

Copping, Adrian ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0257-297X> (2024)
Teaching in the gaps of the writing process. HWRK: the online magazine for teachers, 34 . pp. 52-55.

Downloaded from: <http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/8510/>

Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria's institutional repository 'Insight' must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria's institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available [here](#)) for educational and not-for-profit activities

provided that

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
 - a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

You may not

- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator's reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found [here](#).

Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing insight@cumbria.ac.uk.

TEACHING IN THE GAPS OF THE WRITING PROCESS

Adrian explores ways in which the writing process can be taught more effectively by analysing what should be placed between each part of the learning sequence.



By Adrian Copping



I often picture the strategies we use to teach the writing process as building blocks. We, as teachers plan these blocks really well. We make brilliant mentor texts (WAGOLLS), we help learners come up with great ideas, deconstruct reading, sentence structure, plan the writing, powerful verbs, synonyms for said and so on. How many of you sit there having done your weekly English plan and think – Yes! That will be amazing? How many of you sit there on Tuesday and think, why didn't they get that link? How come they couldn't see that they can use that language in their work?

The answer, I think, goes back to the building metaphor. They

need cement! Having spent a year as a builders' labourer, I can fully appreciate the power of cement. Cement joins the blocks together, it connects them, it helps them make sense of one another. In my book 'Thinking for Primary Writing', I have a section called 'The importance of cement'. In this section I say something like,

Part of the challenge for us as teachers is that our children are not inside our heads as we are connecting ideas to create sequences of work. Whether we are using a scheme, published resources or planning from scratch, we spend time thinking about order, sequence and structure to designing something great. We create connections in our heads between shared reading

and writing, modelling and their writing and to us, when we see it all in that nice and clear word document or whatever you use, it all makes sense, it is obvious how it all fits together. But guess what, our children are not inside our heads. Probably quite a good thing for most of us! To our learners, the incredible connected design that we have created for their learning may well just be a series of unrelated activities to do and hopefully get right. In other words, they are blocks placed next to each other without being connected by cement.

So, in this context, what is the cement? Well, I think it's creative thinking. When we think creatively, connections are made, possibilities are uncovered and



writing can become more about craft than conformity and more about creation than compliance.

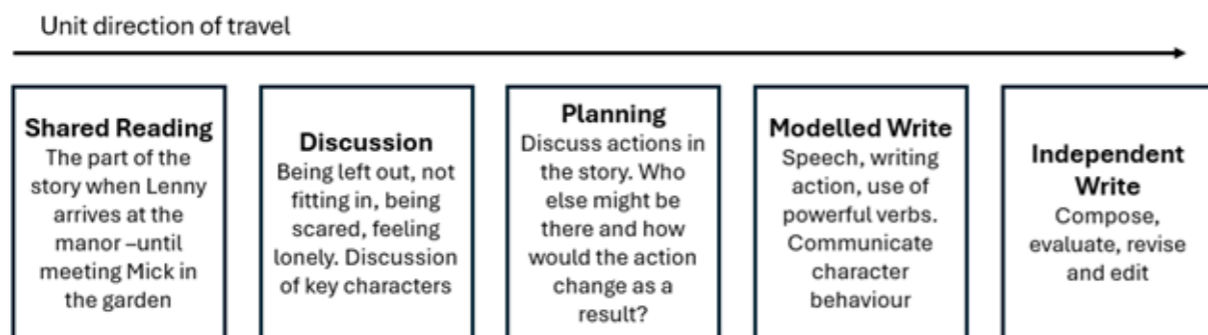
I think there are several ways we can build creative thinking into our teaching, not the blocks, but the gaps- we need to, at huge risk of mixing metaphors, stand in the gap and build bridges between the building blocks.

So, my first practical approach for you to think about embedding in the way you teach writing is called

'building learning bridges'. In *Thinking for Primary Writing* I have given an example of this technique for almost second level planning using the classic Christina Rossetti poem 'A birthday'. The example below is something similar using Shirley Hughes' beautifully illustrated evacuation themed story 'The Lion and The Unicorn'. Given a brass cap badge of a lion and unicorn by his father when he goes to fight in World War II, Lenny Levi is evacuated from London to a big country manor.

There he battles against fear, bullying, until he meets an injured soldier in his safe space, the manor's walled garden who helps him understand what courage really is all about. I challenge anyone to not shed a tear at its conclusion.

The figure below represents the building blocks of a unit of work where the teacher wants to insert some new characters into the story and perhaps twist the plot a little.

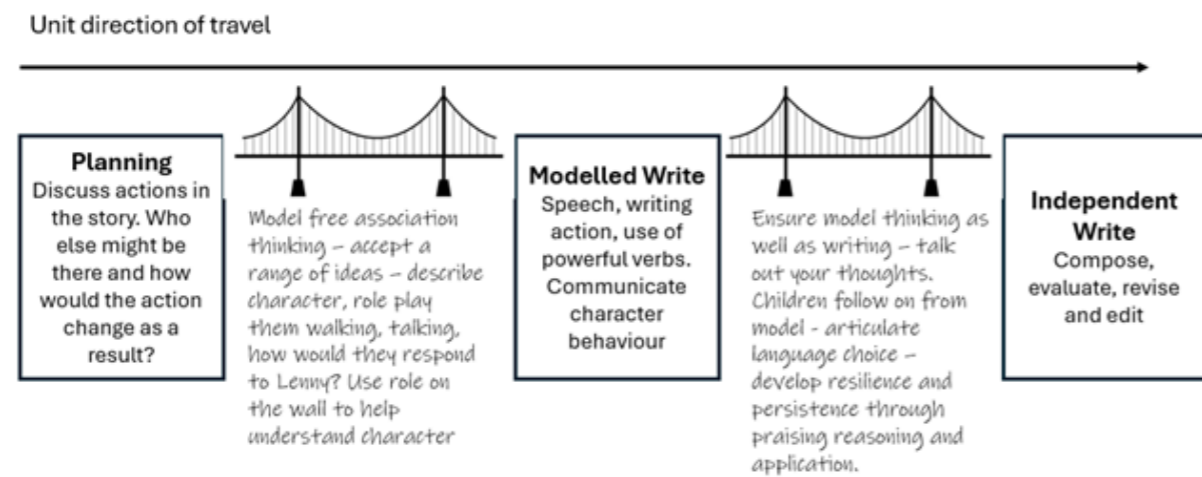


Here are building blocks you might recognise and expect to be there. It's probably a weekly plan structure you use yourself. So having just sat here and planned this myself, it all makes perfect sense – I can visualise it, see

connections between the blocks. But you might be reading this and scratching your head, thinking 'how does this work?' However, you do have the benefit of being teachers so will have familiarity with this process to attach your

thinking to.

The figure below is a section of the above plan with learning bridges between some of the blocks.



Helping the learners cross the learning bridge is crucial to their success. The key here I think is process. We need our learners to be fully engaged and present as they cross the learning bridge – it's not something that can be done for them or something they can jump over. In order to develop the knowledge to understand what's required in the next block, they have to journey over the bridge. If you take a look at the kinds of activities I have suggested for each bridge, they are all about making the implicit explicit. They involve what we might call developing creative self-efficacy, or helping learners believe they have some creative capacity. The ideas often involve doing, not passive sitting. We know that most of us learn by doing, so let's get into some role-play into some scenarios for characters in the book and let's bring these new characters to life.

Over my years of teaching, I have also come to believe in the power of free association. You will see I have linked to that under the first learning bridge. What this means is allowing the children to make their own associations rather than expecting them to guess what's in your head. Ask them to articulate their thinking, in a creative context, rather than shut perspectives down. You might be very surprised at the quality of what you get back. Practically speaking, much of working within the gaps of the writing process is about the questions we ask, how we encourage our learners to reason and articulate their writing choices and praising application of thinking.

For the last section of this piece I want to suggest three practical approaches to working within the gaps of the writing process, that will engage your learners with writing, increase attainment and motivation.

1. Model the application of creative thinking.

How many of us talk out our thoughts as we are modelling writing? I love to see teachers do that. We as teachers need to articulate our thinking so our learners know that is how they are supposed to think when they write. Writing is not just a set of physical processes but a set of cognitive ones too and so we need to model this. Model the craft of authorship so that our learners can make writing choices intentionally and communicate how they want to communicate. I think that's why I find WAGOLLs (mentor texts) quite a challenge – children don't see the process of it being created – so the process doesn't mean anything to them.

2. Develop creative self-efficacy.

I have discussed this briefly earlier in this piece. It means getting into the dirt and mess of the learning and involving yourself with the learner, to stand with them between the building blocks of writing and work in the gaps to bring them together – it may be as simple as 'do you see what we have on what I have written up there – do you see I have highlighted it because... Well you can use that in yours? What do you think?' Questioning in the middle of the writing process is hugely important here, we need to engage with our learners and meet them where they are.

3. Practise free association.

Again, this is something briefly touched upon before. This means encouraging the verbalising of ideas not restricted by a specific task. Each idea we have is associated to other things we are thinking about and so we need to facilitate these types of ideas. We may need to avoid your own tunnel vision of thoughts around a task and invite children to explain their thinking processes.

I have developed these approaches through research and teaching a range of writing workshops over the years to a range of different learners and age groups. Attainment and achievement in measures of writing for a purpose, describing characters, creating atmosphere and selecting appropriate vocabulary and grammar increased in a large percentage of the learners I worked with. So, have a go at developing some bridges between your writing process blocks, mix up some metaphorical cement and apply it to the building blocks of your writing process so that it makes sense to your learners and they can see how a sequence fits together. Let me know how you got on.

Adrian.copping@cumbria.ac.uk

