What Are We Going To Do About Writing? The "neglected R".

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Lorraine Beveridge makes the case for high quality writing experiences in every classroom…

A concerning, declining trend in writing national data over time (NSW Department of Education, 2017) suggests that the teaching of writing could possibly be "a neglected R" (Graham, Hebert and Harris, 2015; Korth, et al., 2017 and Sessions, Kang and Womack, 2016). Writing is a literacy skill, relevant to all key learning areas in school and a necessary communication skill in life. Early literacy includes the interdependent skills of reading, writing and oral language, and it has been suggested that the prioritised focus on reading has led to limited attention to teaching writing as well as inadequate research on early writing instruction (Korth et al., 2017). Declining writing results "casts a light on our teaching practice", (Fisher, Frey and Hattie, 2017 p167), how we teach writing, including the component writing skills and writing processes, our understanding of how students learn to write and suggest a need to investigate writing strategies independent of other literacy skills. Writing is a crucial skill linked to reading and academic success, and engagement in society more broadly (Cutler and Graham, 2008; Gerde, Bingham and Wasik, 2012; Mackenzie and Petriwskyj, 2017). This paper is a result of my research and reflection on practice.

I begin with a focus on an historical overview of learning to write. Then, I outline strategies identified in the literature that work in improving student writing skills and outline examples from my research and the wider literature of best practice in the teaching of writing. The paper concludes with how we, as a teaching profession, can move "onwards and upwards" in ensuring that students are effective written communicators who are also passionate writers and, as a result, their love of writing and chances of success at school and beyond are maximised.

Historical overview of learning to write

Teachers need a shared understanding of how children learn to write as a starting point in improving student writing. (Calkins and Ehrenworth, 2016). Learning to write is often described as a progression from scribbles on a page to conventional text (Genishi and Dyson, 2009), but it is so much more, linked to emotions and communication, and the progression is not always a linear one (Mackenzie and Petriwskyi, 2017). Beginning writing behaviour usually includes exposure to quality texts, models of good writing, classroom talk, drawing and captioning pictures, and tracing over words. In addition to copying captions, students replicate words from around the room and environmental print. Copying print leads to students remembering word forms and writing them independently. At the same time, students are inventing spellings of words that they wish to use in their independent writing, eager to share the stories that are important to them, based on their growing oral language, phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge and sight word vocabulary, in doing so, learning about the writing process through writing (Clay, 1979; Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). In the beginning stages, it is common to see pretend writing, scribble, and copying text. By encouraging early writing experimentation, which includes miscellaneous marks as students master letter formations, a range of print conventions and the use of invented spelling, students are encouraged to create meaning from print and share the messages that are important to them, fostering a love of writing and utilising students' growing graphological and phonological knowledge.

Through partaking in early writing, students are making connections between graphemes (letters) and phonemes (sounds). They are learning about the skills that constitute writing, and that writing is a process that conveys meaning to the reader. Students have a meaningful context to practise and apply their growing awareness of how language works. It can certainly be challenging to decipher students’ early independent writing attempts. However, it is important that we as teachers work hard to determine the message that students are attempting to convey. By seeking to understand students’ intended written message, we are valuing their work, and encouraging them to expand their writing repertoire and take pleasure in it. We are modelling the purpose of writing, which is to convey a message to the reader, “through responding to and composing texts…, and learn(ing) about the power, value and art of the English language for communication, knowledge and enjoyment” (Board of Studies, 2012 p10).

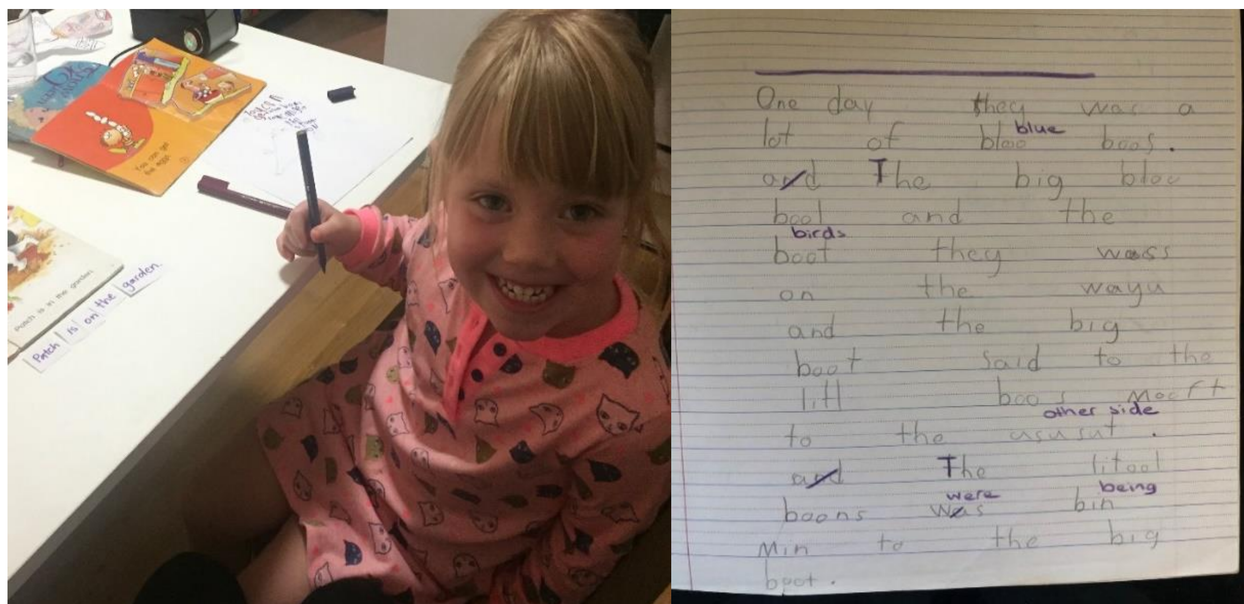

Figure 1: *Supporting students’ early independent writing attempts*

Student writing can be viewed through a formative assessment lens (Wiliam, 2011, 2016, 2018), as a measure of writing growth, an indicator of the impact of teacher practice and to signpost where to next in writing instruction for individual students. Student writing samples provide rich evidence of learning, reducing the over-reliance on narrow test scores to monitor progress (Mackenzie and Petriwskyi, 2017; Fisher, Frey and Hattie, 2017). By keeping regular chronological logs of student writing, teachers and students have evidence of writing growth, as a basis for where students are at, and where they need to go to next in their learning, “monitoring student success criteria” (Hattie, 2012 p19). Syllabus scope and sequences, as in the NSW English syllabus (NSW Board of Studies, 2012) and the National Literacy Learning Progressions (NLLP) (ACARA, 2018) are useful tools for teachers to identify achievement and plan for individual student instruction across the various elements of literacy. Additionally, the

NLLP are potentially useful for students to determine their own learning intentions and success criteria (Wiliam, 2018), providing a framework for them to self-monitor their progress.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) released the Literacy Learning Progressions (NLLP) in 2018, to assist Australian teachers in identifying, understanding and addressing students’ literacy learning needs. In NSW, the NLLP, although not mandatory, are an additional tool to support teachers in implementing the English syllabus (NESA, 2012), which drives teaching and learning in classrooms. Teachers use evidence of student writing to appraise practice, drawing on the English syllabus and NLLP to inform decision making on where to next for individual students, in doing so personalising writing instruction. Similarly, by familiarising students with the indicators of the progressions, they have access to tools to monitor their own learning (Fisher, Frey and Hattie, 2017). By students identifying what they can do using their own writing, and using the progressions as a guide, they are formulating future writing learning goals, and taking ownership of their learning. Student self-assessment is identified as a powerful formative assessment technique (William & Leahy, 2015).

In a recent classroom study, Korth et al., (2017) found that it is rare to observe teachers modelling or scaffolding writing for their students, opportunities for students to write in the classroom are decreasing, possibly due to a myriad of pressures on teachers and a crowded curriculum, and most important of all, teachers explicitly modelling writing processes to students makes a difference to student writing progress. Teacher modelling is a form of direct instruction, specifically targeting identified student needs. Through participating in writing in the classroom, teachers are demonstrating the importance of writing and their enjoyment of writing to their students, including drafting, editing and proof-reading. Modelling writing powerfully demonstrates the writing process, providing opportunities for mentoring and instructional sharing of skills in-context (Calkins, 1986). Through teacher modelling, students see the importance of writing through teachers demonstrating their love of writing and, at the same time, explicitly addressing identified student writing needs.

When they write, young children learn to use sounds and corresponding symbols. During composing, beginning writers say words slowly, and stretch words out to identify, then write, the individual sounds that they hear. Early writing attempts often contain grammar errors. These lessen as students’ grammatical competence increases through direct teaching and immersion in quality texts, increasing their oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (McCarrier, Pinnell and Fountas, 1999; CIS, 2018), similar skills that students draw on in learning to be readers. Through writing, children manipulate sounds using symbols and learn how written language works.

Figure 2: *Example of early writing attempt*

Reading and writing are complementary processes. Just as it is important to model early reading skills explicitly for students, it is equally important to model early writing skills. For example, directionality can be taught using quality texts as models, as can the place of spaces between words.

A small number of letters can make many words, drawing on students' graphological and phonological skills, establishing mental models and increasing their control over written language (Beck and Beck, 2013). Through building on what is already known, students rapidly extend their written vocabulary. Sentence starters are commonly used to teach basic grammatical knowledge and to scaffold students' early writing attempts. For example, the sentence stem, "Here is…" is an example of the recurring principle (Clay, 1979) that students can build on in their own writing. Many children's picture books are based on this principle.

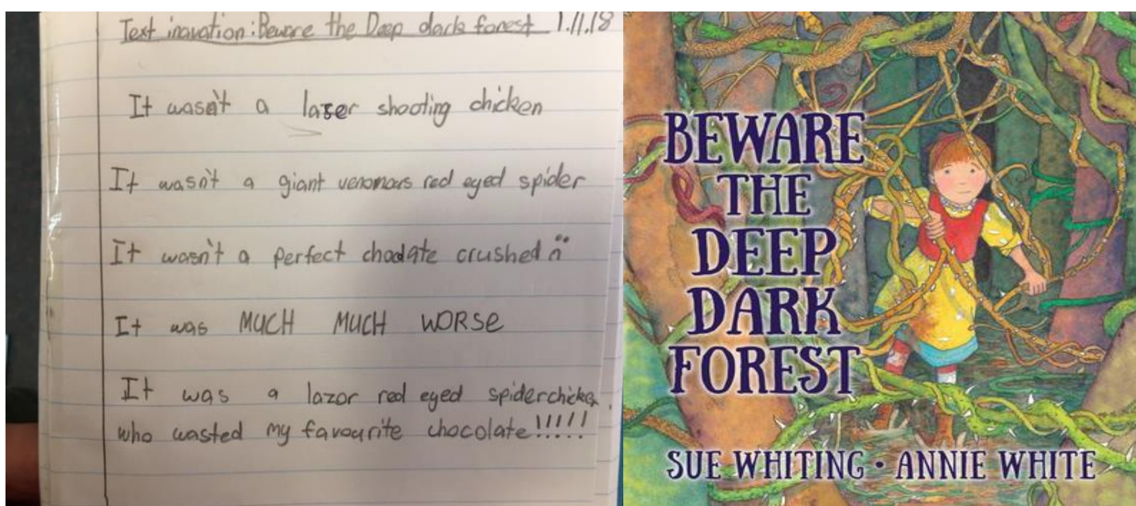

Figure 3: *Innovation on text using the recurring principle*

Holland (2016) encourages teachers to find quality texts containing features that they wish to explore with their students, matching texts to lesson objectives and identified student learning needs, while at the same time providing authentic models for students to draw on whilst writing, propelling them forward in their writing learning journey. ACARA released a text complexity appendix to the NLLP, which explicitly states that "throughout their school years, students will be exposed to texts with a range of complexity" (ACARA, 2018b p2). The text complexity appendix identifies four broad levels of texts, which are simple, predictable, moderately complex and sophisticated texts. These text levels are referenced throughout the NLLP. Simple texts are the simplest form of continuous texts, with common usage vocabulary, language, structure and content. Predictable texts include a more diverse vocabulary than simple texts, there are a range of sentence types and the text structure is usually predictable. Moderately complex texts increase in difficulty in terms of the subject specific language used, use of figurative language and more complex language structures. Finally, the fourth level of texts complexity refers to sophisticated texts, which may draw on academic and extensive technical language. Sophisticated texts contain a wide range of sentence types, complex structures, content and print layout features. The purpose of the text complexity appendix is to encourage teachers to consider the features of texts that they use in their class English programs to ensure that the texts match student identified learning needs and the specific purpose that teachers are targeting in their teaching.

Strategies that improve the teaching and learning of writing

The teaching of writing does need to be a priority. We as a profession need to ensure that those conditions that accelerate student growth in writing are being practised in classrooms and are available to all students. Although it is unrealistic to expect that all strategies would be successful for all students, the literature identifies clear instructional strategies that are more likely to achieve student writing success than others.

Logic dictates that increased, dedicated time to write in schools will improve student writing (Korth et al., 2017; Mo et al., 2014; Bromley, 2007). Mo et al. (2014) calls for a "writing revolution" in which the time spent writing at school is doubled. This strategy not only includes providing regular writing opportunities for students to write frequently and fluently using a growing repertoire of skills, but also teachers providing intentional, regular instruction that addresses students' specific writing needs, often referred to as point-of-need "mini lessons" (Korth et al., 2017). It is important for students to have time to write daily in an unstructured way, including free personal choice writing that will not be critiqued, writing in which they can engage their emotions and tell the stories that they dearly wish to write about. This may take the form of journal writing or some other developmentally appropriate task for emergent writers, possibly symbolic representations, including "think- draw- write". By putting school-wide structures and systems in place to ensure that all students write every day, schools are growing a culture that values writing and the messages that students' writing contain. When students are also provided with explicit and regular feedback on their writing, research suggests that students' writing skills increase dramatically (Hattie, 2012; Simmerman et al., 2012; Cutler and Graham, 2008).

Undeniably, writing is a complex task. Cutler and Graham (2008) also identify the need to spend more time teaching writing. They find that many teachers take an eclectic approach to teaching writing and call for a more balanced instructional line of attack between time spent independently writing and learning writing skills and processes. There are two clear components to effective writing teaching, the explicit teaching of writing skills, which sits alongside the second, possibly more important component, which is teaching the writing process. Writing instruction focusing on a skills-based approach is not enough. It does not evoke a passion for writing. Writers go through a process, a series of steps to compose a piece of writing that needs to be modelled and taught explicitly. The writing process includes collecting and organising information, writing a draft, revising, editing and rewriting. To learn about the writing process, students require protected time to write, choice over the topic they wish to write about and targeted feedback from teachers (Calkins and Ehrenworth, 2016; Cutler and Graham, 2008; Korth et al., 2017).

Education systems need to do a better job of providing targeted teacher professional learning in writing that addresses school and students' identified writing needs. (Mo et al., 2014; Cutler and Graham, 2008). A focus of a recent professional learning course for middle school teachers delivered over a term, and spanning 12 schools, was teachers, collaboratively reflecting on the cognitive dimension of teaching writing, as Oz (2011) describes writing as, "the operation of putting information, structured in the brain, into print" (p251) . Teachers were thinking about and sharing how writing is taught in their local context, and brainstorming how they could possibly do it better, an example of the power of collaborative professional learning, in which teachers learn with and from each other (Beveridge, 2015).

Figure 4: *Middle Years Writing Course reflection (2017)*

In the middle years writing course (Brassil, Bridge and Sindrey, 2012), teachers identified what they regard as going well in the teaching of writing, what still needs be a focus and ideas for improvement. Table 1 below lists participating teachers' responses as to how they were addressing the teaching of writing in their schools and where they needed to go to next in the teaching of writing in their local contexts to address the learning needs of their particular students.

Table 1: *Writing in the Middle Years course reflection (2017)*

What's going well in the teaching of writing?	What still needs to improve?	What are ideas for improvement?
ALARM[1] (cognitive scaffold, framework for writing).	Clarify the learning intention at the lesson outset (and encourage all staff to use this language).	Identifying audience and purpose of writing. Unpacking rubrics together so students are clear about what the task involves. Co-writing rubrics with students drawing on syllabus/ progression indicators to increase student ownership of learning.
SEAL, TXXXC[2] (secondary paragraph writing strategies).	Students to reflect on their writing (self /peer-assess).	Activities and strategies that improve sentence structure. Teacher professional learning on grammar with a shared focus and understanding of how language works.
Using writing tools; a range of writing apps.	Discussing ideas together before we begin writing (dialogic teaching).	Identifying the writing demands of the key learning areas and map the commonalities across KLAs.
Sharing of ideas/writing strategies with staff facilitates professional discussion.	Coherence and consistency of teaching writing across the grades.	Building subject specific vocabulary to draw on when writing. Subject-specific teachers to agree on a consistent approach for teaching writing school-wide.
Making writing a school focus and linking effective teaching of writing to other school foci.	Assessment of writing from a school-wide perspective that all staff share ownership of.	Improving grammar knowledge in context, through explicit teaching and using quality texts as writing models.
Students believe that they can write, irrespective of skill level.	Providing students with quality writing models / texts and explicit quality criteria for writing.	Generating ideas to write about together at the outset of a lesson (in creative ways, to put the magic back in the teaching of writing).

Increasing classroom discourse, where the teacher and students together discuss and clarify complex tasks, has an effect size of .82, double the effect size of .4, which is generally regarded as one year's teaching for one year's growth (Fisher, Frey and Hattie, 2017 p3). In the writing classroom, this may look like the students and teacher participating in joint writing construction, and modelling metacognitive processes, which could involve asking self-questions (for metacognition and self-reflection) whilst writing. Self-questions relate to the learning intentions of the lesson, and whether students have explicitly addressed these in their writing.

[1] ALARM is a learning and responding matrix to support student learning.
[2] SEAL and TXXXC are student writing scaffolds.

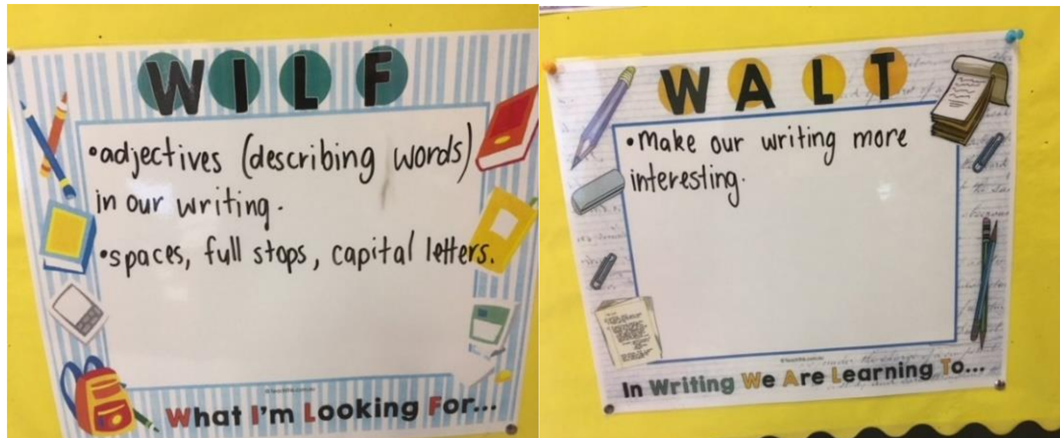

Figure 5: *Tools to support students asking self-questions.*

For example, in Figure 5 above, the pedagogical framework strategies "WILF and WALT" provide visual prompts to students of the learning intention: What are we learning today? (WALT), and success criteria: What am I looking for? (WILF). Such lessons support students in self-monitoring and evaluating their writing. Self-questions students may ask from the WILT and WALT framework include:

- Have I used adjectives in my writing? Where are they? How do they make my writing more interesting?
- Where are my spaces between words, full stops and capital letters? Have I used them correctly? How do they help my writing make sense to the reader?
- What language choices have I made to make my writing more interesting? How successful was I in achieving this?

Calkins and Ehrenworth (2016) outline three guiding principles for teachers to keep in mind when teaching writing:

1. Students are actively involved in the writing process
2. They share what they write
3. They perceive themselves as writers.

Increasing classroom discourse may look like students discussing their current performance and the criteria that they will use to measure their writing success. It has been stated that "the more clearly they [students] can see the goals, the more motivated they will be [to achieve them]" (Fisher, Frey and Hattie p43). Overall but not exclusively, the aim of classroom discourse in writing lessons is for teachers to gradually release writing responsibilities to students (Kaya and Ates, 2016, Pearson and Gallagher, 1983). To become expert teachers of writing, teachers must become skilled at supporting students in achieving their (self-) identified success criteria (Hattie, 2012). The NLLP are a useful guide for

students to identify what they can do, and where they need to go to next in their writing learning journey.

Writing at school has infinite possibilities to integrate learning across the key learning areas which include various genres inclusive of imaginative, persuasive and information texts (Board of Studies, 2012). An emphasis on writing across different content areas reinforces the integrative nature of writing and its high gravitas in all key learning areas at school, and in life. For example, writing class books about a specific topic or activity, describing the attributes of characters or animals and writing expositional texts in science, are all evidence that writing is much more than narrative. Students need to write arguments and information texts; in fact, a wide range of texts across all subjects. In turn, teachers need to clearly state how writing skills learned in one classroom or key learning area can support developing writing skills and processes in another, making explicit and strengthening the writing links across the key learning areas for students.

School leaders have a responsibility to facilitate the organisation of opportunities for teachers and students to develop and share what good writing looks like. This can be achieved through ensuring teachers have time to collaboratively plan for and review student writing. This could involve using the samples provided in the Assessment Resource Centre as authoritative sources, analysing student exemplars locally and collectively studying published writing and quality texts. By developing shared teacher understandings of what good writing looks like across the school, writing expectations for students are aligned and cohere, clarifying and democratising writing instruction from one classroom to another (Wiggins, 2000).

Through exposure to and deconstruction of a range of quality texts, students learn writing strategies through engaging with real authors and identifying how they engage readers in their texts. At the Australian Literacy Educators (ALEA) National Conference in Adelaide in 2016, I attended a writing session presented by an Australian Capital Territory (ACT) community of schools. The schools reported that the most significant factor that contributed to their collective, improved and sustained writing results, and increased student engagement in writing, was a shared "Visiting Children's Author Program" in which students learned to "write like a writer". Exposure to quality texts improves student writing through providing inspiration that they talk about, share and build on in their own writing. A rich diet of a wide variety of texts provides opportunities for critical and creative thinking, and sustained conversations about authors, real texts and aspects of texts that engage readers (Haland, 2016).

At a recent middle school writers' workshop at a local high school, it was reported to me that the first activity of the day involved students voting with their feet. They moved to a specific corner of the room if they enjoyed writing at school and considered themselves good writers. Similarly, students who considered themselves poor writers and didn't enjoy writing at school moved to the opposite corner. Students placed themselves along the human continuum based on their feelings about writing in the school context. Overwhelmingly, the vast majority of the group of around 90 students from the local high school and its primary feeder schools, regarded themselves as poor writers who did not enjoy writing at school.

Whether this informal poll is generalisable data is admittedly dubious. However, when I arrived at the school at the end of the day for teacher professional learning, I found a group of highly engaged, happy and proud students, eager to share their writing with me. The lucky students had spent the day being motivated to write by a high profile children's author who shared his authentic secret business in relation to "writing like a writer" with the students. He provided them with insights and writing models from (his) quality texts, narrative, humour and multimodality that totally engaged and engrossed students in the writing process. Students' shared excitement and pride in their writing efforts and their successes were tangible and infectious. The students had been mentored in writing by a "real" writer, providing a genuine context for their writing. The author worked hard in encouraging students to weave their emotions into their writing, delving into the affective domain, which involved a coming together of their hearts and minds in the act of writing.

It is suggested that the creativity and originality that promotes imagination, expressiveness and risk taking in the writing process is what is missing in the way that writing is taught in schools today, possibly as a result of the way writing is currently measured (Ewing, 2018, Frawley and McLean-Davis, 2015). Increasingly, the decline in writing results Australia-wide is attributed to the movement away from students engaging with processes linked to the creative arts, including imagination, creativity, flexibility and problem solving, processes that have transformative potential (Rieber and Carton, 1987). It has been suggested that the creative magic of writing is possibly what is missing in the teaching of writing in schools today. "What if we brought the magic back into the teaching of writing? It's in teachers' hands" (Adoniou, 2018).

Figure 6: *Middle Years Writing workshop* (2017)

Teaching writing in the digital age

Our students are products of a digital world, and they seem to not respond well to the writing teaching practices of the past (Johnson, 2016; Kaya and Ates, 2016; Vue et al., 2016, Engestrom, 2001). Table 2 below shows how our digitally mediated culture has impacted the way we teach writing, classified by Engestrom (2001) as the old and new way to teach writing. Teaching writing with new technologies requires a shift in how teachers conceptualise writing teaching in their classrooms.

Table 2: *Writing in a digitally mediated culture* (adapted from Engestrom, 2001)

This is now	That was then
Process approach sits alongside writing skills focus.	Product based approach.
Draws on methods and motivators used by published authors. Learning to "write like a writer".	Teaching writing usually the domain of the classroom teacher.
Both writing skills and processes taught together.	Skills-based focus.
Writing tasks have real-world purpose. Focus on communicative action/ meaning.	Compliance discourse, for example, praise for product.
New understandings and models of authoring and publishing texts. Focus on how language works. Functional view of grammar.	Grammar focus.
Use of an increasing range of digital writing tools and web based apps and programs.	Pencil/pen and paper writing tools.
Writing and sharing to a wider [often electronic] audience.	Traditional publishing of stories and books.
Authentic writing tasks across all key learning areas.	Writing was the domain of subject English.
Need to combine digital and non-digital media in teaching writing.	Writing was taught using non-digital media.

Students (and adults) are forever writing, in the forms of text messages, blogs, emails, snapchats, Facebook posts, Tweets, Instagram posts and so on, suggesting high and increased engagement in, and importance of, writing as a result of our digitally mediated culture. The use of digital tools has changed the composing and publishing process. Yet there seems to be a divide between school writing, typified by low engagement and writing in the real world, typically a high engagement task. We need to build a bridge between school and home writing, so teachers and students alike see the high gravitas of both as forms of written communication and making meaning. Digital tools are increasingly part of our world. Well-considered professional development and support is required, to address teacher dispositions in relation to using digital tools in the writing process while, at the same time, building teacher and student skills and expertise that will be sustained and built upon in practice.

As we discover more about neuroscience and human cognition, we are increasingly learning about how multiple formats of texts (multimedia) have a positive effect on learning through reducing the cognitive load on working memory, resulting in improved information processing and understanding (Johnson, 2016; Vue et al., 2016; Wilson and Czik, 2016). Computers do need to be a more integral part of the writing classroom. However, we need to authentically integrate them into learning tasks to improve pedagogy (Cutler and Graham, 2008). Most students have access to digital technology and use it to stay connected. It is their preferred mode of text-based communication. The challenge as we learn more through research seems to be how we can increasingly integrate digital tools to promote quality writing through real-world, authentic and semiotic (meaning-making) writing tasks; and at the same time "hook into" the high student engagement associated with digitally mediated communication (Johnson, 2016; Jones, 2015).

I witnessed one school's attempt to span the home-school writing divide, similar to the "bridgeable knowledge gap" (Hattie and Yates, 2013). Stage 3 students wrote stories, illustrated them, captured them digitally, they then displayed them as QR codes in their classrooms accessed via their mobile phones. In this way, the old and new ways of teaching writing come together in an engaging format, easily shared both locally and with a wider electronic audience.

However, focusing on digital tools in the writing process is not enough, as these can fail on application, and students need to be independently competent written communicators, to succeed at school and in life. The goal is for students to achieve capability writing in authentic ways, to the real world. Authentic writing involves students understanding the relevance and importance of what they are writing, often publishing to a wider, electronic audience.

Turning around school writing results: a case study

In 2013, I surveyed 160 schools and from these data, selected 4 case-study schools to determine the impact and sustainability of collaborative professional learning (Beveridge, 2015). One of these schools had an ongoing focus on the teaching of writing which resulted in a significant and sustained "turn around" in their writing results. They achieved this enviable outcome through a range of whole school strategies that other schools could possibly learn from, and are worthy of sharing to a wider education audience.

The school is classified as a metropolitan government primary school, with an enrolment of 166 students (ACARA, 2012). There are seven full-time teaching staff, a non-teaching principal and one class per grade. It is a small country school, situated on the outskirts of a large regional centre. Contrary to the extant literature (Little, 2006; Louis, Marks and Kruse, 1996; Stoll et al., 2006), I did not find that school size is a clear determinant of whether professional learning is sustained, as this school, as well as a large high school case study, both sustained their learning over a number of years, whilst my other two case study schools did not. It seemed to have more to do with a school culture of collaboration and sharing that facilitated the changes that resulted in professional learning being sustained (Beveridge, 2016).

Specific strategies the school had firmly in place that supported a sustained improvement in writing, are loosely coupled to the framework of factors that sustain collaborative professional learning (Beveridge, 2016), and include:

Leadership strategies

- The Principal was engaged in professional learning as an equal partner, and participated in team teaching sessions alongside teachers.
- The school leadership team monitored teacher workloads to prevent teachers from taking on too much change at any one time.
- Teachers were allocated 30 minutes additional release, to discuss and focus on the writing progress of three targeted students per week with the Principal.
- The Principal and the class teacher jointly monitored student writing data.
- The Principal was aware of and actively interested in students' writing progress.

School-level strategies

- Writing time was a priority in all classrooms, at a set time, every day.
- There was whole school buy-in of a spelling program that staff co-designed, daily, at an assigned time. There was ongoing reflection on and adjustment of the spelling program based on formative assessment data and identified student learning needs.
- Teacher professional learning was regarded as a high priority. Regular collaborative professional learning meetings where teachers discussed latest research, how to implement relevant writing strategies in their classrooms and what they looked like in practice, was facilitated by an external literacy coach. The literacy coach worked towards making herself redundant by building school capacity that would remain in the school when she moved on.
- Teachers had between session tasks to complete in their classroom, concretely linking theory with their daily practice of teaching writing.
- Collaborative reflection on what worked in the local context, based on evidence, was a feature of professional learning meetings.
- Professional learning cohered with the school plan and focused on one target at a time, with leadership support.

Teacher-level strategies

- A literacy coach worked in-class, shoulder to shoulder alongside teachers. She also had timetabled one-to-one regular release time with teachers to reflect, and provide feedback on their individual goals, teaching practice and student learning.
- The class teacher targeted three students per week to discuss writing goals with the Principal and literacy coach, who supported them in-class in achieving their goals. In this way, over a term, each student received specific, intensive individualised writing instruction in addition to their regular class support.
- Teachers organised and implemented their own peer evaluation and feedback sessions with whomever they felt most comfortable among their colleagues. Peer observation and feedback sessions were timetabled regularly.
- The literacy coach observed teachers' lessons, and provided targeted feedback to assist them in achieving their jointly planned professional learning goals. Class teachers put a lot of effort into showing the literacy coach that they were using her advice in practice. Professional trust was tangible.
- A range of multimodal writing tools were used by teachers and students to create texts, share their texts with a wider audience and stay connected both inside and outside the classroom.

I have viewed a number of conference presentations and teach-meets at which teachers from the school presented their writing program, and shared their exemplary practice with wider educational audience. The staff and students shared a love of writing. The strategies that the staff learned were firmly embedded in their daily practice, have been expanded and built upon, and are now regarded as "the way we do things around here" (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; Schuck, et al, 2012). Additionally, other schools visit the school to view first-hand teaching practice that resulted in them not only "turning around" their writing results but also sustaining their improved results over time. In opening up their writing classrooms to others, teachers were sharing the good news about what works in the teaching of writing across the broader education landscape.

> …we collect data for writing and it's really specific data for each student. Every student in my class gets feedback at least once a week on a piece of writing and that's all part of what we're doing. It's hard. You see the improvement in student outcomes and it's so worth every bit. (Natalie, team leader)

There was a clear, coherent developmental path to improving writing. It had both an individual and collective focus. There was ongoing teacher support from colleagues, a literacy coach, who was a "knowledgeable outsider" (Beveridge, Mockler and Gore, 2017) and acted as a critical friend to the school, as well as supportive school leadership. Strategies such as timetabled teacher meetings and team teaching sessions with the literacy coach, as well as data tracking meetings with the Principal, ensured that teachers were supported and learning was targeted to address both teacher and student needs. Professional learning which focused on improving student writing was like a continuum, a complex

interplay of affect, cognition, and metacognition, where teachers acted and collaboratively reflected on learning processes and ways to improve them in an ongoing cycle of improvement and reflexivity.

The "neglected R": onwards and upwards

Reading and writing are complementary processes. Like reading, writing needs to be a priority across all grades and key learning areas, every day… both electronic and traditional writing, to get our message across and make ourselves understood. Too often in the literature it is termed "the neglected R" (Mo et al., 2014; Sessions, Kang and Womack, 2016; Graham, Hebert and Harris, 2015). A stronger systems focus on teaching writing is required to move and improve student writing results.

Teachers are in a privileged position to be able to ignite students' passions in writing, and "put the magic back" (Adoniou, 2018) into the teaching of writing. One means of fostering a love of writing is by engaging students in writing through drawing on quality texts. In this way, students know and experience what great writing looks like, and jointly (and individually) experience the emotions that quality writing evoke. Through dialogic instruction, teachers are able to explicitly teach those skills that students demonstrate that they need in their independent writing, at the same time ensuring that there is designated, frequent class time for students to write and share their own written messages. Students require regular, authentic opportunities to write and share their work with others because writing is a communicative tool, the goal of which is to convey meaning to the reader and engage readers in meaning making.

> *Do you think our identities as teachers of English and literacy more closely align with reading than writing? Have we unconsciously devalued writing?*
>
> (Frawley and McLean-Davis, 2015)

References

See Attachment 1 for reference list.

Dr Lorraine Beveridge has been a NSWTF member for all of her 35 years teaching in the NSW Department of Education. She has held a range of executive roles, both in schools and supporting schools, building teacher capacity across the state. She currently works in curriculum. Her passion is building a love of literacy in students and teachers, and Quality Teaching. Lorraine's PhD research is in the area of collaborative teacher professional learning.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and are not necessarily the views of her employer, the NSW Department of Education.