

# The reader in THE WRITER

The most important thing a teacher can do to develop children's literacy is expose them to high-quality literature

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Almost 20 years ago, Myra Barrs and Valerie Cork embarked upon a research project to look at the links between the study of literature and writing development at Key Stage 2. The outcomes of their study were published in 'The Reader in the Writer', an influential text that still underpins the work and research we carry out at CLPE.

Links between children's reading and their writing have long been acknowledged. What 'The Reader in the Writer' did was to look at exactly how children's reading experiences are linked to their progress in writing, and how, through picking the right literature and helping children understand the skill of an effective and powerful professional author, teachers can support and enhance children's developing writing skills.

Two decades on, in an education landscape dominated by fronted adverbials and auxiliary verbs, this research is still relevant and its conclusions important for our teaching. At CLPE we work with more than 600 teachers a year on our Power of Reading and Raising Achievement in Writing projects, and many more through all our other work. We are still collecting evidence that shows us that the most important thing a teacher can do to support developing literacy

is ensure children are exposed to a range of high-quality literature. Our evidence shows the conclusions of 'The Reader in the Writer' are as relevant to teaching today as they were back in 1998.

## 1 Read aloud, every day

Reading aloud slows written language down, enabling children to hear and take in tunes and patterns. It allows children to experience and enjoy stories they might not otherwise meet. By reading well-chosen

beyond their own reading fluency level. Create a rich reading environment that demonstrates the written word in all its forms and shares how writing can be used for thinking, for communication and as a means of expression. This will enable children to see how writing is used for different purposes and to communicate to different audiences. With a rich diet of quality texts, children will be able to find their own reasons to write and develop a style that fits the purpose, audience and form intended.

*"Children can help each other by reading their writing aloud and responding as readers"*

books aloud, teachers help classes to become communities of readers – ensuring they can share in experiences of a wide repertoire of books they enjoy and get to know well.

## 2 Explore language models and structures

If you want confident young writers, read aloud and share high-quality texts across a range of genres, reflecting a range of writing styles. Choose texts that are rich in vocabulary, and enable children to comprehend

## 3 Share a variety of texts

When children have explored a range of texts across genres, they form an understanding and appreciation of how language functions, and how best to use this when writing themselves. Plan to share rich examples of writing, both on and off the page. Include texts that allow children to absorb the rhythms and patterns of language, reflecting the cultural, social and linguistic diversity of the children, as well as introducing a world beyond the familiar.

Hearing the written word is extremely important, but you should also ensure that children can understand how meaning is conveyed in other forms, such as film, illustration, digital texts and performance.

When exposed to a range of texts that demonstrate expressive, informational and imaginative writing, children begin to understand how to control and manipulate the conventions of writing for a range of purposes throughout a variety of forms across narrative, non-fiction and poetry. Children are more likely to set an appropriate mood and tone for their written pieces if they have seen it done successfully in a range of ways.

## 4 Use creative teaching approaches

Supporting children to 'tune in' to the creativity needed for writing is key to developing imagination and ideas for writing in all forms. When drawing on a text to stimulate writing, pause at pivotal moments as the story unfolds to allow children to express and discuss their initial responses. This type of book talk enables children to deepen their understanding of characters and events, and supports them to articulate ideas effectively in their own writing. Before writing poetry, allow children to hear it read aloud, hear and see it performed, and

perform it themselves; the poem off the page adds layers of understanding and experience of the rhythms and patterns of language.

Provide time and space for drama, explore real and fictional situations through talk or role-play, supporting children to see events from a different viewpoint and write in an authentic voice. In role, children can often access feelings and language that are not available to them when they write as themselves.

Time to develop ideas through art and illustration is also important. Visualising and producing art inspired by

a sound or film clip, or writing read aloud allows children to expand on ideas and add detail and description to their writing, using rich and relevant language.

## 5 Respond as readers

From the earliest stages, it is important that children understand that writing is a means of expression and a communication tool. We know a culture of book talk deepens reader response, and allows children to explore the effect the author of a text has created on the reader. We need to give children opportunities to

reflect on their own texts in the same way.

The teaching of writing is effective when children see the use in it; when there is real, authentic purpose; when there is an audience that authenticates their voice, whether themselves or another reader. It is important for teachers to validate children's writing with appropriate response, focusing first on the effect the writing has on the reader. Children take pleasure in a reader's feedback and begin to link writing with authentic communication.

Children can also help each other by reading their writing aloud and responding as readers, supporting each other as they compose and structure their ideas. In this way they will learn how to communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences. They are

then more likely to reflect on their writing and revise it for the reader, choosing language for effect or to clarify meanings.

## Give children a voice

Supporting children to become literate, to plan the most effective provision so they can become confident, happy and enthusiastic readers and writers with all of the benefits we know this brings, is so much more than asking them to decode, remember grammatical constructions or tricky spellings. It is a complicated and intricate process – and if you enable a child to become literate you have given them a voice, supported them to communicate and provided them with a skill that is vital for all of their schooling and to their life beyond.

In every writer, there is a reader. Give them reading. Let them lift the words off the printed page to enrich their own written work. **TP**

## More ideas...

- ❖ Download a free guide to Writing from the CLPE website – [clpe.org.uk/library-and-resources](http://clpe.org.uk/library-and-resources)
- ❖ Download free booklists for ideas for texts to inspire children from EYFS to KS2 – [clpe.org.uk/clpe/library/booklists](http://clpe.org.uk/clpe/library/booklists)
- ❖ Read this article on nurturing writing in the early years from CLPE's Anjali Patel (first published in Teach Early Years magazine) – [bit.ly/2wmBWQb](http://bit.ly/2wmBWQb)



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