The Teacher as a Writer
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Abstract

This article reports on a research study about the effectiveness of the 'teacher as a writer' modelling strategy with Year one students in a New Zealand Primary school. It provides recommendations for implementing the strategy in a classroom program.

Introduction

Today writing in the classroom is viewed from a social perspective through experiences characterized by dialogism, collaboration, audience and purpose. It has also been defined as a complex task for young students whose motor skills are developing alongside their understandings about print.

Teacher modelling strategies have been widely practiced as a flexible means of supporting students to manage the complexities of the writing process (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2003). Research indicates that the 'teacher as a writer' strategy holds exciting potential for supporting young students to overcome the many challenges they face. Therefore, a small research study was undertaken with novice writers to investigate its influence on three dimensions of student writing.

- How does it enable students to manage the writing task?
- How does this approach develop a community of writers?
- How does dialogic interaction, associated with this strategy support text development?

Literature review

The 'teacher as a writer' modelling strategy implements factors identified by current research as influences upon student achievement in writing. The social perspective, audience awareness and needs, collaboration and self-regulation are discussed below.

Socio-cultural perspective and audience awareness

The 'teacher as a writer' strategy supports the socio-cultural view of writing by enabling participants to co-construct shared meanings through reciprocal relationships (Bahtkin, 1987; Gee, 2017; Rogoff, 1995). Dialogic interaction is an integral part of the modelling process, affording young writers an immediate awareness of audience needs as meanings are adapted, negotiated and created (Black, 2004; Boscolo & Gelati, 2007). Therefore, students can appreciate the functional purposes for writing and develop a sense of authenticity as writers (Bruning & Horn, 2000). This motivates students to express personal voice and think critically about texts written by others (Dix & Cawkwell, 2011). Subsequently, a student's sense of agency is enhanced as they transition from passive consumers, to creators of literacy meanings (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Thorkildsen, 2002).

Collaboration

Within the socio-cultural perspective, both teachers and peers are expected to learn and contribute expertise (Dix &

Cawkwell, 2011; Rogoff, 1995). The 'teacher as a writer' strategy can facilitate a positive network of relationships and train students to improve the quality of their interactions with each other (Hsu, 2009; Loane & Muir, 2017; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007). Students can assume a teacher's role and elaborate their understanding with others (Walker, 2003). Collaboration also promotes greater independence with important writing behaviours such as critiquing, decision-making, and revising (Hsu, 2009).

Self- regulation

The modelling, dialogic and collaborative features of the strategy can enhance self-management of the writing process. Self-regulation is strongly correlated with higher student motivation, engagement and achievement. Students internally direct their own learning and behaviour to achieve personal goals, independently making decisions about the emotional, cognitive or environmental factors affecting their learning (Gadd & Parr, 2017; Ryan & Powelson, 1991). This requires metacognitive thinking as the students monitor their progress, revise and adjust their behaviour, and access support when needed (Gadd, 2017; Ryan, 2014) . Self- regulation is enhanced by using process and strategy goals to improve competence, choice of challenging tasks and refinement of problem-solving skills. (Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Schunk, 2003). The 'teacher as a writer' strategy can foster the use of goals and provide feedback which allows students to self-evaluate (Schunk, 2003).

Modelled writing

Modelled writing is an effective instructional strategy which can address student learning needs at any level (MoE, 2003). 'Think aloud' demonstrations are a key technique which articulate the internal thinking strategies and inner dialogue writers engage in (Gadd, 2017; Richards & Hawes, 2004). Meta-language can be introduced to help students think critically and make connections between oral language and writing (Cambourne, 1988; MoE, 2003). Additionally, modelling is a flexible approach which can interface with other instructional strategies such as directing and prompting, to meet students' needs (MoE, 2003). As teachers exhibit enthusiasm for writing, they position writers as active members of a writing community, risk-takers and problem-solvers (Dix, 2016). Students learn by observing, listening and transferring the demonstrated behaviours into their own writing (Schunk, 2003).

The teacher as a writer

The 'teacher as a writer' strategy is a form of modelled writing and therefore draws upon the research findings mentioned above. It specifically positions the teacher as a 'learner-writer' as opposed to a 'teacher-writer'. Writing behaviours are modelled with students *as they write* in contrast with traditional modelling on a whiteboard *before* students write. The teacher's identity shifts from being an instructor to a colleague, one who can speak from experience about how to grapple with the complexities of the writing task (Jacobsen, 2010). Gadd (2017) associates writing *with* students with higher learning gains and distinguishes it as 'active modelling'.

Modelling approaches which occur *before* students write, rely on the student's ability to transfer knowledge to independent writing experiences (MoE, 2003). This can be problematic when considerable mental energy is needed to develop transcription skills. Teacher modelling *during* composition can assist students to recall vital information. Additionally, it can share the cognitive load students carry, allowing students to address other aspects of the writing process such as revision practices which usually receive less attention by novice writers (Dix, 2006; Graham, 2008).

Importantly, the 'teacher as a writer' strategy offers enormous potential for the co- construction of text. Firstly, the teacher can engage in dialogic teaching with students (Beattie, 2007) . Teachers conduct on -going, interactive, formative assessment and provide quality feedback towards goal achievement (Glasswell & Parr, 2009). Responses and questioning can be multi-layered to guide students towards independence (Dix, 2016).

Secondly, both teachers and students can engage in dialogic writing by negotiating topics and interests, building upon one another's comments, adding meaning, clarity, and exploring thinking.

The 'teacher as a writer' strategy mostly involves experienced writers (Ryan, 2014). However, Peterson and Portier's (2012) review of the research signalled the potential value of the strategy with Year One students. They indicated that even young writers had the skills to respond to audience interactions regardless of their writing abilities. Therefore, an investigation was undertaken to explore the value of implementing the strategy with emergent writers.

Methodology

As a teacher-researcher I used an action research approach to implement a teaching intervention with a group of six Year One students in their first year of schooling, from a large multi-cultural school. The group reflected a range of characteristics and learning abilities. Four students were boys and two were girls. Four students were NZ European and two students of Maori ethnicity. Eight, consecutive, twenty-minute writing sessions were conducted, and each occurred within a daily, class writing program which was introduced by the classroom teacher. The research participants were seated with me and began independently drawing picture plans. Following this, I reviewed the group's learning intention and the use of personal goals. I then informed the students that I would be doing my own writing and that they could watch and copy what I was doing. During the rest of the lesson sequence, the 'teacher as a writer' modelling strategy was implemented, students observed, and journal notes recorded.

Writing samples were collected and triangulated with reflective journal notes. An external reviewer was engaged during data analysis and frequent contact maintained with a research supervisor to increase critical reflection during the research process.

Initial samples established a baseline of achievement and were later compared with post-intervention writing samples to

evidence progress (Ary, 2014). Each sample was assessed using the NZ Curriculum Reading and Writing Standards and the English Exemplar Matrix Indicators for Poetic and Transactional Writing including the designation of Matrix sublevels of 1i and 1ii (MoE, 2009, 2015). Based upon my teaching experience, I felt that the Exemplar Matrix Indicators gave more detailed information about writing achievement in a student's first year of schooling, although the Literacy Learning Progressions are commonly used as indicators (MoE, 2010)

Comprehensive notes recorded instructional moves, verbal interactions and non-verbal behaviour. At the close

of each lesson, further notes were added concerning student writing, any behavioural patterns emerging during the lesson and my etic views as a participant in the research. The depth and scope of the journal notes afforded on-going reflection which informed and shaped subsequent lessons.

Findings

Analysis of writing samples

The samples of writing for each student are described and summarised in this section. They formed the basis for teaching objectives for the modelling strategies used during the intervention.

Table 1:

	Initial Intervention Sample	**Post Intervention Sample**
Best fit	4 students – 1ii 2 students – 1i	6 students – 1ii
Number of ideas recorded	2 students – 2 ideas 1 student – 3 ideas 1 student – 4 ideas 1 student – 6 ideas	2 students – 3 ideas 1 student – 4 ideas 1 student – 5 ideas 1 student – 7 ideas 1 student – 9 ideas
Sentence type	6 simple sentences All students attempting to write at least one compound sentence.	20 simple sentences 6 compound sentences correctly formed.
Grammar	2 students had several words missing from the texts. Two students were unable to maintain the correct tense when writing (students 1 and 2).	2 students had one word each missing from their texts. Students 1 – 5 maintained correct tenses.

Ideas recorded summary

1. All students recorded the least number of ideas during the first session.
2. The number of ideas recorded during the intervention increased as it progressed.
3. Students 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 showed an overall increase in the number ideas recorded from the pre to the post samples. These students recorded one extra idea except for student 5 who recorded three extra ideas.
4. Student 1 showed a decrease from 4 to 3 ideas recorded.

Examples of progress in student writing

Student 3

Pre-intervention sample:

"fist on the list you sat off as a baby amd th you gow up and afta you gow up in to a too yer od and the you gow sam mr and you toon a fivi. And samtis win yoo a fiv yerod you get baby siting.

[First on the list you start off as a baby and then you grow up and after you grow up into a two-year-old and then you grow some more and you turn a five. and sometimes when you are five-year-old you get baby-sitting.]

Student 3 wrote a sequenced description of six ideas in one long compound sentence containing 'and' five times. A b/d letter reversal confusion is evident.

Session and sample:

"I Sali ot into the opn sey becoz bad lics bogbodg with me. And we rilacst on owr bogebob. I went to shore but I fal off my bogy bob. Splash! Ahh! I shouted. Bab came anb sab me"

[I sailed out into the open sea because Dad likes boogie boarding with me. We relaxed on our boogie board. I went to shore but I fell off my boogie board. Splash! Ahh! I shouted. Dad came and saved me]

Here, student 3 recorded eight ideas in three compound sentences and three simple sentences. Correct tense was maintained throughout. Student voice was evident in the use of direct speech. One adjective and a strong verb were used. The b/d confusion persists.

Post-intervention sample:

"I woc up wl mum and bad wer aseep I woct bn stez I woch teve it waz fun bot I went to beb it waz cosy."
[I woke up while mum and dad were asleep I walked downstairs I watched tv it was fun but I went to bed it was cosy.]

Student 3 wrote three simple sentences and two compound sentences. Seven ideas were recorded maintaining correct tense. One adjective was used.

Student 3 summary

Student 3 progressed their writing by increasing the number of ideas recorded. A combination of compound and simple sentences was used. Personal voice was successfully expressed in the last intervention sample. Attempts were also made to include punctuation.

Student 6

Pre-intervention Sample:

"I crow wen I was a bab and my mum td me of f mao."

[I crawled when I was a baby and my mum told me off for (eating too many lollies)]

Student 6 attempted to write a compound sentence containing two ideas. Four words were missing from the sentence.

Session 8 sample:

"I am on my boad a mf cam ayl and I Gum ofth the big Waff. I ladd on my bdd!"
[I am on my board a wave came along and I jumped over the big wave. I landed on my board!]

Student 6 recorded four ideas in two simple sentences and one compound sentence. Tense was not maintained in one sentence. Student voice was evident with the use of an exclamation mark.

Post-intervention sample:

"The dcuk is fun in the duc I had my tsh I dehrd my dog bnogn and dad go back." [The dark is fun in the dark I had my torch I heard my dog barking and dad (said) go back.]

Student 6 wrote 2 simple sentences and one compound sentence. Four ideas were recorded maintaining the correct tense. One word was missing.

Student 6 summary

Student 6 progressed their writing by increasing the number of ideas recorded, including most words that were needed and personal voice. They continued to use one compound sentence and added two simple sentences. An exclamation mark was also used.

Analysis of student samples

The shifts in the writing from these two students demonstrate an increased number of ideas recorded and use of simple and compound sentences. Personal voice was included, and improved attention to tense and use of punctuation was also evident in the samples.

Data analysis

Teacher responses and strategies *Teacher modelling*

Initial modelling focussed on student learning needs identified in the initial writing samples and subsequent lessons were guided by on-going interactions with and between students, as well as the challenges they faced when writing text. They addressed managing the writing process, developing text content and using personal goals.

Student responses

Student uptake of modelled strategies increased over the sessions and showed distinctive patterns. Significant changes were seen in the use of self-regulation, collaboration and dialogic interaction.

Self-regulation

The students showed increased self-regulation of the writing process. This was seen in the increased use of personal goals, sustained writing and accessing assistance from group members when needed. They also showed increased use of spelling strategies and reminded each other *how* to sound out or locate words independently.

Session 5

S4 – "I'm going to get S3 because I ran out of ideas." S4 left the table to find them). They met and discussed S3's writing.

Session 8

S3 to S5 – *"Who can be my buddy?'"*

T - *"That's a good question. Who can answer it?"*

AS – *Students set up buddies for the lesson*

Collaboration and co-construction of text

Collaboration between the students reflected teacher modelling and occurred frequently. Significant collaboration focussed on the co-construction of the deeper features of text; topic ideas and sentence generation. As students interacted text ideas were clarified and co-constructed. Group discussion about topic ideas helped students generate new ideas or expand upon those already included in

their texts.

Session 4

S4 & 6 *Unsure what to write about.*

T – *"Who can help?"*

AS – *Discussed ideas as a group. S2 talked about going to the hot pool. S6 then recalled a personal experience at the hot pools.*

T – *"That would be a great topic to tell your readers about."*

S4 – *"I'm going to write about visiting Nana." (which she did)*

Text Student 6: *I went to Taupo and we went to the hot pool and I couldn't touch the bottom. Dad helped me to the brick side. I felt worried if Dad was going to drop me.*

Session 4

S2 *reads their writing to the group and asks for questions*

S6 – *'what did you do at the pools?'*

S2 – *'I did a back flip'*

S6 - *'Oh cool!'*

T – *'Your readers might like to hear about the cool things you did'*

S2 – *Recorded suggested ideas in their text*

Text Student 2: *I went to Taupo in the hot pool with Mum. I did a back flip. I jumped and flipped.*

Teacher modelling also addressed *when* the students should seek help from a buddy to encourage further self-regulation with this strategy. The students were able to do this independently and expressed their

reasoning as they did so.

Session 5

S3 - *"I'm going to read this to you, cos I don't know what to write"*

S4 – *"OK"*

S3 – *Reads text*

S4 – *Prompts S3 to ask "Any questions?"*

S3 – *"Any questions?"*

S4 – *"What would you do on the plane?"*

S3 – *answers*

S4 – *"I'm going to read my story to you after"*

S3 – *"OK"*

Limitations

Seeking a buddy did not always prove to be helpful. Occasionally, a buddy would not be able to ask a question. Questions that called for one-word answers required the writer to reframe their answer as a complete sentence. Assistance was needed with this at times.

Talking with a buddy could also be a distraction.

Discussion

As students emulated new writing behaviours their attention shifted from observing the teacher, to their own writing behaviours and those of their peers. This indicates the strategy's effectiveness as scaffolded learning by expert others (Rogoff, 1995, Vygotsky, 1978).

Writing samples

Post- writing samples were encouraging. They showed a deeper awareness of audience interests by the inclusion of more ideas overall. The number of compound sentences also increased indicating improved control over sentence structure. Although deliberate teacher modelling of correct sentence structure and tense occurred less often in the sessions, frequent dialogic interaction between participants increased students' exposure to oral role models and influenced achievement (MoE, 2003; Smith & Elley, 1997). Gains within surface features were evident in the improved use of spelling strategies and grammar skills. This reflected Schunk's research (2003) which underscored the value of demonstrating the usefulness of strategies to achieve learning goals when writing texts.

Management of the writing task

Management of the writing task is particularly relevant for young writers who are learning to master the basics of the writing process (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007). Self -monitoring of the writing process was primarily achieved by modelling the use of personal goals. They outlined the writing process and reminded students of pertinent behaviours for progress (Schunk, 2003) . Further self-regulation was developed as students prioritised goals and independently chose who, and when to ask for help (Gadd & Parr, 2017; Nolan, 2001). Additionally, self-monitoring was also evident in student talk reflecting teacher comments 'I'm running out of ideas, so I'm going to read my writing to you' (student 4 to student 5, session 6).

The students also showed increased ability to self-regulate distractions; only pausing to contribute to group discussions or consult about their writing with a buddy. In the final sessions, the students spent more time composing their own texts and appeared to be benefitting peripherally from teacher modelling indicating the strategy's influence at all stages of the drafting process (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007).

Community of writers

Firstly, the students emulated teacher modelling to assist one another to manage the writing process. Schunk (2003) noted that "group members serve as models for one another, especially when they explain the writing process" (Schunk, 2003, p.169). In so doing, the students accepted greater ownership for their learning and strengthened their problem-solving skills (Hsu, 2009).

Secondly, a sense of community developed as students collaborated to co-construct meaning (Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Loane & Muir, 2017). Writing 'talk' occurred at the group, sub- group, paired and even the individual level where 'think aloud' comments were expressed to the whole group as they worked (Loane & Muir, 2017). Audience feedback furthered student experience of authentic purposes for writing. Initial focus on teacher feedback and the number of ideas shifted to creating interesting text for readers. Petersen and Portier (2012) also noted that peer feedback prompted a focus on content, by young writers. Discussion also enabled the students to overcome 'writer's block' and independently record further ideas. This signalled progress to the students and fostered engagement (Schunk, 2003).

The teacher's role in developing positive relationships was evident in the intervention as students sought interactions both within and in one case, beyond the writing group (MoE, 2003; Nolan, 2001).

Dialogic Interaction and Text Development

The 'teacher as a writer' strategy significantly supported dialogic interaction between participants. Discussion reminded students about learning intentions which appeared to be 'lost in transit' from the lesson introduction and assisted students to recall prior knowledge about writing topics. Conversation triggered memories and expanded students' ideas. At times, conversations were quite animated, stirring emotional responses and indicating which topics were of interest to potential audiences.

This influenced topic selection and enthusiasm to record experiences.

Dialogic interaction with a 'buddy' had a noteworthy influence on the students' audience awareness when writing; a very real person would listen and react to their writing. The buddy effectively represented a wider, distant audience and added authenticity to the writing task (Nolan, 2007). As they engaged with a buddy the writer 'stepped back' from the text and viewed it as an artefact for reflection. Secondly, they engaged in 'second order' reflection as they considered the feelings and intentions invoked by on-going conversations with an oral turn- taking partner (Bareiter & Scandamalia, 1982, 1983, as cited in Smith & Elley, 1997, pp. 69 -71). Dialogue provoked the writer to evaluate their writing from a reader/ listener's perspective and make further revisions to their texts. In so doing, the writer has engaged in deep, critical self-assessment (Ryan, 2014). In this study, students' revisions included additions, insertions and deletions to their texts.

The reciprocal role of the reader-buddy in co-constructing text was also evident (Boscolo and Gelati, 2007). Listening carefully to texts encouraged critical thinking. Buddies had to evaluate the current text, consider an appropriate addition and frame this as a question to the writer. As they did so, they stood in the writer's shoes and deepened their own understanding of writing for an audience.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are made to implement the 'teacher as a writer' modelling strategy with emergent writers.

Before the modelling session:
- Assess and prioritise the initial learning needs of your students.
- Plan your teaching objectives. What specific, achievable process strategies and goals should your students aim for?
- Plan questions to foster higher order thinking in your students e.g. 'how could you…?'
- Plan your 'think aloud' comments. They could include talk about thinking processes, strategies and coping with negative emotions.
- Plan your own text and consider where will you insert your 'think aloud' comments.
- The first session is an important time to establish group norms. This can include social manners. In subsequent sessions encourage paired interactions when appropriate.

During the modelling session:
- Position yourself alongside the students rather than as 'the teacher in front'.
- Explain to the students that you will be doing your own writing as they write. Instruct them to notice what you are doing and copy you if they need to. They might also like to 'listen in' as they do their writing to help them remember what to do.
- Model forming goals and intentions using visual icons as personal prompts to refer to during writing. This could include one group goal and a few personal goals. Mention which goal(s) will be the most helpful to you today. Ask the students to record one or two goals. Which ones are important for them? Keep this brief.
- Begin writing. Model the attitudes, knowledge and skills your students need to learn. Use 'think aloud' comments as appropriate. Model *when* to refer to your personal goals e.g. when you get 'stuck', have lost track of what you are saying, have run out of ideas, think you might be finished, cannot spell a word. Model how and when to ask a buddy for help and respond as a buddy to a request for help.
- Respond to student requests for help by encouraging group or buddy responses to their needs. Problem solve together with reference to group or personal goals.
- Observe and listen to student responses. What can you glean about their behavioural, cognitive, emotional and cultural engagement? If possible, make quick notes.
- Relax and enjoy; have fun writing your own text and being part of the group rather than the teacher trying to meet everyone's learning needs.
- Manage time frames, keeping sessions 10-20 minutes.
- Affirm and praise student attempts to adopt new strategies and help others.

- Wrap-up with a summary of what was cool about writing together today. Refer to goals – who tried to/ or achieved one today? Celebrate! Describe *how* the students helped *you*! Allow students to keep writing if they need/want to.
- Thank the students for their help.

Post modelling session:
- Evaluate student writing and collaborative/dialogic interactions – what were the main foci? What will you focus on next time?

Notes:
- Initially, the students may spend longer observing the teacher than they usually do composing their own texts. This is normal – the teacher is acting in a novel role and it's captivating! The students will be learning as they observe and will soon begin emulating your enthusiasm to write.
- Maintain your role as the writer-teacher as your primary function even though both you and your students may be more familiar with a directing-teacher role.
- Less dependence on the teacher is a characteristic of this modelling approach as students increasingly access help from their buddies.

Limitations and shortcomings
The limitations of this small-scale study are acknowledged (Menter et al, 2011). However, it provides evidence-based results which could add to and strengthen other research on modelled writing.

Conclusion
The purpose of this study was to investigate how the 'teacher as a writer' strategy could influence student engagement and achievement in writing. Although not commonly utilised with young students, this modelling approach offered young students several advantages. It significantly highlighted authentic purposes for writing and the dialogic dynamics of writing

for an audience. Discussion occurred at all stages of the writing process and assisted students to think critically about texts. This resulted in the use of revision practices and influenced achievement of both deeper and surface features of texts. Self-management of the writing process was advanced through the modelling, practise and self-monitoring of personal goals. Collaboration between students also increased, enabling them to assist one another with task management and text development. Current modelling strategies provide teachers with a range of techniques that can be used flexibly with other instructional strategies (MoE, 2003). The 'teacher as a writer' strategy has the potential to earn its place in the 'toolbox' for effective literacy practice for both teachers and Year One students.

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