



Literacy For Pleasure

Can Greater Depth Really Be Taught? Explorative Considerations For Teaching To Greater Depth.

A colleague at work set me the challenge of considering whether it was possible to *teach* writing to greater depth. I went back to the research which informed our *Writing For Pleasure* pedagogy and found a few of the articles which looked specifically at gifted and talent writers to see what they had to say. I also used a few pieces of literature on good writing teaching to help me. This is what I found out. For references, please see the end of this pamphlet.

1. CREATE A COMMUNITY OF AUTHENTIC WRITERS:

Firstly and most importantly, create the conditions for greater depth writers to thrive. Attend to and have an awareness of children's intellectual, creative, socio-affective interests/abilities and allow these to enter their writing as an area of strength. Create a positive and very writerly/explorative environment in which children can craft their writing. Have an awareness of their need to have 'intrinsic motivation,' 'volition,' and 'self-efficacy' maintained and respected. They need time and space to self-manage and self-regulate their own writing processes and final writing 'products'.

- Allow them to pursue writing projects which attend to their 'funds of knowledge', opinions, interests and emotional responses. Writing projects which are personal to them.
- Create a small peer workshop environment in which to write with other mature experienced writers.
- Consider ways home and school writing can merge and influence one another.
- Use their own writing processes and ways of producing a final writing product.
- Children need to read and talk about the craft of writing with peers and their teacher with regularity.
- They need to feel they are living a literate life.

2. GENRE EXPERTS:

- Write effectively for a range of **purposes** and **audiences**, selecting the appropriate **form**.
- Choose the appropriate **register**.
- Distinguish between the **language of speech** and **writing**.
- Exercise conscious control over **formality** through grammar and vocabulary.



Move children away from genre imitating to 'innovating' or active hybriding or subversive manipulation. This could provide useful evidence for the above standard. Show them the typical register of major genres and ensure they have an understanding of their 'field', 'tenor' and 'mode'. By allowing them to read about the register of the genre (potentially through [genre-booklets](#)), and to understand it (through exemplars), allow them use it and then play around with it. This should provide rich examples for this standard. Some examples of manipulation include: metafiction, deconstructionist, intertextual, hybriding and the concept of 'faction'.

3. PARENTHESIS:

- *Use semi-colons, dashes, colons, hyphens to enhance meaning and avoid ambiguity.*

Teach the function of parenthesis explicitly. Teach that they have a variety of options to choose from when enacting parenthesis and that they function in slightly different ways. This should help attend to the above statement. Use our [Functional Grammar Table](#) to help you if you'd like.

MATURE INDEPENDENT WRITERS:

- *Drawing independently on what they have read as models for their own writing.*
- *Literary language*
- *Characterisation*
- *Structure*

4. **COLLECTING:** Collecting words, collecting sentences/poetic moments, collecting themes, trying out types of openings, types of endings, collecting metaphors, collecting characters as metaphors, collecting/discussing psychological/philosophical ideas as plots/characters/settings for narrative writing.
5. **BEHAVING LIKE A FILM DIRECTOR:** In narratives, use flash-backs, multiple perspectives/changing perspectives, considering 'camera angles,' using delay, try out different chronology and use of tenses and consider pace.
6. **READING FOR PLEASURE + 'WITH RIGOUR':** Build a reading for pleasure culture in the classroom/home. Provide children with particular books/exemplars which could showcase teaching points and provide 'rigour'.
7. **DEVELOPING NARRATIVE:**
 - Know what psychological or philosophical point they want to make through their narrative first then build/disguise this idea in their characters, settings, objects and events.
 - Give them time to dig deep into the consciousness of their characters. Encourage some of their writing to be character led – not plot led. They should be doing more than simply making up a character and then try to explain and authenticate them. Character, plot and setting are all interconnected behind one coherent psychological/philosophical theme that they want to deliver. They interrogate their character until they know everything about them and why they do the things they do.
 - Know about and use a variety of story arcs.



- They do more than those children who simply have the ability to flesh out with vivid detail an otherwise dull and clichéd plot. In other words, they do more than those who are able to disguise their bad or shallow narratives.
- Appreciate that narrative is made up of structural units ‘description’, ‘dialogue’ and ‘action’. They are able to develop these in both an individual way (almost as pieces of poetry or art in themselves) and as part of the collective whole. Their narrative works should read as an uninterrupted fictional dream which is wholly convincing and never broken through awkwardness or by their sense of ego as the writer.
- As a narrator, they keep a cool distance away from the story and instead use their characters and the events themselves to give over the emotional quality. An extension of this is that they don’t entertain needless explanations – which disrupts this idea of a ‘narrative dream’. They basically stay out of the story if they can help it. In this kind of writing, they understand they are nothing more than an observer of the story and a reader of characters’ minds.
- They see sentences as being made of ‘slots’. E.g. *The man walked down the road*. The slots that can be modified in this sentence are the following: ‘the man,’ ‘walked’ and ‘the road’. One or two of these will typically be modified in the form of ‘show don’t tell’. They are always looking to ‘convince’ to ‘prove’ that the narrative is ‘real’ to their reader through literary language.
- The descriptions they use are always affected by the mood of their characters and their present feelings.
- They check the variety and length of sentences. Actively looking at pace and flow. They don’t fall into the trap of ‘subject-verb-object’, ‘subject-verb-object’ for example.
- Their writing often deals in the concrete as opposed to the abstract. It’s the difference between *That autumn day* as opposed to *autumn* or *happiness* or someone’s *specific* happiness.
- They revise their piece to near death. No aspects are left untouched or underappreciated.

8. A QUICK NOTE ON NON-FICTION:

- These writers should seek the opportunity to play around with non-fiction genres, deliberately turning them on their head in new and creative ways. They will take part in writing ‘faction’ and will also begin to naturally mix different non-fiction genres together through hybridisation.
- They will classify their subject of choice before moving onto discussing its nuances. They include rich poetic descriptions as well as definitions for technical vocabulary their readers may not know.
- They therefore use formal and informal voice as well as figurative language when describing phenomena.
- They are not afraid to reveal their personal response to the non-fiction subjects they write about; providing personal anecdotes and feelings towards their subject which really brings an extra dimension to their non-fiction.
- They have complete control over their non-fiction writing and use subtleties and nuances of language which evoke all the senses and leave their reader genuinely in awe, entertained, thrilled, emotional, persuaded and informed – all within a non-fiction text.
- As a result, they are able to have their own style and voice within non-fiction writing. This can include using figurative language, poetry or personal narrative to enhance their piece and the information they want to get across.



Ten Practical Ideas For Encouraging Possible Greater Depth Writing

Whilst it is unlikely that the below strategies or teaching points will make a significant contribution to a child reaching greater depth, I hope they might provide important reflections. Perhaps they can potentially spark additional thoughts and actions on teaching all children to write but particularly for those considered greater depth writers.

1. Try introducing your writers to '[genre-booklets](#)'. For them to read them and be informed by them. They explain the typical 'register' of the chosen genre before providing a couple of exemplars of the genre in action. Children could then be encouraged to use the genre for their own purposes.
2. In narrative writing, encourage children to write their piece (or part of their piece) from another character's perspective. Remember, character can include settings too. Alternatively, they could try and write it in a different narrator point of view (1st, 2nd, 3rd).
3. In narrative writing, encourage children to move the chronology of their story around. They could be photocopied and **paragraphs cut and moved around**. For example, placing their ending at the beginning of their narrative. They can also **experiment by writing different types of openings and endings (see genre booklets)**.
4. Encourage children to build a story around a psychological/philosophical idea or theme. For example, a plot, character and setting which deals with *fear*. Or the philosophical idea that *the ends always justify the means* or *people and the environment must be able to live peacefully together*.
5. Provide lessons, activities and resources which encourage children to interrogate their characters in fine detail ([see genre booklets](#)). Encourage them to use their character as a metaphor for a theme/idea/emotion. An obvious (and not very subtle) example of this is the characters from ***Charlie And The Chocolate Factory*** – there to represent all the worst of human beings!
6. Encourage children to try out different story arcs. **The six common story arcs** are: fall-rise-fall, rise-fall, fall-rise, steady fall, steady rise and rise-fall-rise. **The Tony Ross Shakespeare Short Stories** are a really good way of showcasing some of these. See [\[www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3679510\]](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3679510) for more details.
7. Encourage children to see **sentences as being made up of slots**. Each slot has an opportunity to be modified. Modification can come through 'show don't tell'. Typically, authors will modify one or maybe two slots. E.g. *The man walked down the road*. The slots that can be modified in this sentence are the following: 'the man,' 'walked' and 'the road'.
8. Encourage children to write '**faction**'.
9. Michael Rosen says you can encourage children to simply '**talk posh**' when writing formally. You can also encourage them to write figuratively – even in non-fiction. You'll be surprised how much both figurative language and metaphor are used in non-fiction texts!
10. Allow children to mix non-fiction with personal response of the subject. This creates two different types of formality and points of view writing. Eventually, you can encourage them to include personal narrative or even poetry within non-fiction pieces too.



References:

This pamphlet is produced as a result of the following reading:

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