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Using constructs of 'good' writing to develop 'a voice of one's own' in the primary school classroom

Victorina González-Diaz, Elizabeth Parr and Kristi Nourie

Abstract

Partly as result of the predominant 'narrow' view of writing in England's recent school curriculum and assessment, current primary school pupils often hold a skills-oriented view of 'good' writing for a substantially longer period than has traditionally been reported in the literature. This makes it difficult for teachers to promote and engage children with writing in the classroom and—crucially for the present paper—limits pupils' awareness of the wide stock of resources they can exploit in their practice, thus impacting on the development of their writer identity. This paper reports on the pupil impact of a teacher-led project on 'good' writing constructs carried out in Merseyside schools in spring 2023. Results from this mixed methods study suggest that classroom activities aimed at developing in pupils a holistic concept of 'good' school writing provides children with greater awareness of the notion of 'choice' in the writing process, hence fostering self-efficacy mechanisms that encourage the resourcefulness, creativity and individuality essential to writer identity creation.

Key words: writer identity, primary school, writing pedagogy, professional development

Introduction

Writer identity in the classroom

Only recently has the link between writer identity and pedagogy been explored; prior to this, it was an 'unexamined assumption' (McKinney and Giorgis, 2009). However, if writing is a social process, there are many aspects of literacy that children might be aligned with or alienated from. Pedagogical research has repeatedly underlined that children's identities as writers influence their learning in a writing classroom (McCarthey and Moje, 2002) and how they engage with and ultimately perform in writing (McCarthey, 2001). Previous research has also shown that teachers' conceptions of writing and pedagogical practice are central in shaping identity positions for children's writing in school (Bernstein, 2014; Bourne, 2002; Cremin et al., 2016). This is particularly pertinent in the current educational context, where recent surveys in England have underlined children's negative attitudes to writing, citing 'a 26% decrease in the number of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who say they enjoy writing in their free time' (Clark et al., 2023, p. 2) as well as a persistent lack of self-confidence as writers (Clark, 2016). Mirroring this, teachers' self-identification as readers rather than writers (Cremin and Oliver, 2016) often translates into a classroom emphasis on achieving the 'expected standard' of writing, which in turn impacts on how teachers approach and nurture the development of children's writer identities.

As previous educational research has also observed, the 'expected standard' of writing has narrowed over the last curricular iterations (Clarkson, 2023; Myhill and Clarkson, 2021). Greater importance is now given to the transcriptional and compositional skills of writing (i.e., grammar, orthography and punctuation), a shift that is also reflected in standard assessment frameworks (for critical discussions of England's teaching and assessment protocols of writing and pupils' perception of them, see Barrs, 2019; Cushing, 2019; Myhill and Clarkson, 2021). Such narrow conceptualisations of 'good' writing might limit children's ability to deploy the repertoire of resources that can make 'good' writing happen, thereby potentially restricting the choices through which they can shape their writer identity. Moreover, a classroom context that draws on rigid interpretations of assessment frameworks rather than a shared dialogue with children provides the potential for pupils to feel alienated, especially when their own identity neither conforms to nor excels within such conceptualisations of 'good' writing.

This paper reports on the pupil outcomes (Background to the study section) that resulted from a

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teacher-led project delivered in Merseyside primary schools. The project aimed to foster pupils' holistic understanding of 'good' school writing in order to enhance their autonomy in writing and, more generally, to prepare them to act on a broader range of choices about 'good' writing to support the development of 'a voice of one's own'.

Conceptualisations of children's writer identities

Literacy and identity are inextricably linked (Bourne, 2002; Moje and Luke, 2009) as 'good writing … enacts our identities' (Young and Ferguson, 2021, p. 7). It is this complex and dialogic relationship that children negotiate during their journey to become a writer and find their voice in writing. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, there has been an increased research focus on writing and children's writer identities as they seek to express their social identity through 'literacy practices' (Street, 2003; see also McLean and Rowsell, 2015; Moje et al., 2008; Snow and Moje, 2010). Much of this work uses a sociocultural perspective of literacy, that is, the idea that literacy development is an activity embedded within social and cultural interactions (MacCleod, 2004). It is through the writing events in the classroom that children's identities are constructed and reconstructed (Compton-Lilly, 2006).

Central to all conceptualisations of writer identity is the use of language as a means to express 'personal feelings, attitudes, value judgments, or assessments' (Biber et al., 1999, p. 966) and validate personal choice. Different approaches to the study of identity conveyance via language choices have been put forward; among others, indexicality (Kiesling, 2009), narrative positioning (Bamburg and Georgakopoulou, 2008) and stance in discourse (De Fina, 2011). Biber et al.'s (1999) lexico-grammatical framework of stance underpins many of the language-specific analyses in the aforementioned approaches and therefore has been adopted in this paper for the linguistic exploration of identity construction.

Background to the study

Framed within a larger project on writing and gendered identities, our own earlier research found that, while teachers normally conceptualise 'good' writing as a holistic process encompassing a variety of composition, creativity and audience-awareness factors, current primary learners often hold a narrow(er) view of 'good' writing that is focussed on skills-oriented aspects (e.g., punctuation or handwriting, González-Díaz et al., 2024) for a longer period than has traditionally been reported in the literature (Tamburrini et al., 1984; Wray, 1994). This appears to negatively influence their development as creative agents. Previous research indicates that when technical elements of writing are emphasised, children may develop the idea that writing is merely about correctness rather than communication and expression or is a matter of following rules rather than an opportunity to convey their creativity (Calkins, 1994). This can undermine their confidence, autonomy and motivation to write (Grainger et al., 2005; Myhill et al., 2023b). As one of the pupils participating in our study noted,

> *[If] you keep thinking about, 'oh, I need to put a comma there, I need to put a full stop there', your brain's gonna be jumbled up with those instead of all your ideas of what exciting stuff is.*

We sought to act on this and refocus writing pedagogy (Young and Ferguson, 2021) by providing a professional development programme for teachers (henceforth PDP) where we explored teachers' constructs of 'good' writing, their awareness of children's narrow views of writing quality, and the effect these views have on pupils' writing self-efficacy and writer identity (see González-Díaz et al., 2024). We also worked with teachers to develop bespoke action plans that they would implement in class. All activities aimed at fostering children's holistic understanding of 'good' writing (see The PDP and its principles section). The present paper reports on the activities' effects on pupils, addressing the following research questions:

- What 'good' writing factors do pupils prioritise before and after the PDP?
- What changes do pupils make to their conceptualisations of 'good' writing?
- What effect does 'choice' during classroom writing activities appear to have on pupils' writer identities?

The PDP and its principles

The work that forms the foundation for this paper comprised two elements: (1) a PDP for teachers of children in Year 5 (aged 9–10 years) delivered by the research team and (2) the resulting teachers' projects that they delivered with children in their classrooms. This paper focuses on the changes to children's conceptualisations of 'good' writing in relation to the teachers' PDP activities; however, a general outline of the PDP is presented below to provide the necessary context.

The PDP consisted of three sessions delivered for teachers over a period of 6 weeks. Each of the 2-h sessions provided:

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- A summary of research evidence highlighting children's conceptions of 'good' writing as well as their views on writing enjoyment and pedagogical aspects of writing such as feedback (see González-Díaz et al., 2024, 2022).
- Opportunities for teachers to discuss discrepancies between their personal and professional concepts of 'good' writing as well as their existing instructional practices for writing.
- Evidence-based pedagogical strategies intended to develop resourceful children who are able to act on choice in their writing to support their writer identity. These strategies provided a framework for making both writing and *teaching* writing a pleasurable, personal experience in the classroom. These were aligned with Young and Ferguson's (2021) principles of world-class writing teaching. They included, among others, providing valuable and sensitive verbal feedback during pupil conferences (Ferguson and Young, 2021) as well as the use of precise evaluation of linguistic choices (Myhill et al., 2018).
- Time for teachers to create their own action plans (including tailoring and implementing a selection of these principles with their pupils) and to reflect on how these helped them to modify their teaching practice. Throughout this paper, we refer to teachers' enactment of their action plans as 'the project'. In the second and third sessions, teachers shared the 'good' writing focus from each stage of the project and the strategies used in each. They informally evaluated the impact either using evidence from samples of their pupils' writing or anecdotal reports on pupils' attitudinal changes, and the group discussed possible adaptations for their own settings. Those evaluations we see as the core of the PDP success for both practitioners and children.

Appendix 1 provides a more detailed breakdown of each of the three PDP sessions. Table 1 documents the instructional strategies and classroom activities that teachers implemented and aligns each with writing factors from the Craft of Writing framework (Myhill et al., 2023b) employed in our analysis and introduced in Spider diagrams section. Figures 1–3 illustrate some of the evidence teachers submitted on their classroom activity.

Methods

Participants

Six teachers from three primary schools in Merseyside took part in the PDP detailed above. Table 2 summarises each school's pupil characteristics.

Pupil participants (n = 160) were drawn from the Year 5 classrooms (children aged 9–10 years) of those teachers taking part in the PDP. In accordance with research ethics protocols and guidelines, pupil data were anonymised by assigning each child a unique alphanumeric identifier comprising their school (i.e., A/B/C) and pupil number (e.g., 1–60). This mixed-methods study used an explanatory sequential design; data were collected and informed two separate phases of analysis (quantitative then qualitative), with the qualitative being used to explain or expand upon the quantitative (Ivankova et al., 2006). The data regarding pupils' conceptualisations of 'good' writing came from two sources: spider diagrams (quantitative) and focus group interviews (qualitative).

Spider diagrams

Before the first PDP session, participating teachers supplied students with a handout that included the following prompt: 'What is good writing to you? Create a spider diagram that includes what you think are all the required elements of a piece of good writing. Remember there are no right or wrong answers.' The spider diagrams were then collected, and the research team scanned them. In the week following the final PDP session, teachers re-distributed the spider diagrams (Figures 4–6) and verbally asked pupils to reflect on what they had included the first time and, if necessary, to either add or delete information with a different colour marker.

Spider diagram analysis was completed in three stages. Children's responses were first coded using an adapted version of Myhill et al.'s (2023b) Craft of Writing framework to capture the aspects of 'good' writing noted by individual pupils. Data were coded separately by two members of the research team; discrepancies were discussed and one code agreed.

Table 3 below details the typology and the working definition we used for each feature in our analysis. For further discussion of the rationale underlying our adaptations of Myhill et al.'s (2023b) framework, see González-Díaz et al. (2024). As illustrative examples, spider diagram nodes such as 'powerfull [*sic*] adjectives', 'conjunctions' and 'rhetorical questions' (see Figure 4) were categorised as three different features (or tokens), that contributed to the *Language Choices* factor. Aspects such as 'interesting characters', 'suspense' and 'action' (see Figure 4) were included in the *Being an Author* category, whereas 'hook your reader' was classed as part of the *Reader–Writer Relationship* factor. *Writing Process* and *Text-level Choices* are exemplified in Figures 5 and 6, with features such

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Table 1: Teachers' selected instructional strategies and classroom activities aligned with pedagogical principles and writing factors.

Session	*School*	*Instructional strategy*	*Main classroom activity*	*Underpinning principle*	*Writing factor*
1	A	Free writing first drafts	Writing bursts focused on imaginative ideas to draw in readers	Balance composition and transcription	Being an author/writing process/reader–writer relationship
	B	Precision editing and redrafting	Share and discuss exemplar texts/ Establish 'editing experts'	The writing process	Being an author/writing process/text-level choices/language choices
	C	Paired evaluation and revision of own writing	Establish 'critical friends'	Pupils reading, sharing, thinking and talking about each other's writing	Language choices/being an author/reader–writer relationship
2	A	Feedback on compositional features rather than transcription	Whole-class feedback on writing samples read aloud by authors	Balance composition and transcription	Being an author/writing process/text-level choices/Language choices
	B	Celebrating writing	'Proud wall' linked to thrive in five writing lessons	Set writing goals	Being an author
	C	Unstructured writing in first person	'Guess who' with typed texts focused on conveying voice	Pursuing personal writing projects	Language choices/being an author
3	A	Peer to peer writing feedback	Establish feedback emojis as starting point for providing peer feedback	Pupils reading, sharing, thinking and talking about writing	Being an author/writing process/text-level choices/language choices
	B	Peer to peer writing feedback	Train children to use feedback board to provide specific feedback	Pupils reading, sharing, thinking and talking about writing	Being an author/writing process/text-level choices/language choices
	C	Pupil conferencing	Support children to ask and respond to 'author's questions'	Pupil conferencing	Language choices/being an author/reader–writer relationship

Note: Writing factors (right column) are presented in more detail on Table 3 and discussed as part of our coding framework in Spider diagrams section.

as 'editing', 'taking on feedback' and 'handwriting' developing the former, and 'structure' and 'chronological order' the latter.

After the initial round of coding, the qualitative data from the spider diagrams were quantified in the second stage of analysis. Frequency tables recorded the representation of each writing factor per student, nested within a school, at pre- and post-project collection points. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were then done in SPSS 28 to ascertain quantitative changes in the frequency of factors across pre- and post-project spider diagrams. Due to non-normal distributions, Wilcoxon signed rank tests were performed on data matched by school, and related samples sign tests were carried out to test for differences by school.

This analysis identified differences in the frequency of writing factors, each of which comprises multiple features (see Table 3), rather than the individual features themselves. We hypothesised that differences in these broader writing factor categories might be indicative of changes in pupils' conceptualisations of 'good' writing that could be explained during focus group interviews.

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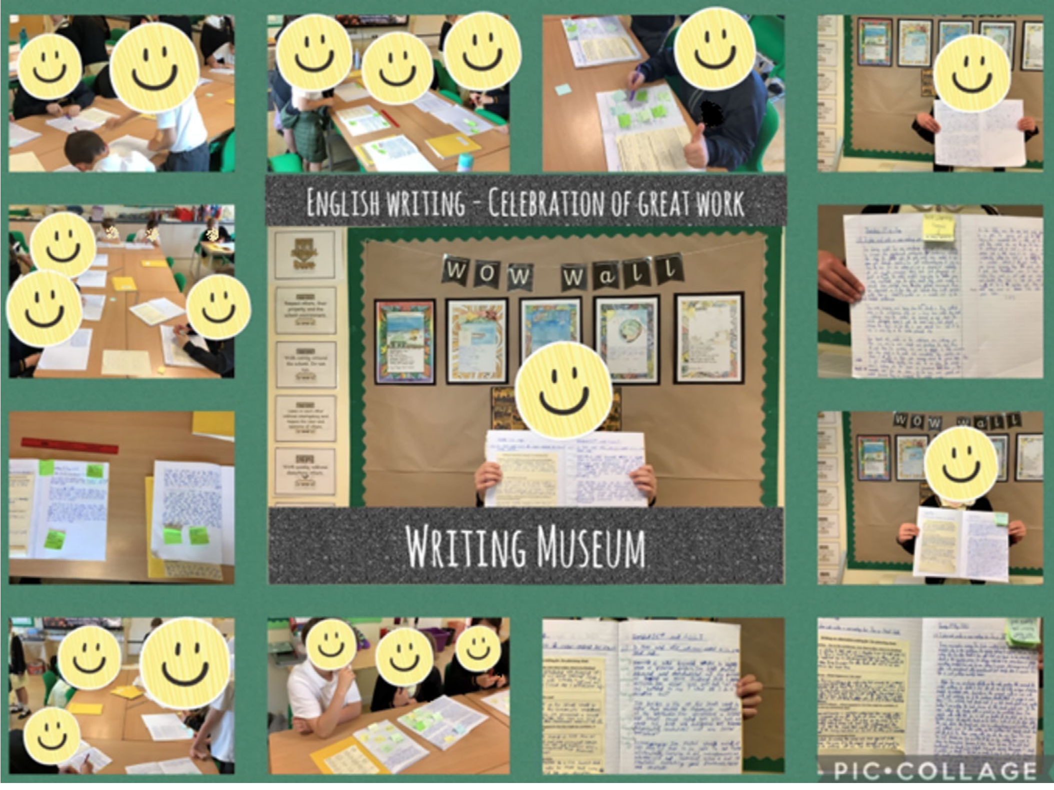

Figure 1: Evidence submitted to illustrate Main Classroom Activity 2.B from Table 1.

Focus groups

We ran six separate pupil focus groups, one per participating class/teacher, 1 month after the project's conclusion. Focus group participants were selected on the basis of their spider diagrams: each group included the boy and girl in the class who made the most substantial changes to the number of features and factors represented on their spider diagrams along with the boy and girl whose final spider diagrams recorded the fewest changes.

Focus groups lasted 20 min. Drawing on photo elicitation methods, researchers asked each pupil to reflect on their spider diagram and comment on

- what had (not) been added and why;
- whether/how classroom writing activities planned and delivered by teachers as part of the project had influenced the concept of 'good' writing represented on the spider diagram.

Focus group audio recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai and checked by a member of the research team. Pupils' contributions were then qualitatively analysed using Biber et al.'s (1999) lexico-grammatical stance-taking framework, which has been standardly used to explore writers' identity in language learning and writing development (Ivanic, 1998; Kress, 1994). The framework encompasses three primary areas: modality, affectivity and evidentiality. Modality refers to the use of modal verbs, adverbs and other linguistic markers that indicate the writer's degree of certainty and commitment to the truth of their statements (Biber, 1988). Affectivity conveys the writer's attitudes towards the content (Biber, 2006). Evidentiality focuses on features such as reporting verbs and attribution phrases that provide evidence to support the writer's claims. Collectively, these language areas and features help us to systematically interpret children's personal experiences and conceptualisations of 'good' writing.

Results from analyses of both datasets are provided in the Findings and discussion section below. Quantitative analyses of the spider diagrams are provided first and then followed by selected representative samples from focus group data that complement and elaborate quantitative results.

Limitations of the methods as used

Previous research notes that spider diagrams may oversimplify complex relationships and only superficially capture the depth of certain research constructs

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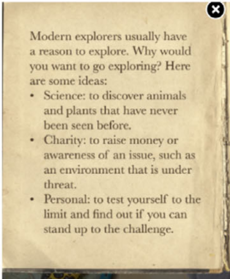

Your other equipment will depend on where you're going. Think about these questions:

- How will you find essentials such as water, food, and shelter?
- What dangers will you face: wild animals, wild weather or possibly even wild people?

If you have to carry everything yourself, you want to take as little as possible.

RULES

- Use Google docs
- Font 14 Arial Title
- 12 Arial Text
- First Person
- Do not use your name
- Include 1 picture/map with a caption.

Write a diary entry. You are an explorer on an expedition. Write about your experiences.

10th May 2023

Dear Diary,

Figure 2: Evidence submitted to illustrate Main Classroom Activity 2.C from Table 1.

(Eppler, 2006). In our research, we tried to counteract these issues in two ways. First, we computed tokens for writing features included on the spider diagrams relative to the thematic writing factors they contribute to (e.g., *Writing Process* and *Being an Author*) rather than simply considering them at face value. Second, we ran focus groups in which we specifically asked a selection of pupils to elaborate on the rationale behind the additions, deletions or lack of changes they made to their diagrams. We further acknowledge that, by redistributing the original spider diagrams, pupils' post-project changes may have been influenced by what they saw had been included on their pre-project diagram. Although eight pupils were satisfied with their original representation of 'good' writing and indicated they had nothing to add to their spider diagram after the project, more students undoubtedly looked for opportunities to include new features. Note, however, that the post-project focus groups allowed us to prompt the participating students to reflect on these decisions.

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Figure 3: Evidence submitted to illustrate Main Classroom Activity 3.A from Table 1.

Table 2: Participating schools' pupil characteristics, rounded to nearest whole number.

	School A	School B	School C
% of pupils with SEND	17%	14%	15%
% of pupils whose first language is not English	11%	5%	87%
% of pupils eligible for free school meals at any time during the last 6 years	7%	3%	57%

Finally, and while the organisation of both pre- and post- project focus groups would have been helpful, only post-project focus groups were convened as, without any data on which to base initial pupil selection criteria, all pupils in the sample (n = 160, c40 focus groups) should have been interviewed about their pre-project diagram to ensure that we had the necessary data for the post-project focus group comparison. Time and research-funding constraints did not allow for this.

Findings and discussion

Varied conceptualisations of 'good' writing were expected across pupils and school data: as previous research has noted, writing is a complex process that includes a broad range of linguistic and socio-contextual factors, including pupils' personal experiences as well as the influence of school writing frameworks and teachers' background and priorities (Bearne and Reedy, 2017; Clarkson, 2023; Lines, 2014).

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Figure 4: Pupil spider diagram from School A (Pupil A46).

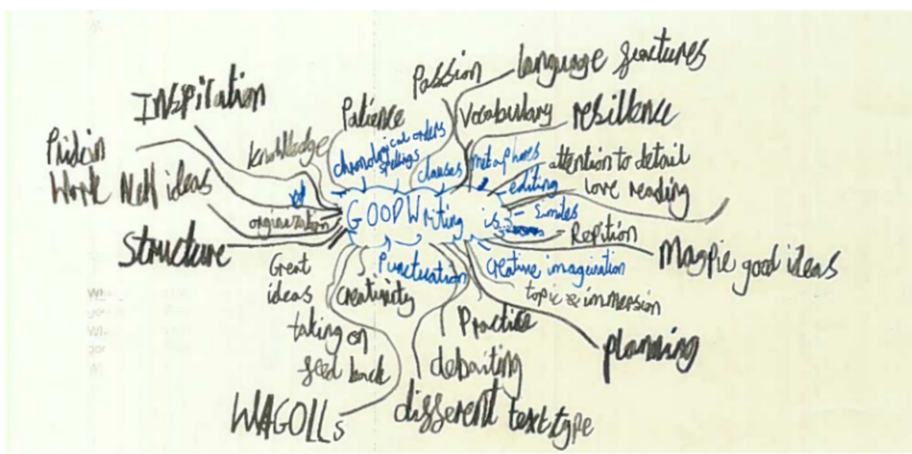

Figure 5: Pupil spider diagram from School B (Pupil B57).

Figure 6: Pupil spider diagram from School C (Pupil C1).

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Table 3: Thematic factors and writing features associated with 'good' writing.

Thematic factor (Myhill et al., 2023b, p. 409)	*Writing feature*	*Feature definition*
Being an author: 'Knowledge about the personal resources and intentions that authors bring to their writing.'	Attitude factors	Aspects influencing writing behaviours (e.g., interest, attention, effort)
	Creative flair and ideas	Originality of writing, voice, and/or style
	Use of personal reading	Author draws on others' work(s) in their own writing
	World-building	Description, either direct or indirect, that visually develops characters/their world
	Detailed articulation	Explicit attention to details used to achieve an intended effect
Language choices: 'Knowledge about language choices and their effects.'	Grammar and syntax	References to word classes/grammatical categories (e.g., clauses)
	Punctuation	Correct use of marks and capitals to convey meaning
	Spelling	Words spelled following standard written English criteria
	Vocabulary	References to individual words or choice of words, without explicit regard to purpose or category
Reader–writer relationship: 'Knowledge about the interaction between reader and writer, and the ways in which readers become engaged in or affected by writing.'	Instructional influence	Effects of current/previous writing instruction on student thinking/behaviour, including viewing teacher as audience
	Reader engagement and awareness	Purposeful choices intended to captivate and/or support audience with explicitly stated intention
Text-level choices: 'Knowledge about structural and text-level features and their effects.'	Genre and purpose	Features associated with type of writing or included to achieve stated objective
	Register and domain	Appropriate diction and language choice(s) for intended context and audience
	Textual coherence and cohesion	How text is configured and held together to make it intelligible, complete and logical
The writing process: 'Knowledge about strategies and processes involved in writing, from pre-writing activities to final proofreading.'	Drafting	Writing or improving text by planning, editing, evaluating, or revisiting
	Handwriting	Forming letters/words fluently and legibly
	Physical aspects of writing	Behaviours associated with the physical act of writing (e.g., holding a pencil)
	Presentation and layout	Paragraphing and overall neatness
	Writing stamina and sustained writing	Ability to carry on with writing over prolonged periods

Pupils' priority factors in 'good' writing

Spider diagram analyses reflected variation in what 'good' writing means for pupils across schools at the specific feature level (see Figures 4–6 above). When those individual features are then clustered in thematic writing factors using Myhill et al.'s (2023b) Craft of Writing typology, trends begin to emerge both pre- and post-project. As Table 4 shows, pupils in all three schools normally associated 'good' writing with two thematic factors, namely *Being an Author* and *Language Choices*. Overall, these thematic preferences are consistent within data points and schools: School A favoured *Being an Author* at both data points while School B

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shifted from *Language Choices* to *Being an Author* and School C showed consistent preference for the *Language Choices* construct. This is also consistent with the writing factors that each school targeted through the teachers' choices of instructional strategies and classroom activities (see Table 1).

As Myhill et al. (2023b) note, *Being an Author* 'foreground[s] attention … to characteristics of authorship … in contrast to experiences of school writing as being mere production of text', and consistently includes notions of drawing on personal experience, using one's voice and creating emotional connections to 'give writing "power" and "narrative truth"' (p. 16). This was reflected on our spider diagrams:

> *(1) 'Good' writing is"make sure you like it [your writing]" (Pupil C32)"sticking to your plan" and "being creative" (Pupil B12)"patience, brave vocabulary and a great imagination" (Pupil B3)"topic immersion, pride, passion, resilience, take your feedback" (*Pupil B50)

Language Choices in Myhill et al.'s (2023b) system encompasses a range of text-construction features including conscious word selection, sentence structure and the technicalities of the *Writing Process* (e.g., punctuation and spelling). Children's spider diagrams here, however, showed that their understanding of the *Language Choices* construct mainly concerns secretarial skills such as the use of 'correct' punctuation and deploying a variety of lexico-grammatical categories. Frequently mentioned features include adjectives, conjunctions, and subordinators (see Figures 7 and 8). These findings align with previous literature claims about the progressive narrowing of writing instruction

Table 4: Schools' writing factor rankings pre- and post-project.

Writing factor	*Collection point*	*School A*	*School B*	*School C*
Being an author	Pre average (rank)	4.82 (1)	3.44 (2)	0.65 (3)
	Post average (rank)	7.25 (1)	7.88 (1)	1.07 (2)
Language choices	Pre average (rank)	2.02 (2)	3.77 (1)	3.15 (1)
	Post average (rank)	4.27 (2)	5.86 (2)	4.11 (1)
Reader–writer relationship	Pre average (rank)	0.15 (5)	0.25 (5)	0.15 (5)
	Post average (rank)	0.75 (4)	0.3 (5)	0.8 (4)
Text-level choices	Pre average (rank)	0.2 (4)	0.93 (4)	0.29 (4)
	Post average (rank)	0.62 (5)	1.81 (4)	0.42 (5)
Writing process	Pre average (rank)	0.55 (3)	1.37 (3)	0.77 (2)
	Post average (rank)	0.8 (3)	3.96 (3)	0.82 (3)

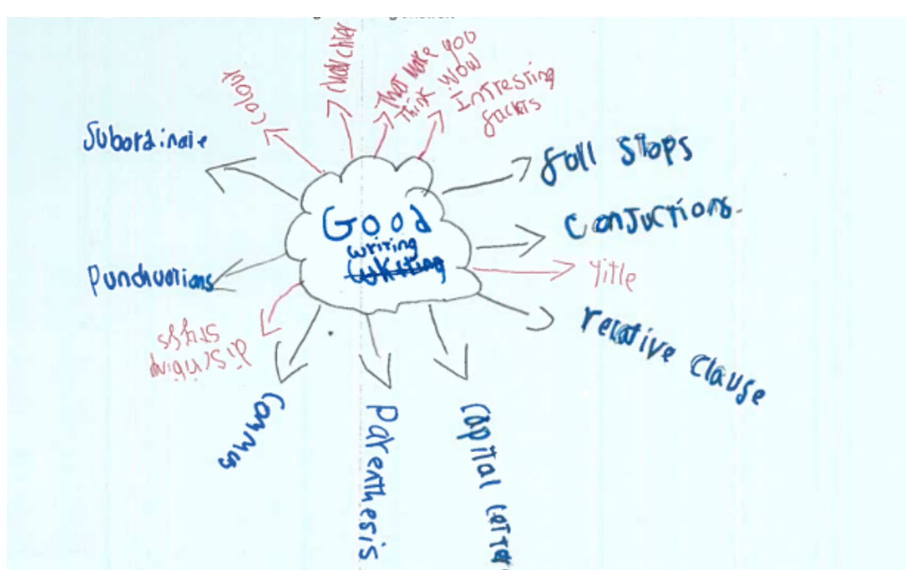

Figure 7: Pupil spider diagram (Pupil C17).

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in England's current National Curriculum guidelines towards a heavily grammatical and skills-based content (Clarkson, 2023; see also Hardman and Bell, 2019; Barrs, 2019; Cushing, 2019).

Pupils' broadening concepts of 'good' writing

Looking *across* pre- and post-project data points, the results (Table 5) indicate that most thematic factors saw

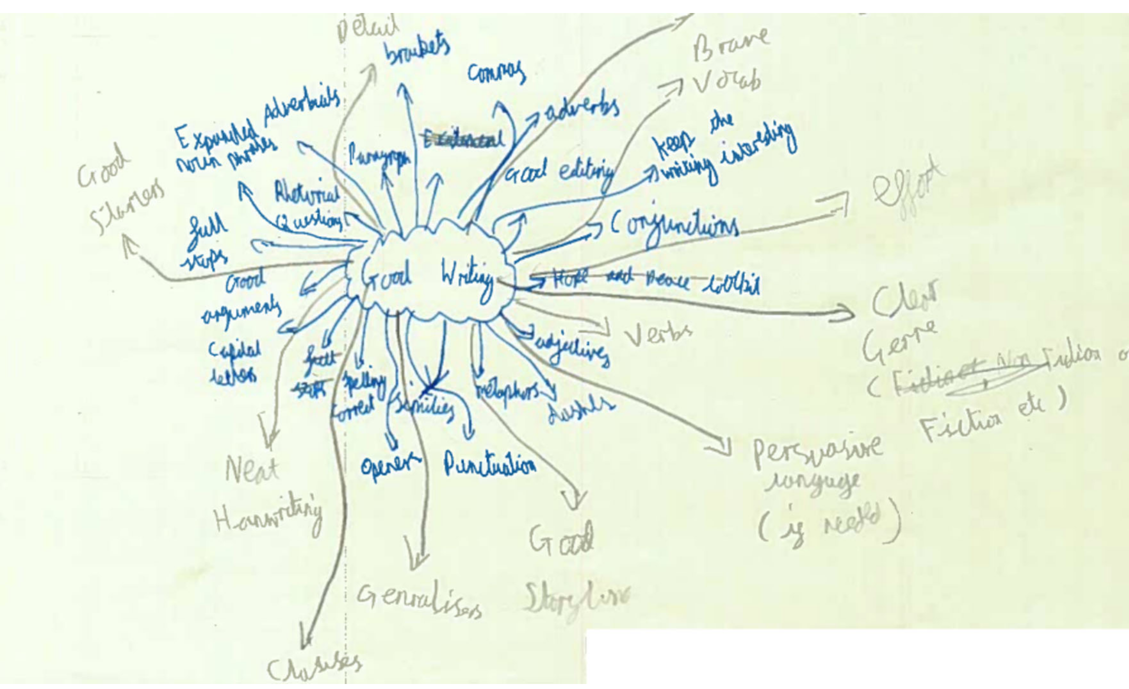

Figure 8: Pupil spider diagram (Pupil B19).

Table 5: Pre- and post-project thematic factors: descriptive statistics, significance and effect sizes.

Factor	School	Pre	Post	p	z	d
Overall concept	A	8.18	14.45	<.01	6.47	1.27
	B	10.25	21.86	<.01	6.57	1.39
	C	5.57	8.93	<.01	5.10	0.90
Being an author	A	4.82	7.25	<.01	6	0.8
	B	3.44	7.88	<.01	5.91	0.78
	C	0.65	1.07	<.01	3.44	0.51
Language choices	A	2.02	4.27	<.01	5.74	0.77
	B	3.77	5.86	<.01	5.97	0.79
	C	3.15	4.11	<.01	3.88	0.57
Reader–writer relationship	A	0.15	0.75	<.01	5.01	0.67
	B	0.25	0.3	.08	1.73	0.22
	C	0.15	0.8	<.01	3.2	0.47
Text-level choices	A	0.20	0.62	<.01	3.69	0.49
	B	0.93	1.81	<.01	4.97	0.65
	C	0.29	0.42	<.01	2.64	0.39
Writing process	A	0.55	0.8	<.01	3.07	0.41
	B	1.37	3.96	<.01	5.73	0.75
	C	0.77	0.82	.1	1.63	0.24

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significant increases. Changes related to *Being an Author*, *Language Choices* and *Text-level Choices* in the post-project data are statistically significant for all three schools and increases for the *Writing Process* and *Reader–Writer Relationship* factors are significant for Schools A and B and Schools A and C, respectively. This distribution of writing factors is also reflected in the instructional strategies and classroom activities that teachers implemented following PDP sessions (see Table 1). The increases in writing factors across schools appear to suggest pupils' greater awareness of the different aspects involved in writing production, which we interpret as possible indication of a broader, more rounded view of 'good' writing in the post-project data.

A snapshot of the qualitative trends underlying our quantitative analysis is provided in Figures 9–11 below. There were individual cases where post-project additions to spider diagrams increased the representation of just one writing factor. Such is the case in Figure 9, where the pupil only added features belonging to the already-represented *Language Choices* factor (see gree words, e.g. conjunction, colon, adjective), meaning no broadening across writing factors was detected.

However, the quantitative results show that, on average, pupils not only included a greater number of features (tokens) but also that those tokens meant the inclusion of a broader variety of writing factors post-project (no individual feature was counted twice for a single spider diagram; see Table 5). Crucially, this increase in the representation of different writing factors appears to indicate a change in personal understandings of these factors and a broadening in overall conceptualisations of 'good' writing.

Figure 10 for instance illustrates an initial conceptualisation of 'good' writing (features in blue) centred around formal *Language Choices* such as punctuation and grammar. The post-project features (green) also record an awareness of *Writing Process* (e.g., nice handwriting) and *Reader–Writer Relationship* (e.g., makes you cry).

Figure 11 illustrates a case where the pupil's initial concept (grey) favoured *Being an Author* (e.g., similes and metaphors and building tension) and, to an extent, *Language Choices* (e.g., powerfull [sic] adjectives, verbs). These were complemented, post-project, by *Writing Process* (e.g., thinking it through) and *Reader–Writer Relationship* (e.g., hook the reader) additions (blue).

Pupils' negotiations of their developing concepts of 'good' writing

The focus group data helped us understand better how pupils' broadening of writing constructs is discursively constructed. The illustrative extracts below, where 'F' is the facilitator and pupils are represented by alphanumeric identifiers, reveal a relatively patterned distribution in pupils' linguistic stance-taking.

Attribution of stance is explicit via the use of first-person pronouns and mental verbs *think* (Extracts 1 and 3) and *care* (Extract 2). Second person is used across examples to present the pupils' views as shared by the wider community where 'you' is anyone who identifies as a writer. Following Halliday (2000), the combination of declarative sentences with the (semi)modals *should, need to, ought to* (Extracts 1 and 3) helps pupils to present as incontestable what they believe is central to the writing process or to a writer's repertoire. Causative constructions with *make* are used across these extracts to create a sense of urgency regarding the impact of pupils' writing on their audience. Stance and focussing adverbs (*really* + verb; *just, basically* + NP) in Extracts 2 and 3, and degree intensifiers (*really* + adjective) in Extracts 1 and 2 serve to

Figure 9: Pupil spider diagram (Pupil C3).

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Figure 10: Pupil spider diagram (Pupil A48).

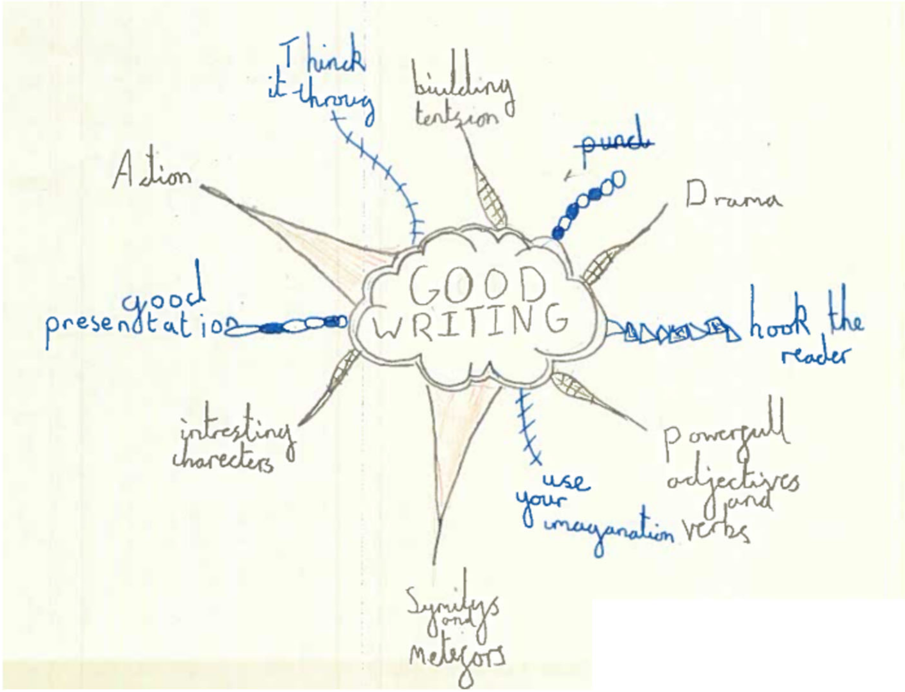

Figure 11: Pupil spider diagram (Pupil C8).

qualify attributes pupils value highly in written text or, post-project, to downgrade the weight of particular aspects on the overall writing process (Biber et al., 1999) and what contributes to 'good' writing.

EXTRACT 1

F: Would you like to take us through yours please?
C5: So to make it exciting writing it needs to make the reader interested and want to read it, and make them emotional. Like the main clause or subordinate clause, but it's not really important that much. Interesting by the character and the book as well, like, interested and something colourful on the book […] to make the reader like it and read and really desperate to read the next chapter. […]F: You mentioned at the beginning, that you had a main and subordinate clause in there but then you said you do not think they are very

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important? […] Why?C5: Because, like, you should think about what you are writing, like, first thing to make it exciting writing … like, you do not think of a subordinate clause or commas or anything about that. Just making your writing really exciting and interesting. And like, make the reader really, like emotional.

EXTRACT 2

C12: What I put for good writing is that punctuation, but I do not think punctuation really matters that much. I think it's about like, the interest in writing and how they how I make them feel about writing. And I would not really care about the parenthesis as well, and the clauses […] Parenthesis as well. But I would not really care about the stuff that the laptop's gonna correct. And if we do it on like, a laptop, it's gonna be like a draft. And then we can make it interesting for them. […] Like you draw a picture in their mind. Like, it can make them feel sad, and make them feel emotional, and make them feel like really happy about the things they put in your book[.]

EXTRACT 3

B36: I firstly did explain because you there's no point in writing a story if you do not if you cannot explain how the plot happened. Then you also need to have adventurous new ideas. Because it's there's no point like copying a book and of changing a few words, because that's basically just stealing another person's idea, and you need to have creativity, which is around, which is basically the same thing. But then like, create things that you would not usually find in your world, if you are doing like a book that's not based on reality. And then when I, when I added stuff I did good decision making, because then you need to be able to quickly decide that you want this one now, and then the other one later, or both of them now. Or, all those stuff and taking on feedback. Taking on and responding to feedback, so that, because if someone says like, 'this might need to be changed to make it better', then you will need to change it, they will like it more. […]F: Okay, would you mind just telling us a little bit more about what you meant when you said decision making?B36: Like decision making is like, […] if someone said two things like they did like this part of the book, or someone said they did not like this part of the book, would I decide to change that or write a new book with that in it? But then it's like, between them, and you need to decide: Do you want to keep it that way and be proud of it? Or do you want to change that and listen to the feedback?

Significantly, these extracts exemplify how pupils negotiate their developing concepts of 'good' writing. In all cases, this seems to take place via two interrelated processes: the integration of aspects of writing that the pupil had not initially considered in their 'good' writing construct (e.g., decision-making in feedback-taking, Extract 3) and the relativisation/recalibration of the importance of features that had been initially included in the writing construct (e.g., the importance of grammar and punctuation, Extracts 1 and 2) but that, after the teachers' project activities, no longer seem to be as central as they had originally.

Pupils' writer identities, classroom activities and the notion of choice

As Cremin et al. (2016) note, identity is dynamically constructed through identification: positive identification via solidarity and allegiance arising from characteristic sharing and negative identification via the construction of difference, or what singles out one's own voice against the rest. Extract 3 above for instance provides one such glimpse of a writer's voice development. The pupil reflects on self-regulating practices as part of their own writing craft, expressed as a struggle between prioritising one's own voice versus allowing others' voices—readers, possibly teachers—to influence a text.

Reflections on personal preference and style were evident when, during focus group interviews, the children commented on teachers' classroom activities and their effects on pupils' writer identity (Extracts 4–7 below). In Extract 4, the student reflects on the peer feedback activity (see Main Classroom Activity 3B in Table 1), which helped them to discover the use of rhetorical questions as part of their writer's repertoire. In Extracts 5 and 7, the pupils particularly refer to project activities where teachers gave them freedom to experiment with function before form (see Figure 2 above, also Main Classroom Activity 1A in Table 1). Extract 6 reports on a classroom activity designed to raise awareness of how to develop one's own reception strategies (Main Classroom Activity 1C in Table 1).

EXTRACT 4

B13: Some people had very different opinions on mine. But some had like the same, so. Yeah, I kind of did change the opinion of good writing, because the people said some, like stuff that I did not really think about when I was writing the story. I was like, 'Oh, that's a good one. I didn't think I had that'. […] And they said, 'I like your use of rhetorical questions'. I was thinking 'Wait, where were my rhetorical questions?' I did not like realise when I was writing that I used quite a bit of them.

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EXTRACT 5

C21: [N]ormally, like, if you keep thinking about, 'oh, I need to put a comma there, I need to put a full stop there', your brains' gonna be jumbled up with those, instead of all your ideas of what exciting stuff is. So, we were told, whilst we were in the middle of it, to just write what you think you are thinking about, and then put all your commas and full stops.F: So when you do that, […] write what you are thinking about, and then go back and add in all your full stops and everything? How helpful was that? How did you find that when you were writing?C21: It always helps a lot. Because well, if you are thinking about very exciting ideas, you are definitely gonna forget if all you are thinking about is a full stop and an exclamation mark!

EXTRACT 6

A1: So recently, we have been doing like how to hook the reader more. And I think it definitely has had an effect on my writing personally. Now, like, I'm definitely writing a bit more dramatically, almost. Because I do write a lot. I like writing.

EXTRACT 7

A1: I think adding to the bit about free writing, I really liked that, because it allowed me to - so basically, usually, when we do a writing task, I have no problem finding like a theme at all, because usually what we do is like, kind of reinvent a piece into our own. But usually, and I think the teacher says this a lot, I go, like way too much off the actual book and just start writing my own thing completely. So I think the free writing task was really nice, because I can kind of like, I had an idea, and I just got to kind of write in my own style, which is like, more description than action.

In terms of linguistic features, consider, across examples, the stance attribution via the use of first-person pronouns *I* and *we* and the possessive determiner *my* (*my rhetorical questions, my writing* in Extracts 4 and 6), stance adverb *personally* and the emphasiser *own* (e.g., *my writing personally* in Extract 6, *my own style* in Extract 7). Self-reflection as a key aspect of identity development (Tynan and Garbett, 2017) is also clearly recorded in the extracts: pupils discuss personal writing preferences (writing *dramatically* in Extract 6; *more description than action* in Extract 7) but are also critical of the school writing protocols that constrain them. Also note the use, in some examples, of the repetition of truth-value markers to emphasise their viewpoint: 'I didn't *really* think about when I was writing the story' (Extract 4); 'you're *definitely* gonna forget if all you're thinking about is a full stop' (Extract 5); 'I think it *definitely* has had an effect on my writing personally' (Extract 6). Pupils clearly observe in their comments that they do not always feel able to fully shape their own writing given the restrictions imposed in the classroom. This has implications for pupils' writer identities; they are not able to 'write their own thing completely' (Extract 7) and therefore cannot put their writer's 'personal stamp' (Hyland, 2000, p. 23) on their texts.

More generally, a writers' personal stamp is inextricably linked to an awareness of the notion of choice, or the possibility of making an informed and selective use of the writing resources at hand for a given purpose. This idea is clearly reflected across extracts: the activities allowed pupils to tailor their writing to their own preference (free writing activity) and become more aware of their own trademark style (peer feedback activity). In this respect, previous research notes that choice is 'important for motivation because the increased autonomy generates greater self-efficacy' (Myhill et al., 2023a, p. 3, referring to Pajares et al., 2006). However, such an awareness of choice is only possible when pupils have a holistic understanding of what 'good' writing means. Thus, by broadening pupils' understanding of the factors that are included in 'good' writing constructs, the teachers' activities associated with the project crucially enhanced pupils' 'resourcefulness toolkit' that is an essential component of writer identity development.

Conclusion

This paper explores variation and change in Year 5 (aged 9–10 years) pupils' conceptualisations of 'good' writing following a 6-week, teacher-led PDP. Methodological limitations aside (see Limitations of the methods as used section), the quantitative findings from the study suggest that pupils' overall conceptualisations of 'good' writing significantly broadened across the three participating schools and that such broadening aligned with the changes that teachers implemented to their writing instruction as a result of the PDP training. Pupils were seen to (a) consistently broaden their concept of 'good' writing via the integration and the recalibration of writing features and aspects and (b) use such broadening to aid the development of their identity as writers. Furthermore, as the qualitative data suggested, the project had a positive effect on instilling into pupils a greater awareness and sense of ownership of their writing preferences and priorities.

Our findings therefore indicate that holistic understandings of 'good' writing are essential tools to enhance writer identity development by drawing attention to the importance of linguistic choice. With such

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choice comes greater opportunity for children to selectively employ a range of skills and devices with their writing, thereby being equipped with more tools with which to show personal preference and articulate their writer identity. Furthermore, at a wider, classroom-practice level, these findings suggest the importance of fostering the development and sharing of holistic writing constructs in the classroom if instruction is to nurture children's writer identities.

This work also builds on that of Barrs (2019), who notes teachers' concerns about the lack of curricular space for them to 'teach in a way that they believe would promote good writing' and instead are worried that 'as soon as they learn to write [children are] worrying about correctness' (p. 28). This is not only borne out in our findings but furthered in that we argue, where teachers are provided with the space and teaching tools to adequately explore constructs of 'good' writing, pupils quickly learn to employ such tools to develop their writer identity and shape texts. When considering implications for practice, it is also important to highlight the antithetical discourse around the assessment of writing. As these judgements of what counts as 'good' writing are rooted in relations of power and in whose interests the assessments are made (Ivanic, 2004), the notion of broadening conceptualisations of writing and the way in which these support the development of writer identity cannot be easily captured in marking schemes. It is therefore necessary to consider the position of writing in primary education beyond these assessments in order for teachers to develop children's concepts of 'good' writing and ultimately ensure children can find 'a voice of one's own'.

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Conflict of interest statement

This work is an original piece of research that has neither been already published elsewhere nor is currently under consideration for publication elsewhere. Therefore, there is no conflict of interest to disclose.

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Appendix 1

Gender, Good Writing and the 'Gap': PDP Overview

Session 1: Good writing.

Item	*Description*
Pre-session task	Teachers upload examples of good pupil writing (one fiction, one non-fiction) and picture(s) of writing/literacy/English wall
Children's questionnaire	Questionnaire to gather pre-intervention data about children's thoughts on writing
Session 1 taught content and activities	***Guided development of 'good writing' definition*** • *What is good writing?* • *What elements do you expect to be in good writing from your students?* ***Application of 'good writing' definition*** • Identify the elements of good writing that are in the student writings you submitted. Provide extracts from the student writings to show how an identified element has been included. • How completely does your writing wall represent your idea of good writing? • How completely do your students' writings embody your idea of good writing? **Compare personal conceptualisation of 'good' writing to research findings** • Review research data • How does your definition compare to other teachers' conceptualisations of good writing? **Compare teacher data to student data** • What discrepancies did you note between the teacher and student data? • What discrepancies did you note between your own idea of good writing and the student data? **Develop a shared conceptualisation of 'good' writing among teachers** • Which parts of your definition align with students' ideas of good writing? • Which parts of your definition contrast with students' ideas of good writing?
Gallery walk	**Plan how to create a conceptualisation of good writing that is shared between a teacher and students** Research-informed practices (based on Young, R. and Ferguson, F. (2021). *Writing for Pleasure: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge) principles of world-class writing teaching that support good writing.
Action plan	Tool supports teachers' efforts to plan how to implement good writing practices and provide evidence of that implementation.
Good writing Spider diagram	Students create a spider diagram that represents their idea of good writing, completed following Session 1 and prior to any classroom activities.

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Session 2: Gender and writing

Item	*Description*
Pre-session task	Teachers upload examples of classroom activities intended to develop a shared understanding of good writing with students following session 1.
Session 2 taught content and activities	**Share successes/challenges of creating a class conceptualisation of good writing** • What did you try that worked well? Why did it work? • What did you try that did not work so well? What were the challenges? **Discuss gender and writing using teacher-provided samples of good writing** • Discuss whether a boy/girl wrote the texts • Looking at the responses you recorded, what patterns emerge within each gender (and genre) and between the genders (and genres)? **Distinguish between the content of writing and the behaviours around writing (research-based discussion of gender and writing performance)** • Compare participants' responses to student and teacher data • How do your ideas about gender-specific behaviours and writing compare to other teachers' ideas? • Distinguish between behaviours and content • Review the linguistic data and consider what discrepancies did you note between students' writing performance and teachers'/students' ideas about writing?
Gender and writing text	**Discuss policies and practices intended to support good writing with boys** Jones, S. (2012). Mapping the landscape: Gender and the writing classroom. *Journal of Writing Research*, 3(3), 163–179. https://doi.org/10.17239/jowr-2012.03.03.2 To serve as basis of conversation that transitions discussion from previous data to teachers' practices.
Action plan	**Plan how to provide equitable, content-based instruction and evaluations that support good writing.** After reviewing the linguistic data, determine how to communicate to all students • your expectations and • quality markers/indicators. After reviewing findings from the literature, determine how to include good writing support that is • content-based, • positive, constructive, and balanced, • equitable for boys and girls • provided before, during, and after the writing process.

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Session 3: Feedback and instruction

Item	*Description*
Pre-session task	Teachers upload examples of classroom activities implemented to avoid gender stereotyping students' writing following session 2.
Session 3 taught content and activities	**Share successes/challenges of avoiding gendered stereotypes of children's writing in the classroom** • What did you try that worked well? Why did it work? • What did you try that did not work so well? What were the challenges? **Identify elements of effective feedback included in and missing from current practices** • Sort the cards to indicate which feedback practices you use and which you do not use (adapted from Ferris, D. R. (2014). Responding to student writing: Teachers' philosophies and practices. *Assessing Writing*, 19, 6–23. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2013.09.004 and Ferguson, F. and Young, R. (2021) *A Guide to Pupil-Conferencing With 3–11 Year Olds: Powerful Feedback & Responsive Teaching That Changes Writers*. Brighton: The Writing For Pleasure Centre) • Order the practices currently used in the classroom to reflect those most used to those used least often. • How do these practices look in your classroom/with your students? • Consider all the feedback practices that you do not currently use. • What factors prevent you from using these practices? **Plan how to embed effective classroom practices** **Good writing and gender and writing** • What have you added to your instructional practice that you want to keep doing? • How can these become sustainable instructional practices (beyond this school year and beyond your classroom)? • What have you added to your feedback practices that you want to keep doing? Or what is not currently part of your practice that you want to add? • How can these become sustainable feedback practices (beyond this school year and beyond your classroom)?
Action plan	**Plan for longer term actions/dissemination for sustainable practices** What practices can I take forward in my own classroom with future groups of students? What practices can I feed into the whole school English programme? What practices can I disseminate throughout the school?
Revised spider diagram	Teachers upload students' revised spider diagrams to indicate their updated understanding of good writing.
Children's questionnaire	Questionnaire to gather post-intervention data about children's thoughts on writing.

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