

Institution: University of Worcester
Unit of Assessment: 29 - English Language & Literature
Title of case study: Developing New Approaches to Teaching Creative Writing in English Primary Schools
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The case study will discuss, and provide qualitative evidence of the ways in which Julie Maclusky's action research into developing approaches to teaching creative writing in primary schools has contributed to the thinking, training and continuing professional development of primary school teachers and their teaching practice. It will illustrate the emerging impact that the research has had on the practices of primary schools in teaching creative writing and on the value and success of those practices to developing articulacy and literacy amongst primary school-aged children.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research was conducted between May 2010 and June 2011 by Julie Maclusky (teacher of writing in university contexts including, formerly, University of Southern California and Bangor University) while full-time Senior Lecturer in English Language and Creative Writing at the University of Worcester, and Dr Robyn Cox, then Principal Lecturer in Primary Education at Worcester (and subsequently Associate Professor of Literacy Education in the Faculty of Education at The Australian Catholic University, Sydney). The research posited conception of the primary classroom as a 'creative space' for children's engagement with writing, and some techniques deployed in university teaching of creative writing as offering possibilities for developing that engagement. It addressed the widely acknowledged 'problem' of the teaching of writing in schools being constrained by a measurable, outcomes-driven approach (Cremin et al, 2009), at the expense of creativity – a view supported by the 2009 Rose Report. Its context was governmental focus, in England, on increasing standards of literacy amongst primary school-aged children (Andrews, 2009): the 2009 Ofsted report, <i>English at the Crossroads: An Evaluation of English in Primary and Secondary Schools 2005/08</i> had identified significantly lower standards in writing than in reading, noting that "Teachers, who were confident as writers themselves and could demonstrate how writing is composed, taught it effectively." (Ofsted 2009: 5).</p> <p>The research aimed to propose a model of teaching creative writing that engaged pupils as creative individuals rather than as producers of expert text. Integral to its design was therefore interrogation of what constitutes good writing (Peha,2002) – a question largely confined, in policy and curriculum documents addressing children's writing attainment, to measurement of 'technical' attainment. The research took a determinedly 'alternative', qualitative approach, proposing 'good writing' to be 'affective writing': how, through encouraging affective writing - and thereby promoting the confidence, engagement and creativity of individual pupils - might the teaching of creative writing ultimately have an impact on standards of writing throughout the primary school curriculum?</p> <p>The researchers developed, tested and assessed a set of writing exercises designed to support teachers' confidence to tailor their teaching to individual context and need, providing a framework for achievement. The research deployed a restricted sample of six intentionally diverse primary school classrooms in schools across England and some 200 children, aged 7-12. A series of writing exercises (designed by Maclusky) prompted learners' engagement with their personal 'story experiences' with the aim of growing engagement and attainment, especially amongst pupils struggling with formal writing lessons. The exercises were delivered by teachers (supported by Maclusky) in two-hour writing classes designed to 'model' the creative process of professional writers and encouraging use of analogous composition and crafting techniques. Classrooms were redesigned as 'creative environments' to encourage pupil interaction, group working and individual confidence. The researchers sought to achieve the highest possible integration of teaching content, delivery and environment to stimulate creativity (with creativity conceived as catalytic of pupil/teacher enthusiasm capable of generating progress across the wider literacy curriculum).</p> <p>Dr Cox led on data collection and analysis, with pupil engagement measured using a momentary</p>

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time-sampling technique and lesson observations, and recorded semi-structured interviews with a selection of pupils after each class. Classroom teachers and assistants present assisted Cox in data collection. While acknowledging the 'risks' attached to assessing outcomes through definition and assessment of pupil engagement, the researchers nonetheless argued the efficacy of such an approach in this, the projected pilot phase of a larger-scale research project to be developed subsequently. Their findings provided clear evidence of the capacity of Maclusky's exercises and the writing environment that had been created to engage pupils in writing activities: outcomes of the researchers' use of their classroom observation protocol suggested strong pupil engagement, and analysis of subsequent pupil interviews indicated pupils' enjoyment of the freedom created from conventional, outcomes-based writing activities.

3. References to the research

Maclusky, J & Cox, R, *Teaching Creative Writing in the Primary School: Delight, Entice, Inspire!* 2011, McGraw-Hill/Open University Press, 2011, ISBN 9780335242795.

Cox, R & Maclusky, J 'Creative Writing in the (new) Primary Curriculum: an exploration' 15th July 2011, *Empowerment through Literacy: Literacy Shaping Futures*, 47th UKLA (UK Literacy Association) Conference, Chester, 15th-17th July 2011 [http://www.ukla.org/downloads/UKLA Chester International Conference Papers 2011.pdf](http://www.ukla.org/downloads/UKLA_Chester_International_Conference_Papers_2011.pdf) (NB erroneously, only Cox is listed as presenting)

Maclusky, J & Cox, R 'Is There a Way Forward for Creative Writing Pedagogy in the Primary School Curriculum? An International Study' 4th July 2011, *Creative Engagements. Thinking with Children*, 7th Global Conference, Inter-Disciplinary.Net, 4-6th July 2011, Mansfield College, Oxford <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/at-the-interface/education/creative-engagements-thinking-with-children/project-archives/7th/session-1-creating-the-space/>

Maclusky, J 'Delight, Entice, Inspire: writing exercises that deliver and engage', 11th November 2012, *NAWE Conference 2012. Anniversary Event* 9-11 November 2012, York <http://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/nawe-conference/previous-events/2012.html>

4. Details of the impact

An outcome of Maclusky's and Cox's research was their co-authored book designed for use in primary schools, *Teaching Creative Writing in the Primary School. Delight, Entice, Inspire!* in 2011 (see section 3 above), which provides teachers and tutors with 'alternative' methods through which pupils can engage in writing and improve their enjoyment of it, and schools, thereby, can improve attainment levels in both reading and writing. Following publication, the researchers went on to discuss their work at a variety of conferences involving a mix of academic educators, teachers and professionals in the field of education. From this initial dissemination, by means of which Maclusky's and Cox's approaches were promulgated, Maclusky received further invitations and opportunities to share her approaches with existing and future teachers of writing and literacy in primary schools – by means of which the impact of the research upon approaches to teaching and learning within primary education was achieved in the REF period:

- At the invitation of Pamela Hodson, Principal Lecturer, Primary Education, Kingston University (who had read Maclusky's and Cox's book), Maclusky was invited to lead two workshops for two groups of Kingston Primary PGCE students (60 in total) on May 10th 2012. The workshops were intended to support students in developing their own classroom practice. Hodson introduced Maclusky's and Cox's book as a set text for Kingston's PGCE in Primary Education, graduates of which go on to teach in primary schools throughout south east England.
- At the invitation of Dr Jean Ashfield, Principal Lecturer in the School of Education at Kingston, Maclusky was invited to give a presentation 'Creative Writing: a driver for change and progress' to academics of the School with responsibility for teacher training. (Impact can

therefore be seen to have extended beyond the academic context of the paper's delivery).

- At the invitation of Worcestershire County Council's Learning and Teaching Adviser, Ruth Sale (who had been present at Cox's and MacLusky's presentation as part of the 47th UKLA conference in Chester – see above), MacLusky devised a workshop for some 30 'lead literacy teachers' for primary schools in Worcestershire, which took place on 11th October 2011. She subsequently worked with Sale to devise a demonstration workshop now being marketed to all of Worcestershire's 200 plus primary schools for delivery, in school, in the academic year 2013/14. In addition, Sale invited her, in the REF period, to devise a course for teachers to improve writing attainment for years 5 and 6 pupils and, following publication of the new draft National Curriculum for primary English in September 2013, to discuss ways in which she might support Worcestershire Schools' meeting the new targets.
- Kate Wolstenholme, Learning Manager for east London's Discover Story Centre, and lead for its Catching Words literacy project (<http://www.community-links.org/earlyaction/success-stories/discover-childrens-centre-catching-words-project>) invited MacLusky to visit the Centre on 9th December 2012 to discuss ways in which her research findings might inform the work of the Centre.
- In May 2012, MacLusky was invited to make a presentation on her teaching methods to Philippa Watt, Director of Kip McGrath Education Centres in Balerno, Edinburgh South and Livingston, and Watt subsequently deployed MacLusky's and Cox's book (and the methodology and exercises that it proposes) in all three Centres. Success led to Watt inviting MacLusky to provide workshops for her tutors, with the aim of introducing her writing programme to tutoring centres throughout Scotland.

Also in response to publication of the book, MacLusky gave invited workshops to:

- Four classes of 30 year 5 and 6 pupils, their teachers and classroom assistants at St Barnabas Primary School, Barnetby, Lincolnshire (at the invitation of Head Teacher Mrs Murray), July 2011
- Four classes of 30 year 5 and 6 pupils, their teachers and classroom assistants at Saltergate Junior School, Harrogate (at the invitation of Head Teacher Mr Taylor), July 2013

She has also accepted an invitation, made within the REF period, and as a result of word-of-mouth recommendation from Christine Gryzbowki, Head of Literacy, Saltergate Junior School, to provide a workshop for pupils and teachers of Hookstone Primary School, Harrogate, in autumn 2013.

An additional outcome of MacLusky's promulgated approach to working with primary school-aged children was the interest that it also generated amongst secondary school teachers, who identified the potential of some of her methods for adaptation to working with older students in the context of the new English Literature, Language and Creative Writing A/AS-level curricula.

As a result, MacLusky delivered a workshop at Worcester Sixth Form College, to 30 English Language and Literature students who had recently completed their AS-level study and were progressing to A2 study. The session took place at the invitation of the Head of English & Media and was also attended by the Course Leader for AS English Literature. The success of the workshop led to an invitation to MacLusky, within the REF period, to conduct a second workshop (to take place in September 2013). Also within the REF period, Droitwich Spa High School's Co-ordinator of Extra-curricular Activities in English invited MacLusky to deliver a half day session to AS-level English Language and Literature students (to take place on 19th September 2013).

Public/professional engagement with the issues that MacLusky's and Cox's research raised about the teaching of literacy, and awareness of the research, was achieved through the following media features/interviews/discussions/mentions:

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BBC TV *Midlands Today* (16/7/2010)

Times Higher Education Supplement (15/7/2010)

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/university-of-worcester-writing-all-wrong/412459.article>

BBC Hereford & Worcester, interview feature with Tony Fisher (12/7/2010)

BBC Radio Hereford & Worcester news bulletins (12/7/2010)

Radio Wyvern FM (2/7/2010)

Worcester News, interview feature 'Are Classroom Targets Stifling Creativity?' (25/10/2011)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Ruth Sale, Learning & Teaching Adviser, School Improvement Service, Worcestershire County Council: value and impact of Maclusky's research on county-wide thinking about how to drive up attainment in writing and literacy amongst primary school-aged children.

Pamela Hodson, Principal Lecturer, Primary Education, Kingston University: value to, and impact of, Maclusky's research on developing approaches to the teaching of writing in the primary classroom and on the training of primary teachers in this regard.

Philippa Watt, Literacy Manager, Kip McGrath Tutoring Centres in Scotland: value derived by Kip McGrath Tutoring Centres and their pupils in need of extra support, from introducing teaching methods and approaches honed and promulgated by Maclusky as a result of her research with Cox.

Lucy Byrne, Head of Literacy, St Barnabus Primary School, Barnetby, Lincs: value of introduction of methods and exercises set out in Maclusky's and Cox's book to pupil attainment at St Barnabus Primary School.