

# WRITING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

## What we know works

Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

Research from CLPE projects:  
Raising Achievement in Writing  
The Power of Reading  
The Power of Poetry  
The Power of Pictures



CENTRE FOR LITERACY  
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION



# WRITING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

## Introduction

Almost twenty 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 important and influential text which still underpins our work and our research 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 to understand the skill of an effective and powerful professional author, teachers can support and enhance children's developing skills as a writer in a meaningful and effective way.

Twenty years 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 we are still collecting evidence to support teachers to plan the most effective provision so that children can become confident, happy and enthusiastic readers and writers with all of the benefits we know this brings.



## What works?

In this booklet we are sharing the key things that teachers have told us are important when teaching writing. We have gathered evidence from teachers on all of our projects but particularly Power of Reading and Raising Achievement in Writing. Our evidence shows that the conclusions of *The Reader in the Writer* are as relevant to teaching today as they were twenty years ago.

Developing children as writers is so much more than asking them to remember grammatical constructions or tricky spellings. It is a complicated and intricate process – and if you enable a child to become a writer 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.

**Louise Johns-Shepherd, Chief Executive, CLPE**

*This is the fourth in the series of these resources. To download the others 'Reading for Pleasure', 'Poetry in Primary Schools' and 'Choosing and Using Quality Texts' please visit [www.clpe.org.uk/freeresources](http://www.clpe.org.uk/freeresources)*

**For more information about CLPE visit [www.clpe.org.uk](http://www.clpe.org.uk)**

**For more information about Power of Reading visit [www.clpe.org.uk/powerofreading](http://www.clpe.org.uk/powerofreading)**

The quotes in this document come from the reflective evaluations of teachers on our Raising Achievement in Writing, Power of Reading, Power of Poetry and Power of Pictures courses.



# 1 Understand the role reading plays in developing writers and the value of being immersed in quality literature

A well-chosen text provides rich language models and structures from which children can learn how writing works and the effect it can have on a reader. 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 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. With a rich diet of quality texts and enriching experiences children will be able to find their own reasons to write and develop a style that fits the purpose, audience and form intended.

**Learn more:** .....

Power of Reading  
[clpe.org.uk/powerofreading](http://clpe.org.uk/powerofreading)

Power of Reading in the Early Years  
[clpe.org.uk/porey](http://clpe.org.uk/porey)

Inspiring Writers KS1  
[clpe.org.uk/writingks1](http://clpe.org.uk/writingks1)

Inspiring Writers KS2  
[clpe.org.uk/writingks2](http://clpe.org.uk/writingks2)

CLPE Reading and Writing Scales  
[clpe.org.uk/readingandwritingscales](http://clpe.org.uk/readingandwritingscales)

“ Reading texts to children that they are not ready to access independently exposes them to language they can own. ”

“ Children now see a clear link between reading and writing. They also see that non-fiction can be presented in many different formats as opposed to the traditional information text style. They are bursting with ideas and don't have to focus as much on what to write, but instead, how to write it and this has really helped with incorporating the grammar. ”



## 2 Ensure children have experience of a breadth of texts including those that are visual and digital

We know that children draw on their experience of reading when shaping their own writing. 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 will also want to 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.

**Learn more:** .....

Power of Pictures

[clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures](https://clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures)

Power of Reading

[clpe.org.uk/powerofreading](https://clpe.org.uk/powerofreading)

Meeting the Needs of Children with EAL

[clpe.org.uk/EAL](https://clpe.org.uk/EAL)

“ Children have really enjoyed the class readers that we have read, and this has also shown in their writing as they are using vocabulary that they would not have otherwise used. ”

“ The books chosen for the Power of Reading teaching sequences have widened children’s vocabulary and drawn their attention to different components of writing, and so they are now using these techniques in their writing before having been explicitly taught them. They are more aware of the audience they are writing for. ”



### 3 Provide a range of meaningful opportunities to write for real purposes and audiences and to respond to writing as a reader

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 that 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.

Create opportunities for writing inspired by meaningful events and experiences in texts and real life. This provides the children with ways in to talking and writing about their own feelings, experiences and interests and, with purpose in mind, begin to think about their audience and adapt their tone accordingly. Children take pleasure in a reader's feedback and begin to link writing with communication. It is important for teachers to validate children's writing with appropriate response, focusing first on the effect that the writing has on the reader.

**Learn more:** .....

Raising Achievement in Writing  
[clpe.org.uk/raw](http://clpe.org.uk/raw)

CLPE Reading and Writing Scales  
[clpe.org.uk/readingandwritingscales](http://clpe.org.uk/readingandwritingscales)

“ Children know the texts and genres inside out and have their own ideas and perceptions from their reading to apply to their own writing. They feel the writing is a culmination of their efforts and are keen to make it the best that it can be. They use the texts as a scaffold and starting point and because they have a clear framework, they then feel more able to use their imagination in a safe space. ”

“ Illustrations in picturebooks have opened up discussion and encouraged them to share ideas. ”



## 4 Develop an understanding of the craft of writing by engaging with professional authors and their processes

Having the opportunity to see and learn from a professional writer's practice is aspirational for children as writers and helps them to see the process of writing from a new and exciting perspective. Real life writers can bring a greater depth to learning about authentic writing processes. Teachers who engage with authors, and understand the editor's role are better able to appreciate the value of slowing writing down for children, allowing them time to plan and craft ideas, set the scene, create characters and formulate plotlines; revising and reviewing ideas along the way after response from others.

Model the planning, drafting, responding, revising and editing process in shared and collaborative writing to demonstrate how to strengthen all parts of the writing. Start with response to structure and impact on the reader and later polish with proofreading and editing before producing a published piece, fit for the intended purpose and audience. Consider the range of writers you could introduce to the children. Poets, illustrators and filmmakers can share how meaning comes through pictures and sound as well as words. Journalists can share how a real news story occurs and develops and is shaped for print or media.

**Learn more:** .....

Power of Pictures  
[clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures](http://clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures)

Poetryline  
[clpe.org.uk/poetryline](http://clpe.org.uk/poetryline)

“ Children need to see the face behind the books that they are reading. They need to be exposed to an author's mistakes and understand that this is authentic thinking and writing process. ”

“ Year 6 children are able to successfully transition between genres because teaching from a text gives them purpose and content for their writing. Year 3 and 4 children are able to write creatively, and they are not afraid to share their ideas with the class. Children are including vocabulary they would never have used previously. ”



# 5 Understand and model the processes of writing authentically

As a teacher, it is important that you are able to model writing 'live', sharing the frustrations and successes involved.

Engage in cooperative writing that includes the teacher as writer and allows children to be supported to develop their ideas, skills and writing style within the security of a large group and maintain momentum for writing. This will enable you to learn empathy with pupils, give them more space when they are writing and respond more sensitively and deeply to their own efforts.

Model writing everywhere; linked to all areas of learning and throughout provision. Show children and parents it is inherent in daily activity. Demonstrate the act of writing but, crucially, write alongside children, articulating the thought process you are going through and strategies you draw on to articulate ideas and ways to overcome difficulties faced. Children benefit enormously from a teacher that writes, a writer that teaches. Demonstrate to children how to craft texts with the reader in mind and how to reflect critically on their own writing. They will, in turn, see how to manipulate and control writing to achieve intent as a writer for purpose and effect on the reader.

Learn more: .....

Raising Achievement in Writing  
[clpe.org.uk/raw](http://clpe.org.uk/raw)

CLPE Reading and Writing Scales - free download  
[clpe.org.uk/readingandwritingscales](http://clpe.org.uk/readingandwritingscales)

“ The children now plan, draft and edit their work, using the texts which they have read as inspiration. They are able to choose grammatical structures and vocabulary to suit the audience and purpose as they have spent time studying a range of texts which use language and style to make an impact on the reader. ”

“ To be able to listen to authors, their beginnings, difficulties that they overcome, allows every child to feel that the opportunity is theirs if they wish. ”



## 6 Support children to identify as writers and develop their own authentic voice

Learning to write is a complex process and it is every child's entitlement. Taking possession of the written word can open up a world in which children can cultivate identity, an understanding of the world and their place in it in relation to others. To engage children in writing, they have to want to write, see the purpose in doing so and the opportunities it gives for them to have a voice. Make writing a part of daily life, linked to play, fictional and real experiences. Provide authentic contexts for writing that are meaningful to the children and demand their active and critical engagement with the process.

A lost toy can provide the basis for a written campaign to find it or a story about the adventures it went on whilst away; an issue or dilemma faced by a character in a text allows children to write in response, offering advice. Poetry is a wonderful medium to provide children with a reason to write to reflect on or capture experiences, share feelings, or use humour to engage a reader.

Through purposeful opportunities and reasons to write, children are able to develop authentic personal voice, style, stamina and range as a writer. They enjoy writing expressively, imaginatively and informatively for purpose – they will become authors.

**Learn more:** .....

Let's Write! Improving Reading and Writing using Poetry with Joseph Coelho  
[clpe.org.uk/creativewriting](http://clpe.org.uk/creativewriting)

Power of Reading  
[clpe.org.uk/powerofreading](http://clpe.org.uk/powerofreading)

“ Seeing the genuine process that an author goes through and taking part in it makes you realise that the way we teach writing is very removed from this. As a teacher you have to have your ideas shaken up and your perception of how best to teach changed. ”

“ Being a 'writing teacher' has had a great impact on my own understanding of the writing process. As a teacher, I am better able to empathise with my pupils. They are able to see me struggle alongside them. ”



# 7 Give children time and space to develop their own writing ideas

Providing structured writing opportunities allows children to understand how the writing process works, but it is equally important to allow children to use and apply their learning by giving them time and space to write freely for their own purpose and pleasure.

In the Early Years, children engage in writing or mark making activities for their own satisfaction, generally without an intended audience. As writing develops, children may write purely for themselves, before becoming more confident to write for others. Provide well stocked writing areas with a wide range of materials and media for writing, including appropriate technology to engage in wider forms of writing. Provide free-writing journals and time to develop writing projects, and hone personal style in private and more publicly. Writing projects such as a class magazine or newsletter may allow children to see writing differently and help to improve confidence and motivation to write. When children are given time and space to use writing as a tool for thinking, and opportunities to share ideas and preferences, they take ownership over their choices and develop the confidence to play around with language features, writing conventions and form.

**Learn more:** .....

Raising Achievement in Writing  
[clpe.org.uk/raw](http://clpe.org.uk/raw)

Inspiring Writers KS1  
[clpe.org.uk/writingsks1](http://clpe.org.uk/writingsks1)

Inspiring Writers KS2  
[clpe.org.uk/writingsks2](http://clpe.org.uk/writingsks2)

“ The children love to read what I have written and, because I share, they have been keener to read their work to the class. ”

“ Many Year 6 boys resented having to write, and this showed in what they produced. Through the Power of Reading these boys have thoroughly engaged within writing. They ask if they can write, because writing from the text gives them a purpose. ”



## 8 Use creative teaching approaches that build imagination and give time for oral rehearsal

Supporting children to tune into the creativity needed for writing through a range of experiences is key to developing imagination and ideas for writing in all forms. Encourage children to explore ideas prior to composition through art, drama and role-play, music and movement and small world play, providing opportunities to write independently to develop these ideas into extended pieces.

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. Allow 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. Developing ideas through art and illustration is also important.

Learn more: .....

Planning Creatively Around a Text in EYFS, KS1 and KS2

[clpe.org.uk/planningey](https://clpe.org.uk/planningey)

[clpe.org.uk/planningks1](https://clpe.org.uk/planningks1)

[clpe.org.uk/planningks2](https://clpe.org.uk/planningks2)

“ After some initial trepidation, I really enjoyed writing as part of the course. It was great to be creative but also put myself in the shoes of the children. ”

“ The children are more engaged in their writing and are able to replicate some of the stylistic features of the writing of the authors to develop their own style of writing. They are choosing vocabulary carefully, varying the length of sentences and adding dialogue to move the action on in order to have the greatest possible impact on the reader. ”



## 9 Ensure the teaching of phonics, grammar and spelling is embedded in context

We know that children who explore and hear a range of high quality texts read aloud and have opportunity for critical discussion are better able to reflect on effects on the reader created by the writer. Reading authentic texts aloud will help children to hear the patterns and types of language used for different forms and purposes and understand levels of formality appropriate to the intended audience. This teaches them much about the language and grammar structures appropriate for different audiences, purposes and forms of writing.

Create a language rich environment, focusing on enriching vocabulary, understanding what words mean and how and why they are used and ways language is used effectively for impact on a reader. Children who appreciate first-hand the impact of authorial choices on them as a reader, demonstrate a more assured use of grammatical structure themselves.

Teachers should provide rich models for talk and writing, both through texts and as language users and writers themselves. Provide a curriculum rich in rhyme, song and poetry to foster children's phonological development and use shared reading and writing sessions to draw children's attention to the letters, sounds and spelling patterns within words.

**Learn more:** .....

Phonics in a Rich Reading Curriculum  
[clpe.org.uk/phonics](http://clpe.org.uk/phonics)

Effective Spelling in a Rich Reading Curriculum  
[clpe.org.uk/spelling](http://clpe.org.uk/spelling)

Language and Grammar in a Rich Reading Curriculum  
[clpe.org.uk/grammar](http://clpe.org.uk/grammar)

“ Writing is a slow process. Children need sufficient time to develop their ideas, read it aloud and redraft it. ”

“ The free writing journals have been a tremendous success; children are given their voice back. Finally they can write for pleasure without the eagle eye of the teacher judging their every word. ”

“ Drama and artwork have really helped those children who could never think of anything to write. ”



# 10 Celebrate writing through authentic publication and presentation across platforms

Publishing their work for an audience gives children a purpose for their writing. Showcase a range of authentic types of publication in the reading environment, such as picture books, short stories, graphic novels, collections of poetry, newspapers, leaflets, notices, information booklets and instructions.

Plan opportunities for bookmaking, publishing or final performance that brings the children's writing to a wider audience and creates pride in finished pieces. Allow time and space for children to make their own books and try out ways of positioning text and illustration on the page. Provide opportunity for children to have their writing read aloud, and performed, then discussed and polished further. Allow time to be spent on considering the layout of a poem as in getting the words and rhythms right. Hold a poetry slam for children or act out playscripts on a stage, allowing children to think about the wider elements of staging and theatrical performance that add layers of meaning to an audience.

Use technology as a powerful tool for learning, showcasing authentic means of digital publication for web pages, newspapers, comics, film and other digital texts.

**Learn more:** .....

Raising Writing Standards through Book Making – Foundation to Year 8  
[clpe.org.uk/bookmaking](http://clpe.org.uk/bookmaking)

Power of Reading  
[clpe.org.uk/powerofreading](http://clpe.org.uk/powerofreading)

“ Children are writing at greater length and quality has improved. More are choosing to write in free time and at home. ”

“ The children were eager to write, even reluctant writers as they had ideas which they wanted to share. The speaking and listening tasks really helped develop language, giving the children a platform to write and build on their knowledge. ”



# WRITING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

## WHAT WE KNOW WORKS

1. **Understand the role reading plays in developing writers and the value of being immersed in high quality literature**
2. **Ensure children have experience of a breadth of texts including those that are visual and digital**
3. **Provide a range of meaningful opportunities to write for real purposes and audiences and to respond to writing as a reader**
4. **Develop an understanding of the craft of writing by engaging meaningfully with professional authors and their processes**
5. **Understand and model the craft and process of writing authentically**
6. **Support children to identify as writers and to develop their own authentic voice**
7. **Give children time and space to develop their own ideas in writing**
8. **Use creative teaching approaches that build imagination and give time for oral rehearsal**
9. **Ensure the teaching of phonics, grammar and spelling is embedded in context**
10. **Celebrate writing through authentic publication and presentation across platforms**





**Power of Reading**

A CLPE RESOURCE



**CLPE**

CENTRE FOR LITERACY  
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

# Power of Reading

**Reading for pleasure,  
achievement for life**

*“At a time of teacher crisis and with difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, CLPE bring back what teaching is about. My teachers are bursting with enthusiasm and creativity which they’ve passed on to the children and other teachers.”*

Head Teacher, Power of Reading School

[www.clpe.org.uk/powerofreading](http://www.clpe.org.uk/powerofreading)



# Keep in touch



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