**

While all children will need guidance and advice at times, they need to know the self-regulating strategies which will help them to write confidently and independently, such as how to generate ideas, use planners and checklists, and have access to resources for editing and publishing.

### **Becoming Writer-Teachers (11)**

Become a writer-teacher who writes for and with pleasure! Children gain from knowing that their teacher faces the same writing challenges that they do. Write and share in class your own pieces in relation to the projects you are asking the children to engage in, but be sure to maintain reciprocal relations when discussing and modelling your own writing processes and the exemplar texts you have written.

### **Pupil Conference: Meeting Children Where They Are (12)**

A rich response to children's writing is crucial. Many teachers use both written and verbal feedback. Research particularly emphasises the usefulness of oral feedback, which is immediate, relevant and allows children to reflect on and attend to learning points while actually engaged in the writing. Conferences will be short and are most successful in a settled, focused and self-regulating classroom. Teachers give feedback initially on composition and prioritise those who are in most need of assistance. Writer-teachers are better able to advise and give feedback because they understand the issues when writing themselves.

### Reading Impacting On Writing (13)

Successful writing teachers know that children who read more, write more and better. A reading for pleasure pedagogy assists a writing for pleasure pedagogy since the reading of good texts available in school and in libraries can provide children with models and suggest ideas and themes for personal writing. Successful writing teachers also know that reading aloud whole texts to the class in an engaged way has a significant effect on children's vocabulary and story comprehension, and increases the range of syntactic structures and linguistic features they use in their writing.

### Considering Your Successful Interconnecting Of The Principles (14)

We cannot emphasise strongly enough that all these principles are powerfully interconnected and should be considered as such. As many studies show, they are critical to the effective teaching of writing. Where do you currently see your practice making links between these different principles and where is more development needed?

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