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Practice, Pedagogy and Policy: the  
influence of teachers' creative writing  
practice on pedagogy in schools

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PhD

2012

Practice, Pedagogy and Policy: the  
influence of teachers' creative writing  
practice on pedagogy in schools

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## **Abstract**

This research aims to develop understanding of how teachers' experience of practising creative writing influences pedagogy in schools. The research is located within a literary studies domain, responding to the context in which creative writing is most commonly taught in schools and in higher education. The central research question explored is:

- How is the pedagogy of creative writing in schools influenced by teachers' creative writing practice?

The research explores the premise that creative writing practice has the potential to raise teachers' 'confidence as writers', enabling them to 'provide better models for pupils' (Ofsted, 2009: p.6). This thesis examines what 'creative writing practice' means in the context of developing pedagogy; considers how creative writing is conceptualised by teachers; and investigates how teachers' creative writing practice connects to pedagogic methods and approaches. The research sub questions that underpin the research are:

- How has creative writing been conceptualised in educational policy, and how do these conceptions influence pedagogy in schools?
- Does the practice of creative writing influence teachers' conceptualisations of creative writing, and, if so, what is the impact on pedagogy?
- Does the practice of creative writing influence teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers, and, if so, what is the impact on pedagogy?
- Does the experience of working with writers influence teachers' pedagogic approaches in the classroom, and if so, how?

The research includes a case study involving 14 primary and secondary school teachers, engaged in developing their own creative writing practice under the guidance of professional writers. The case study approach enables exploration of the research questions through analysis of participants' lived experience of creative writing practice and pedagogy. The analysis of the case study at the heart of this research is situated within an interpretive framework, acknowledging the complexity of multiple meanings at play in socio-cultural learning contexts. The analysis draws on Bruner's exploration of how pedagogical approaches imply conceptions of the learner's mind and pedagogy (Bruner, 1996), and considers the interplay between teachers' experiences of creative writing, and their choice of pedagogical methods and approaches.

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others. The research was carried out in collaboration with New Writing North.

Ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been sought and granted by the School Ethics Committee on 13/01/10.

Name: Caroline Murphy

Signature:

Date:

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Central Research Question and Project Objectives**

This thesis examines how teachers' experience of practising creative writing contributes to creative writing pedagogy in primary and secondary education. To this end, the central research question is:

How is the pedagogy of creative writing in schools influenced by teachers' creative writing practice?

The research explores the premise that creative writing, conceived as 'human acts and actions' that use imagination, reflection and language to create texts (Harper, 2010: p.117), is an 'artistic event' (Freire, 1985: p.79) that sits within the discipline of literature; that pedagogy can be developed more effectively when the literary context of creating text is fully recognised; and that the experience of practising creative writing can deepen teachers' understanding of how the processes and acts of creative writing connect to the 'choice of pedagogical practice [that] implies a conception of the learner' (Bruner, 1996: p.63). In other words, I will explore whether teachers can develop an understanding of the theories and concepts that inform the writer's 'active critical sense' by practising creative writing (Harper, 2008a: p.1), and examine whether this in turn can be useful in developing effective creative writing pedagogy. I will also investigate whether the literary context of creative writing has been undermined by recent education policy to the detriment of creative writing pedagogy in primary and secondary schools.

The research includes a case study (see 1.2 below). The participants involved in this study are primary and secondary school teachers, engaged in creative writing practice under the guidance of professional writers. For clarity, the former group will be referred to as teacher-writers, and the latter as writer-teachers. Teacher-writers in this study are

teachers who, as part of their teaching of writing, engage in their own creative writing practice during the course of this study. Writer-teachers in this context are professional writers who, as part of their professional practice, also spend some of their time teaching creative writing.<sup>1</sup>

Creative writing practice has been identified as having the potential to raise teachers' 'confidence as writers' so that they are able to 'provide better models for pupils' (Ofsted, 2009: p.6). My research explores this hypothesis and seeks to come to an understanding of what 'creative writing practice' means in the context of developing pedagogy, and analyses how writer-teachers might contribute to this process. In order to do this I will consider how creative writing is conceptualised, and how creative writing practice connects to pedagogic methods and approaches. The research sub questions that the project therefore seeks to explore are:

How has creative writing been conceptualised in educational policy, and how do these conceptions influence pedagogy in schools?

Does engaging in creative writing practice influence teachers' conceptualisations of creative writing, and, if so, what is the impact on pedagogy?

Does engaging in creative writing practice influence teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers, and, if so, what is the impact on pedagogy?

Does the experience of working with writers influence teachers' pedagogic approach in the classroom, and if so, how?

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<sup>1</sup>Recent expansion of creative writing courses in universities has led to growth in the number of writer-teachers employed in higher education, who continue to practise creative writing, but are also involved in the pedagogy of and research into creative writing practice. There is also a large body of freelance writer-teachers who spend some of their time developing their own creative practice and some in the teaching of creative writing in schools, community classes, and as visiting teachers in higher education.

On one level it may seem that it is a simple matter of common sense to assume that the experience of practice in any given field will strengthen pedagogy, and indeed practice is a prerequisite of pedagogy in many fields. However, whilst primary school teachers and secondary school English teachers are expected to teach creative writing to their pupils, there is no expectation that they will have any experience of practising writing. It cannot be assumed that teachers either have or do not have any experience of undertaking their own creative writing. If they do, it may be an entirely private activity, pursued separately from and without explicit connection to their pedagogic practice. It is therefore important to be explicit about the kind of 'creative writing practice' that is being studied in this research; to clarify what is meant by 'working with a writer' in the context of the case study; and to explore the conceptualisations of pedagogy that inform the research.

## **1.2 The case study approach**

The research questions in this thesis are explored through the analysis of a case study. The case study explores the experiences of the teachers taking part in the North East strand of Well Versed, a national pilot programme that aimed to improve the teaching of poetry in schools.<sup>2</sup> Well Versed took place in three English regions: the West Midlands, the East of England, and the North East. The North East programme was selected because it was the only one of the programmes that focussed on the development of teachers' own creative writing, and therefore offered the best scope for engagement with the research question<sup>3</sup>. The programme involved teachers taking part in a Post Graduate

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<sup>2</sup> Well Versed was funded by Arts Council England and co-ordinated by Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE). It ran from October 2010 to November 2011. <http://wellversedpoetry.co.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> Well Versed in the East of England aimed to develop the skills of poets to work in schools, and to support teachers' engagement with live literature. Well Versed in the West Midlands focused on initial teacher education, supporting student teachers to use poetry across the curriculum; and on a mentoring scheme to develop learning relationships between established and emerging poets who work in schools.



Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom, accredited by Northumbria University, and working with poet-mentors in their schools. The North East programme included teachers from both primary and secondary phase education, and at various levels of experience. The 'problem' of creative writing pedagogy is evident throughout the key stages (as explored in Chapter Two), and therefore the learning from and analytical generalisability of the case study is improved by the inclusion of teachers from both primary and secondary contexts<sup>4</sup>.

The Well Versed project specifically addresses the writing of poetry, located within the discipline of creative writing. Poetry is a complex and multifaceted genre that can make considerable linguistic, cognitive, imaginative and technical demands on both teacher and learner (Wilson, 2007). Perhaps because of this, and because of the focus of national testing and assessment systems on other forms of writing, it has received less attention than other literary forms in both the primary and the secondary curriculum (Ofsted, 2007: p.3). Poetry has been perceived as provoking reluctance and uncertainty amongst teachers (Ray, 1999: pp.403-404); as the 'hardest form of writing' to teach (Grainger, 2005: p.80); as the literary genre that is most difficult to define (Kroll, 2008: p.18), and as the form with the weakest knowledge base among teachers (Cremin *et al.*, 2008b: pp.457-8). The case study will therefore explore perhaps the most challenging ground when considering creative writing pedagogy in schools.

The case study enables me to give explicit consideration to theoretical concerns regarding the conceptualisation of creative writing. The theoretical discourse about creative writing

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<sup>4</sup> It is not intended that the participants in this case study represent a sample of the teaching population that can be expanded into statistical generalisation. Rather, the interpretive analysis of the case study has the potential to develop situated knowledge that is applicable to new contexts (see 3.6 below).

has taken place largely in higher education, often prompted by the fact that creative writing has had to struggle to assert itself as a valid academic discipline in universities in England (Wandor, 2008). In Chapter Two I will investigate whether the near total absence of a recent discourse concerning the nature of creative writing in primary and secondary education has contributed to under developed pedagogy, and whether the provision for creative writing that exists within the curriculum is undermined by a dislocation from its literary context that limits the development of creative writing pedagogy.

### **1.3 'Creative writing practice' in this research**

The term 'creative writing' does not appear within the National Curriculum for English. Nonetheless, teachers are expected to teach pupils how to write play scripts, stories, poems, and diary and journal entries at both primary and secondary level. In addition, teachers are expected to teach pupils how to produce 'imaginative and thoughtful' writing across a wide range of 'text types' including recount, non-chronological report, instructions and procedures, explanation, persuasion and discussion (DfES, 2006; DCSF, 2008b). Therefore teachers are concerned with both 'creative writing' and 'creative approaches to writing' in the writing experiences that pupils encounter in schools. It is evident, therefore, that whilst the term 'creative writing' is absent from the policy discourse, there is an expectation that the acts and processes relevant to creative writing will be taught to pupils.

It has been argued that two divergent popular conceptions of creative writing practice have given rise to recurring questions about whether creative writing can be taught at all, and, if it can, about what constitutes creative writing knowledge and pedagogy in the discipline (Wandor, 2008: pp.105-106). On one hand, creative writing is seen to be

conceived differently from other art forms because its means of expression makes it readily accessible:

...because language is our medium, and language is mastered, at a basic level, by almost all human beings, great achievement in this art seems accessible... the delusion that writing is the one art that requires no education has persisted. Urban myths tell the tale. Most of us recognise that we could not paint like Michaelangelo [sic], but isn't it true that a chimpanzee with a keyboard could write Hamlet? It's said that everyone has a book in them, but not a symphony, a digital installation or a pickled shark.(Brayfield, 2009: p.176)

On the other hand, the processes of creative writing may appear to be shrouded in mystery, and contingent upon 'Romantic' notions of inspiration – often conceptualised as a force that 'happens to' an individual (inspiration descends, the muse visits) giving the creative writing process an almost mystical quality, something that is entirely outside the individual's control. It is therefore the case that creative writing may be conceptualised as both highly accessible and completely unattainable.

Like everyone else, teachers may become engaged in a variety of creative writing activities in their personal and professional lives. These might include for example, private writing experiences that are carried out for the individual's own emotional or intellectual satisfaction; writing that is developed specifically to engage others through blogs and other digital media; writing stories, poetry, and scripts to be shared with specific audiences, such as community writing or drama groups; writing for school or other publications and events; and, of course, writing that has unclear goals and does not lead to texts that can be described as 'complete' or 'finished'<sup>5</sup>. I recognise that these may be

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to suggest that such unfinished works are unimportant in considering creative writing practice. In *On Creative Writing*, Graeme Harper has discussed in detail the existence of creative writing as a set of acts and actions, asserting that the 'incomplete, fragmentary, momentary, ephemeral, personal, speculative' are as much a part of the acts and actions of creative writing as 'works that are (or sometimes only 'seem') finished.' (Harper, 2010: p.30) Harper G. (2010) *On Creative Writing*, Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

valid creative writing experiences that can have some influence on pedagogy; however, the boundaries of creative writing practice in this research are determined not only by the nature of the writing activity but also by the context of pedagogical reflection in which it takes place.

Thus, the creative writing that is under scrutiny in this research is practice that is carried out by teachers in a formal learning situation as students of creative writing, being taught by a writer-teacher. It is creative writing that encompasses critical practice, by which I mean it includes a critical perspective that aims to use writing experiences to investigate and come to a deeper understanding of the acts and processes of creative writing 'both working and works, not separated' (Harper, 2010: p.115) and to connect this understanding to pedagogical practice.

#### **1.4 'Pedagogy' in this research**

Although the term pedagogy is 'widely assumed to be self-evident' (Adams, 2011: p.467), the complexity of the concept renders it difficult to define 'even in the formal literature on the subject' (Watkins and Mortimore, 1999: p.1), and 'the spectrum of available definitions ranges from the societally broad to the procedurally narrow' (Alexander, 2004: p.9).

In the educational discourse relating to schools, the term pedagogy is not only less widely used in England than in other parts of Europe and America, but is also perhaps subject to narrower definitions (Alexander, 2004; Adams, 2011; Simon, 1981). It has been suggested that in England, the discourse equates pedagogy with classroom practice alone (Allison, 2010: p.56; Alexander, 2004: p.10), excluding the 'sense of how pedagogy connects with culture, social structure and human agency, and thus acquires educational

*meaning*' (Alexander, 2004: p.10, original emphasis). Whilst concern with classroom practice in the discourse is natural, since pedagogy is concerned (though not exclusively) with the teacher's role and activities in the classroom, such narrow conceptions evade 'questions of power, history, ethics, and self-identity' that can be seen as central to developing pedagogy (Giroux, 1992: p.98).

In this research, pedagogy is conceived as encompassing both 'the act and discourse of teaching' (Alexander, 2004: p.8), where classroom practice does not exist in isolation, but reflects the interaction of individual agency with wider societal and cultural forces. From this perspective, the exploration of the pedagogy of creative writing in this thesis encompasses analysis of how policy discourses and teachers' experiences in and outside of the classroom influence participants' conceptions of creative writing (Chapters Two and Six); consideration of the ways in which creative writing practice contributes to teacher-writer identities, creating interplay and tensions between the teacher-self and the writer-self (Chapter Five); and examination of the changes in classroom practice that result from participants' experience of creative writing (Chapter Seven). This reflects a perception that pedagogy is multi-faceted; that teachers' identities and their conceptions and experience of creative writing practice have a relationship with their pedagogy; and that the choices they make about classroom practice interplay with dynamic, evolving constructions of identity and conceptions of creative writing. The thesis examines the assertion that 'all educational practice implies a theoretical stance on the educator's part' (Freire, 1985: p.43), investigating how engagement in creative writing practice informs the theories, assumptions and ideas that shape participants' implicit 'conceptions of the learner' (Bruner, 1996: p.63).

## **1.5 'Teachers working with writers' in this research**

The 'writer-in-school' has been a well established phenomenon for well over a generation, and writer visits to schools have been supported by Arts Council England since the 1960s (Jones and Lockwood, 1998: p.199). Two predominant models have emerged over this time: the author visit, and the writing workshop. The author visit is usually designed to interest pupils in a particular book or books, often engaging with large numbers of pupils, and focussing on reading for pleasure. It is an opportunity for children and young people to meet a practising writer – usually a children's writer – and to ask them questions about how and why they write. The writing workshop tends to be concerned with sparking interest in the process of writing, and often focuses on involving pupils in highly engaging activities that enable them to produce work relatively quickly. This is a pragmatic response to a situation where schools often invite writers into school for a day and ask them to work with a succession of students in class groups. In response to this, writers have developed strategies that allow them to create busy, active environments working with groups of children who they don't know so that each child can leave the session with a 'complete' piece of work, often on a theme or topic chosen by the teacher.

More recently, as interest in the role of creative teaching and learning has grown, writers are more likely to be asked to work in partnership with a school over several days, although it is still the case that most writer visits are for one day (Horner, 2010: p.4). It is also the case that almost all writer activity is focussed on the expertise of the writer being shared with children and young people rather than the teacher. The National Literacy Strategy, which is discussed in some detail in Chapter Two, has also had an impact on the way in which writers work in schools, and some research suggests that this has led to a situation where 'the work of writers in schools is most often directed towards the teaching of literacy' (Arts Council England, 2006: p.3).

Clearly both the author visit and the writer-led workshop have the potential to influence teacher pedagogy through the teacher's observation of and reflection on the writer's activity, and perhaps through conversation that may surround the visit. However, traditional writer visits to schools are not the focus of this research. I will instead explore an emerging model of practice, whereby a writer-teacher works primarily with a teacher rather than a group of pupils. The writer-teacher's role in this model is to mentor the teacher, supporting their understanding of creative writing and helping them to develop their creative writing practice and pedagogy. This connects the experience of working with a writer closely to 'creative writing practice' within the boundaries of this research.

## **1.6 The need for the research**

The primary need for this research is to increase understanding of how to improve creative writing pedagogy in schools. In primary and secondary education, the focus on improving standards in writing has been relentless since the inception of the National Curriculum in 1988, but little attention has been paid to teachers' experience of creative writing. The narrative has been almost exclusively one of failure: schools 'fail' to reach writing targets set by government; pupils 'fail' to achieve the levels in writing expected of their age group. This has meant that for more than twenty years the discourse about young people's writing has largely focussed on what they cannot do. The narrative of failure has been most clearly expressed in the results of national Standard Attainment Tests (SATs), in which writing lags behind reading and all other areas of national attainment testing (DCSF, 2008a: p.5; Ofsted, 2012: p.4). Arguments exist about the extent to which this is to do with the nature of the tests, lack of rigour in defining literacy, the comparative complexity of writing as compared to reading, or the implementation of a 'top-down' over prescriptive curriculum. These discussions are considered in Chapter

Two, as they have a relationship with research project. However, they are not the primary concern of this research. Rather, I am seeking to discover how teachers' experiences of creative writing framed within a critical and reflective learning dynamic influence their creative writing pedagogy.

In recent years, the need for both primary and secondary phase teachers to increase their experience of creative writing has been advocated. Two significant Ofsted reports, *English at the Crossroads* (Ofsted, 2009) and *Poetry in Schools* (Ofsted, 2007), have recommended that teachers' knowledge and experience of creative writing needs to be extended and improved in order to improve the teaching of writing. More recently, it has been suggested that too few choices for pupils to engage in extended writing, and 'too little emphasis on creative and imaginative tasks' have led to weaknesses in the teaching of writing (Ofsted, 2012: p.25). National literacy and primary strategies have sought to develop frameworks that will lead to improvements in young people's writing, but such strategies have failed to ensure that the target numbers of young people attain the expected level. It has been argued that in pursuing the pedagogy imposed by the strategies, 'prescription and accountability' have pushed aside 'artistry and creativity', and that as a result a technicist approach to teaching writing has come to dominate creative writing pedagogy in schools (Cremin, 2006: p.416; Alexander, 2004: p.11). This has led to calls for 'Artistic professional development in writing that repositions teachers as co-participants and perceives them as creative practitioners' in order to 'revitalize practice and critically influence their efficacy as creative teachers of writing' (Cremin, 2006: p.430). This research seeks to discover whether creative writing practice and involvement in a process of critical and reflective learning about creative writing does in fact strengthen teachers' pedagogy; and, if it does, to analyse how such improvements are achieved, and how they are expressed in pedagogy.



The research is also needed in order to increase understanding of how writer-teachers can help to meet the professional development needs of teachers in response to opportunities for creative writing in the curriculum. Recent changes to the secondary curriculum mean that young people have increased opportunities to develop their creative writing at GCSE, and a Creative Writing A level was announced in Autumn 2012<sup>6</sup>. However, some commentators believe that students may not be encouraged to take these opportunities because teachers lack creative writing experience, and their 'sense of uncertainty and personal discomfort in teaching creative writing' inhibits effective pedagogy (Green, 2009: p.188). The research will investigate the role that writer-teachers can play in developing teachers' knowledge and confidence in creative writing practice and pedagogy so that students are able to take full advantage of creative writing opportunities in the curriculum.

## **1.7 Summary of current state of knowledge in the field**

### **1.7.1 Creative writing and pedagogy: primary and secondary education**

Creative writing pedagogy in primary and secondary education is located largely within the English subject area, a domain that also includes literacy and literature. When the Labour government came to power in 1997, its claimed intention to raise standards in education gave rise to a wave of policy reform and associated target setting for judging the performance of schools. Central to this was a focus on raising standards in literacy and numeracy, which was seen as key to addressing social exclusion and inequality in the United Kingdom. By the end of its term in power in 2010, despite broad improvements in all areas of attainment, government targets for writing had still not been met. In 2008, 68% of 11 year olds and 77% of 14 year olds achieved the attainment level for writing expected

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<sup>6</sup> Creative Writing at A level has been accredited by AQA for teaching in schools from September 2013 <http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/english/creative-writing.php>

of their age group, a considerable shortfall from the 85% target set by government (Ofsted, 2009: pp.8-9)<sup>7</sup>. In 2012, Ofsted identified that pupils' inability to achieve writing targets remained a 'persistent issue' in both primary and secondary schools (Ofsted, 2012: pp.11, 25), linking this failure to 'weaknesses in the teaching of writing and gaps in [teachers'] subject knowledge' (2012: p.4).

The difficulty in reaching targets has led to the development of national strategies and frameworks that seek to influence teacher pedagogy in order to raise standards, principally the National Literacy Strategy and subsequent frameworks, and the Secondary National Strategy (DfEE, 1998; DfEE, 2001; DfES, 2003; DfES, 2006; DfEE, 2000). While standards have not risen to the desired levels, many commentators feel that teacher pedagogy has indeed been influenced, and much of the research has focussed on the negative impact of a sometimes contradictory and weakly conceived pedagogy advocated through highly prescriptive policy (see, for example, Shiel, 2003; Marshall, 2006; English *et al.*, 2002; Jolliffe, 2006; Moss, 2009; Alexander, 2004; Alexander *et al.*, 1996; Wyse, 2003; Andrews, 2002; Allison, 2010).

Research has indicated that the national strategies have had a negative impact on the 'morale, confidence and creativity of the teaching profession' (Webb and Vulliamy, 2007: p.578) and have led to a disproportionate amount of curriculum time devoted to activities that are directed at helping pupils to accumulate knowledge and strategies that will enable them to achieve the expected level in their test. 'Teaching to the test', also known as 'washback', has been identified by a number of researchers as responsible for a degree of narrowing of the curriculum and elimination of creativity and imagination in teaching and

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<sup>7</sup> 2008 was the last year in which attainment data for writing for both KS2 and KS3 was published.

learning (Marshall, 2008; Shiel, 2003). Within the English subject area, this has led to a dominance of a narrow focus on literacy over the other main elements of the subject: creative writing and literature. Concern has been raised, for example, about primary teachers' low levels of literature knowledge, and their perceived lack of association between engaging with literature and improving writing (Cremin *et al.*, 2008a: p.11; Cremin *et al.*, 2008b).

### **1.7.2 Creative writing and pedagogy: higher education**

The theoretical discourse about creative writing has largely taken place in higher education. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, creative writing as an emerging discipline has had to counter questions about whether or not it can in fact be taught. The juxtaposition of 'craft' (which it is widely perceived can be taught) and 'talent' (which it is often perceived cannot) in historical conceptions of creative writing have formed the basis of some scepticism (Brayfield, 2009: p.176; Weldon, 2009: p.168; Harper, 2006: p.2), and the under-theorisation of the discipline has been identified as a barrier to its scholarly development, particularly in relation to the need for research to be developed in a critical or theoretical framework (Rodriguez, 2008: p.186; Misson, 2001: p.1; McLoughlin, 2009: p.40; Harris, 2009: p.31-45; Curtis, 2009: p.105; Wandor, 2008: p.148).

Secondly, as creative writing undergraduate and post-graduate degrees have flourished in universities, writer-teachers have begun to think theoretically about both their writing practice and their pedagogy, and have entered and extended the debate (Dawson, 2005; Wandor, 2008; Myers, 2006). In other words, a critical mass of interested and informed parties has developed, stimulating a discourse that seeks to situate creative writing as a distinct domain of academic activity within the university (Dawson, 2005: pp19-20). This is

a relatively recent development, and is set against creative writing's 'persistent hostility to, and rejection of, anything remotely resembling historical, critical and theoretical study' (Wandor, 2008: p. 224). It has been argued that the historical antipathy to theory on the part of the creative writing community arises from deep suspicion of literary theory movements that dominated the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and have been perceived by some as 'a sustained attempt by academic readers to usurp the role of the writer' (Harris, 2009: p.32).

Theoretical discourse has however begun to gather momentum, although pre-paradigm theoretical concepts are still developing and emerging, and the academic community is 'watching the discipline further invent itself. Monitoring our own contribution to its construction and reflecting on how these processes affect our creative work, our research and our pedagogies' (Harper and Kroll, 2008: p.xii). In universities as in schools, creative writing has been most commonly positioned in English Departments and has developed as part of a broader domain of literary studies. Theoretical concerns arise from this position. Literary theory and literary criticism both deal with the end result, the 'post-event' product of creative writing (Harper, 2008b: p.161). The creative writing itself – activities and actions that contribute to writing that may or may not ever become 'finished' and so may never enter the realm of 'post-event' study – lies outside these constructs. Harper's exploration of a typology of creative writing that may emerge from creative writing - 'pre-texts, complementary texts, final texts, and post-texts' – reflects the on-going need to 'accumulate, access and discuss' the evidence of creative writing in order to evolve a richer theoretical understanding of the practices undertaken by creative writers (Harper, 2008b: p.170).

Recent exhortations by writer-teachers such as Dawson and Wandor (Wandor, 2008; Dawson, 2005) have urged a closer engagement with literature, theory and criticism and have given rise to some debate about the usefulness of literary theory and criticism in shedding light on the complexity of creative writing processes for the student engaged in their own creative writing. On one hand is the understanding that while literature may have a great contribution to make to the developing writer, 'it's difficult to see how studying the reading methods of literary criticism' will help (Harris, 2009: p.36). On the other, it is perhaps just as difficult to see how 'writerly critical understanding' that is concerned with both the reader's and the writer's viewpoint can stand entirely outside literary criticism (McLoughlin, 2007: p.89).

On all sides of the debate is a developing interest in the pedagogical aims and methodologies that are present in teaching creative writing. The dominant methodological tool remains the writing workshop, and creative writing literature is dominated by anthologies of workshop practice and ideas – what Wandor calls 'Household Tips and Recipe Books' (Wandor, 2008: p.108). However there is an emerging literature that goes beyond 'how to' and seeks to understand 'what' and 'why'. Critiquing of the workshop and positing of alternative pedagogical models attempt to unravel the difficulties of engaging in a creative-critical, reflection-action dynamic in which students develop as writers, researchers, editors and critics of their own work and that of their peers (see, for example, Wandor, 2008; McLoughlin, 2007; Harper and Kroll, 2008).

As the discourse develops, questions that are intrinsically linked to both the practice and the pedagogy of creative writing continue to occupy the academic community in higher education, many of which have been clearly articulated by Harper and Kroll:

...what place should critical or theoretical discourse have in the discipline? How should critical understanding of Creative Writing be nurtured? How do we develop the best teaching methods at undergraduate and postgraduate levels? How do we develop practice-led research? How do we proceed as creative writers who are also teachers and/or students? (Harper and Kroll, 2008: p.xii)

All of these questions have, to a greater or lesser extent, some relationship with the research questions explored in this thesis, and provide ground for further exploration of the nature of creative writing practice and pedagogy in the lives of primary and secondary teachers.

### **1.7.3 Creativity in teaching and learning**

In the last decade, interest has grown in creative approaches to teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools. The emphasis within much of the policy discourse around creativity in education focuses on promoting young people's 'creative behaviours' (Roberts, 2006) that meet the needs of the future workforce to develop to its full creative capacity. Research into creativity in education raises concerns that the conceptual and theoretical complexity of creativity (encompassing for example individual and societal notions of cognition, action, emotion, imagination and judgement) has been under-represented in the policy dialogue (see, for example, Craft, 2006; Craft and Jeffrey, 2008; Jeffrey and Craft, 2004; Wyse and Spendlove, 2007). In addition, creativity in education is seen to exist as a background discourse against dominant and consistent concerns about 'the pressures of the curriculum and the targets and objectives laid down within it' which are seen to 'severely restrict and constrain' creative practice (Dobbins, 2009: p.95).

Partnerships between schools and cultural and creative individuals and organisations have grown in recent years, partly in response to government initiatives that have

promoted creative learning and that have located cultural and creative activities within a social inclusion agenda. However, as discussed by Hall and Thomson, this may have led to a situation where ‘creativity’ is seen as being located outside mainstream school structures, in projects rather than in the National Curriculum, and in artists rather than in teachers’ (Hall *et al.*, 2007: p.315). In other words, creative practice is dislocated from the normal pedagogic practice of the teacher, and embodied in the visiting ‘artist’ – in the case of this research, the visiting writer. Hall and Thomson have gone on to discuss the difficulties faced by the model of developing partnerships between schools and ‘creative practitioners’ in effectively influencing pedagogy (Hall and Thomson, 2007) while Galton has concluded that it is difficult to resolve the differences between the pedagogy of the ‘creative practitioner’ and that of the teacher in the current assessment driven education context (Galton, 2008).

Interest in ‘creative learning’ has had an impact on how writers are perceived in education. The interest in developing young people’s ability to behave creatively positions the writer as a ‘creative practitioner’ whose primary usefulness may lie not in writing expertise but in the ability to encourage young people to explore creative approaches to a variety of learning outcomes. The expertise in writing and potential influence that a writer can bring to bear on understanding creative writing practice may, it seems, be lost between polarised discourses that are dominated on one hand by literacy and testing, and on the other by a creativity agenda that promotes a range of ‘creative behaviours’ that may be unconnected to deepening understanding of creative writing.

#### **1.7.4 Teachers' practice as writers**

Relatively little research has been conducted into the pedagogical implications of teachers' own practice of creative writing, but three previous studies in the UK are significant. Cremin's 2006 small scale study raises the idea that teachers' explicit engagement in the 'false starts or blank spots, the uncertainty of open exploration and their cognitive and emotional engagement' may be critical to improving young people's writing (Cremin, 2006: p.418). The study, which focussed on the experiences of three members of a group of sixteen primary school teachers responding to the challenge to write a short story, reported that 'all those involved encountered periods of intensely experienced insecurity and expressed considerable emotional discomfort, even distress during the compositional process' (Cremin, 2006: p.421). This echoes the anxieties found by Grainger in a 2005 study of fourteen primary school teachers taking part in creative writing (Grainger, 2005), where the tensions between private and public writing were found to cause teachers particular concern. Cremin and Baker's 2010 study of two primary school teachers concluded that the classroom becomes a site of struggle and tension as participants attempt to enact teacher-writer identities (2010: p.8). Each of these studies draws attention to the place of risk-taking in teachers' creative writing, which Cremin characterises as 'relying more on unconscious intuitive insights, trialling unconventional options and venturing down unexpected routes and pathways' (Cremin, 2006: p.427).

The studies referenced above took place with primary teacher participants, and Cremin identifies that there may be a particular need for teachers in this phase to be supported in working creatively since it is 'in the primary phase where the teaching of writing is undertaken by generalists, who would arguably benefit from opportunities to stretch their own voices' (Cremin, 2006: p.416). The inference here is that secondary English teachers



are specialists, usually have an English literature degree, and therefore are perhaps better prepared for the teaching of creative writing. It has been argued, however, that 'comparatively few' teachers of English in secondary schools have any experience of creative writing (Green, 2009: p.188), and therefore they cannot be considered to have specialist knowledge in developing creative writing pedagogy. In addition, Green argues that secondary school English teachers may not only feel unsure about teaching creative writing, but that they 'may well have suspicions surrounding the value of creative writing' (Green, 2009: p.188). However, Domaille and Edwards' evaluation of a curriculum development that engaged secondary English teacher trainees in creative writing activities revealed that creative writing was valued as both 'imperative if students are to continue to enjoy English whilst covering the Literacy objectives' and the 'most loved, least practised form of writing' (Domaille and Edwards, 2006: p.74). It is pertinent, therefore, that this research will include both primary and secondary teachers as participants.

These studies raise important questions about how to raise teachers' 'confidence as writers' (Ofsted, 2009: p.6). They suggest that the practice of creative writing involves teachers in a complex internal struggle as they negotiate the interaction between the self (as writer) and the text, and reflect on tensions that may exist between the writer-self and the teacher-self. This thesis seeks to address this under-represented area of research.

## **1.8 Structure of the thesis**

Chapter Two of the thesis is an exploration of the literature, and provides the context that justifies and underpins the research. In this chapter, I consider the conceptualisation of creative writing in both policy and academic discourse, tracing how debates in higher education about the subject of English and creative writing have contributed to the

conception of creative writing in schools. I explore historical conceptions of creative writing in schools as an art form, as a form of self-expression, as a tool for personal development, and, more recently, as a mechanism for demonstrating technical and functional skill in written communication. The influence of policy developments on pedagogy in creative writing are explored, with particular attention to the period since 1998 when the National Literacy Strategy was introduced. This chapter also considers the influence of cultural policy on the ways in which writers work with schools, and considers whether the dominant models of teacher-school relationships contribute to creative writing pedagogy.

Chapter Three describes the rationale for the case study approach to undertaking this research. The research questions are explored, and the place of the researcher in the research is discussed. Consideration is given to both the advantages and disadvantages of case study methods in general, and to the strengths and limitations of the Well Versed case study in particular. The inductive, qualitative paradigm is discussed, and data collection methods and management are described. The chapter presents an overview of the theoretical framework that is employed in the thematic analysis of data, and concludes with an exploration of the ethical considerations in the research.

Chapter Four briefly contextualises the data, providing a narrative about the Well Versed project. Although the Well Versed case has been explored in relation to methodology in Chapter Three, further details are given here for clarity. The Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom is described, and a summary of the seminars that formed part of teachers' experience is provided. The partnerships between poet-mentors and schools and the role of poet mentors in the project are described. Further information is also provided about the written documentation that forms part of the data set.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present and analyse research findings. Each chapter concentrates on exploring a specific theme emerging from the case study: teacher-writer identity (Chapter Five); conceptions of creative writing (Chapter Six); and changes in classroom practice (Chapter Seven). These themes have some correspondence with Sachs' conception of teachers' on-going negotiations with 'their own ideas of "how to be", "how to act" and "how to understand" their work and their place in society' (cited in Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: p.178). Thus they are presented as inter-related dimensions of participants' experience of creative writing practice and its influence on their pedagogy.

Chapter Five comprises the presentation and interpretation of research findings relating to participants' identities as teacher-writers. The concept of teacher identity and the relevance of teacher-writer identity to the teaching of creative writing is briefly explored. Data is analysed to trace the influence of creative writing practice on the construction of teacher-writer identity. Three thematic strands emerged through data analysis: the significance of teachers' creative writing histories; personal and professional anxieties, tensions and risk-taking in emerging teacher-writer identity; and the co-construction of teacher-writer identity through the sharing of creative writing practice. The thematic analysis of data is contextualised within a conceptual framework that draws on Bruner's models of the learner's mind and pedagogy (Bruner, 1996: pp.44-65).

In Chapter Six I analyse research findings to explore how teachers' conceptions of creative writing are influenced by their creative writing practice. Creative writing practice is considered in the policy context within which teachers work. Firstly, consideration is given to how participants in this study identify national policy and strategies as influential on

their thinking and practice. Then, findings are analysed to explore how themes of freedom and flexibility in the evolving policy narrative are interpreted by participants in the case study. The chapter goes on to explore the influence of participants' experience of practice on conceptions of creative writing, examining how participants engage with poetry as a 'special case', intimately involved with ideas of 'the self'. The last theme in this chapter is concerned with how findings reveal the ways in which participants conceptualise the construction of knowledge about creative writing through practice. Again, the analysis is framed within a conceptual framework that draws on Bruner's models of the mind and pedagogy.

In Chapter Seven, findings from the case study are analysed in order to illuminate how participants' pedagogical approaches and actions have changed as a result of their experience of practising creative writing. Changes in classroom practice are described in relation to five key themes: the development of teachers' creative writing practice as a pedagogical approach in the classroom; increased opportunities for learners to engage in creative writing in the curriculum; the implementation of new approaches to teaching creative writing in the classroom; self-assessment, metacognition and dialogue as elements of pupils' creative writing practice; and an exploration of the creative-critical dynamic in creative writing pedagogy.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis. Here, I return to the research questions to appraise how findings from the research contribute to developing understanding of how teachers' engagement in creative writing practice influences their pedagogy. I explore the limitations of the research, and consider the further questions that are raised by the findings, offering a perspective on the potential for further research in this area. I consider the policy and

practice implications of the research findings, and, in concluding this thesis, make recommendations for the future.

## **1.9 Summary**

This thesis reports on research into how teachers' experience of practising creative writing influences creative writing pedagogy in primary and secondary schools. The research is located within a literary studies domain, responding to the context in which creative writing is most commonly taught in schools and in higher education. In exploring this field, this research also investigates those aspects of broader educational and cultural policy that have the potential to impact on creative writing pedagogy in schools.

The analysis of the case study at the heart of this research is situated within an interpretive framework, acknowledging 'that we live in a social world characterized by the possibilities of multiple interpretations. In this world there are no "brute data" whose meanings are beyond dispute' (Yanow, 2000: p.5). This approach to the analysis is congruent with the exploration of creative writing, a discipline which is to some extent characterised by an exploration of what constitutes its own knowledge, and in which multiple meanings 'reflect the shifting reality' of those involved in both its practice and its pedagogy (Harper and Kroll, 2008: p.xii).

## **2 The exclusion of creative writing from literary studies and the curriculum: an exploration of the literature**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I will explore how conceptions of creative writing are constructed in both the scholarly literature and policy discourse, and will analyse the way in which such conceptualisations may influence pedagogy. Creative writing is positioned within literary studies, a subject that attracts debate about the nature of English, its relationship with national culture, and what should constitute an English curriculum (Widdowson, 1982; Andrews, 2002; Kress, 2006; Hodges *et al.*, 2000; Doyle, 1982). The debates that have given rise to the introduction and development of literary studies and creative writing are extensive, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine in depth the wide range of theoretical perspectives that inform the discourse. Rather, the literature is explored in order to contextualise conceptions of creative writing that have influenced pedagogy in schools. The educational policy narrative relating to creative writing in schools is described, and I explore how this contributes to constructing conceptualisations of creative writing in relationship to literature and literacy. The political control of both subject matter and pedagogy in creative writing are investigated. Finally, I consider how cultural policy has influenced the way in which writers work in schools, and consider whether the dominant models of teacher-school relationships contribute to creative writing pedagogy.

### **2.2 Conceptualisations of creative writing in higher education: pedagogy and practice**

As established in Chapter One, the primary focus of this research is the pedagogy of creative writing in schools. However, it is necessary to examine the conceptions of creative writing that arise from tertiary education for two reasons. Firstly, it is largely within higher education that the theoretical discourse about the nature of creative writing, its

position and pedagogy within English studies has taken place, and this must be taken into account in order to fully explore conceptions of creative writing that influence practice in schools. Secondly, the teaching of creative writing in higher education is largely carried out by writer-teachers, that is to say the professional body who teach creative writing in universities are also (mostly) practising writers. This is highly pertinent to the central research question of this thesis which explores the connection between the practice and pedagogy of creative writing.

Conceptions of creative writing are intimately linked with pedagogy in the discourse in tertiary education, since creative writing consistently encounters the question ‘can it be taught?’ and ‘how can it be assessed?’ (see for example Myers, 2006; Dawson, 2005; Wandor, 2008). The struggle to establish creative writing as a subject of sufficient academic merit and rigour to take a position in the university is evident in the discourse. Conceptions of creative writing can be seen in the establishment and development of English as a subject within the academy, informing understanding of its practice and pedagogy both in higher education and in schools.

### **2.2.1 Early disciplinary identity and the omission of creative writing**

As noted previously, creative writing is most commonly located in the English subject area in universities in England, and it is therefore useful to trace its conception in relation to broader conceptions of literary studies. John Churton Collins, in the first moves to establish English Literature as a separate school of study at Oxford in the 1880s, questioned why ‘the teaching of literature is neglected altogether or abandoned contemptuously to dilettantes and philologists’ (cited in Wandor, 2008, p.29). Collins’ campaign owed something to Matthew Arnold’s belief in the value of literature as an

improving force for the individual and for society. For Arnold, the argument about literature was always part of a concern with larger cultural issues: questions about the purpose and value of literature were resolved in culture, tradition and heritage, and the significance of literature was deeply connected to the development of 'morality and character' as well as 'intellect and sensibility' (Allott, 1993, p.xliv). By the 1920s, however, the social changes that followed the First World War and the impact of younger academics in universities – and particularly at Cambridge, where the English Tripos had been established in 1917 – were to produce 'a 'critical revolution' that, within twenty years, had transformed the academic study of literature and raised it to a new prominence within the national culture' (Mulhern, 1979, p.19). In establishing the subject's disciplinary status, however, it is also possible to trace the beginnings of the exclusion of creative writing from literary studies.

I.A. Richards' method of practical criticism attempted to align literary studies with the academic credo of objective analysis (Richards, 1964). This moved literary studies forward from the historical and philological practice that had dominated universities up until this point (Wandor, 2008: pp.45-46; Pope, 2002: pp.83-84). The development of a technical language for study, and of agreed principles and practices, aimed to establish a degree of academic rigour in literary criticism that sought to employ the objectivity associated with scientific study in its analytical processes. As such, Richards' approach can be seen as an attempt to theorise literary discrimination and judgement, to understand how literary quality is discerned by the reader, and to move away from the 'leisurely and expansive connoisseurism' that had characterised the study of literature (Mulhern, 1979, p.25). It was an attempt not only to develop a methodology, but by doing so to reform literary studies and to articulate the value of literature in society.



The practical criticism method gave rise to New Criticism in America, although it has been argued that Richards' 'insistence, from the beginning, on what might be termed the sociality of language – the impossibility of analysing a purely linguistic element independently of a whole set of features associated with its use' distinguished his approach from that of the New Critics (Abbs, 1984: p.168). In *Principles of Literary Criticism*, there is some exploration of the 'special communication gifts' of the writer and of the writing process itself, but in the end Richards concludes that the processes of creative writing 'are not very profitable for investigation: they offer far too happy a hunting-ground for uncontrollable conjecture' (Richards, 2001: p. 24). There is some sense here that exploration of the making of literature – creative writing – would expose literary studies to exactly the kinds of attack that the practical criticism approach attempted to deflect through its 'objective' approach, and distract attention from the 'grand project' of establishing English Literature as a subject with its own rigorous academic premise.

F.R. Leavis, widely identified as the successor to both Richards and Arnold, and credited along with Richards for shaping 'the ways in which English was taught, across the educational spectrum' (Wandor, 2008: p. 32) went further in his assertion that creative writing had no place in the field of literary studies:

I don't at all favour the institution of the 'creative writer on the campus'...Further, I don't at all think that candidates for Honours should be encouraged to believe that by submitting original poems, novels, or plays to the examiners, they may improve their claim to a good class.... (Leavis, 1969: p.63)

Leavis' dismissal of the idea that creative writing may have any place in literary studies was framed by his Arnoldian view that the literary academic's concern was to explore 'the best that is known and thought in the world' and create 'a current of true and fresh ideas' (Arnold, 1865, in Allott, 1993: p.183). In setting out his ideas for an ideal English school

within university education, Leavis developed a vision that would expand pedagogy, embrace new assessment procedures, develop interdisciplinarity, and create a literary critical elite capable of examining 'the relations between the economic, the political, the moral, the spiritual, religion, art and literature, and would involve a critical pondering of standards and key concepts – order, community, culture, civilization and so on' (Leavis, cited in Mulhern, 1979: p.194). Creative writing, however, was entirely absent from Leavis's vision. Indeed, the influence of Richards and Leavis in the first half of the twentieth century contributed to a concept of literary studies that had effectively excluded any idea of the practical experience of creative writing from its domain.

### **2.2.2 Theoretical perspectives, the challenge to literary studies, and opening the academic door to creative writing**

Critical perspectives emerging in academia in the post war period, however, advanced new theoretical perspectives that argued against prevailing orthodoxies in literary studies. Detailed consideration of the methods and ideologies that inform literary and cultural theories in the 1960s-1980s is beyond the scope of this exploration of the literature. Rather, I am concerned to analyse the part that theoretical perspectives played in creating the conditions that enabled consideration of creative writing as an academic discipline within literary studies, and the ways in which theoretical developments contributed to evolving conceptions of creative writing. The rise of theory in literary studies is relevant to the development of creative writing into the academy not necessarily because of what theory had to say *about* creative writing but rather because the challenge that theory made to literary studies created an environment in which creative writing could be accepted (Wandor, 2008: pp.83-84).

As the provision of higher education expanded and post-war socio-political changes were felt in universities, the boundaries of literary studies were challenged and explored. New disciplines (such as Cultural Studies) that crossed ground with the developments in literary studies began to emerge, and existing literary practice and axioms were challenged.

In literary studies, the advent of Marxist theory sought not only to examine the political and social context of literary production and reception, but was relentlessly concerned with the cultural and philosophical questions that underpin conceptions of literature. During this period, literary theories contested the idea that the study of literature was in any way 'disinterested' and sought to address the subjectivism of value judgements in literary studies. Structuralist concerns with analysis over evaluation, and with relational rather than inherent quality in the 'meaning' of text, expressed disregard for the 'cultural value' of its object (Eagleton, 1983: pp.80-85). This challenged the fundamental basis on which Arnold, Richards and Leavis had grounded the establishment of the subject.

The challenges made by post-structuralism and deconstructionism were perhaps even greater, disputing the possibility of analysing meaning through coherent and fully intelligible sign-systems in texts, and drawing attention to the discourses that construct meaning. The questioning of the fundamental nature of literary studies was also present in theoretical perspectives inspired by the political radicalism of Feminism and Post-Colonialism, and interest in the part played by language in creating power relations informed both psychological and more politically driven theoretical perspectives.

These theoretical perspectives contributed to the development of a process by which concerns that had traditionally been at the margins of literary studies became the subject of serious intellectual attention and inquiry. The 'marginal' included both sections of society whose experience had been largely ignored, and the cultural processes and products that had remained outside intellectual interest (Green, 1982: p.77). The connection between developments in literary theory during this period and the subsequent rise of creative writing in universities lies in the influence that these ideas had in bringing the marginal – in this case creative writing - into the legitimate domain of study.

### **2.2.3 Creative writing in the university**

In 1970 the UK's first Creative Writing MA was established by Malcolm Bradbury and Angus Wilson at the University of East Anglia as 'a vocational course of a new kind, bringing literature, as a verbal art, into the academy at postgraduate level' (Wandor, 2008: p.9). Significantly for the consideration of pedagogy, Bradbury wanted the MA to address the fact that 'though some writers flourish best in solitude and have no difficulty in discovering the structure of narrative or the intensities of the imagination, many benefit from the support of others and a constant debate' (Bradbury, 1995).

The wider debate that emanated from the inclusion of creative writing in literary studies was, however, slow and gradual. This was partly perhaps due to the perceived 'impossibility of holding literary development within any one centrally agreed form' that had arisen through theoretical debates (MacCabe, 1984: p.81). The emerging development of creative writing as part of the provision made at undergraduate degree level often faced questions about whether or not creative writing could be taught at all and how it could be assessed, and academics developing and delivering creative writing

courses reported that creative writing was regarded by colleagues as 'at best an indulgence, at worst a soft option' (Bulman, 1984: p.73). This conception of creative writing lacking educational validity can be seen to be instrumental in the narrowing of creative writing in the primary and secondary school curriculum, which is explored later in this chapter.

The last two decades, however, have seen rapid expansion in the study of creative writing at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. As the subject has gained critical mass through a more developed academic community, the literature about the pedagogy of creative writing in higher education has grown, although references have been made throughout the debate about a lack of research in this area (McLoughlin, 2009: p.40; Misson, 2001: p.1; Wirtz, 2010: p.60)

Despite the extensive theoretical developments that paved the way for creative writing's entrance to the academy, conceptions about creative writing continue to be influenced by the 'incompatible pairing of the Romantic Muse and coercive self expression' that implicitly inform creative writing pedagogy (Wandor, 2008: p.219). The notion of the 'transcendental, ineffable moment' (Brace and Johns-Putra, 2010: p.400) locates creative writing in the unconscious, both unreachable and un-teachable. This is set against a diametrically opposed and equally unhelpful pedagogic notion, that 'because language is our medium, and language is mastered, at basic level, by almost all human beings, great achievement in this art seems accessible. It's not, of course...' (Brayfield, 2009: p.176). Pedagogy is thus positioned between a conception of creative writing as, on the one hand, 'notoriously elusive...unpredictable and emergent' (Brace and Johns-Putra, 2010:

p.400) and, on the other hand, so easily accessible that it cannot merit serious academic attention.

Against this background emerges a sense that the creative writing academic community is 'watching the discipline further invent itself, monitoring our own contribution to its construction and reflecting on how these processes affect our creative work, our research and our pedagogies' (Harper and Kroll, 2008: p.xii). As the conceptions of creative writing continue to evolve, shaping the discipline's pre-paradigmatic landscape, the processes and pedagogical practices that form its identity continue to explore creative writing's relationship with other arts subject and with literary studies. In particular, and in relation to both of these areas, creative writing locates the site of its knowledge production within its practice.

In clarifying how we discuss creative writing, some challenges have occurred to notions that have informed those 'post-event' arts and humanities subjects that deal with the products of creative writing practice. 'Post-event' arts and humanities subjects are those that locate their discourse, and their knowledge, primarily (indeed, often solely) in analysis occurring after the act or actions of creative practice. In contrast, creative writing locates its discourse, its knowledge and its understanding in the act and actions of writing creatively. (Harper, 2008b: p.161)

The development of creative writing within the university as part of literary studies is framed within a conception of creative writing as an art form. The presence of writer-teachers in universities has been instrumental in shaping this conception of creative writing. Writer-teachers continue to explore the parameters of creative writing's disciplinary home within the university, and while for some creative writing 'can only belong within, or in symbiotic relation to, English literary studies' (Wandor, 2008: p.220), continued exploration of the knowledge, pedagogy and practice of creative writing stimulates investigation into the relationship between creative writing and other practice-

led disciplines, such as visual arts (Harper, 2008b). As I examine in the rest of this chapter, writers have not had the same direct influence on developing recent conceptions of creative writing in schools, and this may have contributed to a narrowing conception of creative writing in this environment.

## **2.3 Conceptualising creative writing in the primary and secondary curriculum**

Creative writing in schools, like universities, sits within the English subject area, encompassing literature, language and literacy. As outlined in Chapter One, English has been subject to intense political scrutiny since the Labour government came to power in 1997, introducing a significant wave of policy reform that attempted to raise standards in education and address social exclusion. Academic discourse in recent years has been dominated by analysis of the influence that such reform has had on conceptions of English. The recent discourse reflects a longer historical concern with fundamental and recurring questions about what English is, and, more recently, what it is for. It is, therefore, pertinent to analyse how English has come to occupy its current position in the National Curriculum, to examine the conception of English revealed in the historical policy rhetoric, and to explore how these factors have contributed to conceptions of creative writing.

### **2.3.1 Establishing English in the curriculum: The Newbolt Report (1921)**

A report on the teaching of English that laments lack of resources, low pay for teachers, and poorly stocked libraries, and goes on to express the scale of the challenge ahead in the context of a rapidly changing and unstable economic environment foreshadows many current concerns. *The Teaching of English in England* (the Newbolt Report) was, in fact, the first major educational policy development to take place in the aftermath of the First

World War (Board of Education, 1921). The report, running to over 400 pages and broad enough in its field of inquiry to encompass the teaching of English language and literature from Elementary school to University and adult education, sets out a vision for the teaching of English that builds on the Arnoldian concept of literature as an improving force intimately connected with personal moral growth. Where Arnold had argued determinedly for the inclusion of English in elementary schools, Newbolt's report was significant in establishing English as a core subject in the education system.

Newbolt shared with Arnold a concept of English as a 'humanist surrogate for religion' (Widdowson, 1982: p.5). The Newbolt report is analysed in some detail here because it was critical in moving Arnold's concept of the subject of English into the policy discourse, and because its influence can still be seen in contemporary concerns about language, literacy and literature in the school curriculum in England, and in shaping perceptions of creative writing. If Arnold was the greatest individual influence on the subject of English, as asserted by many commentators, then the Newbolt report may be seen as the first policy discourse that pursues this liberal humanist approach in the development of the teaching of English in schools, and that conceives of writing as an art within teaching and learning.

### **2.3.2 The moral force of English language and literature**

The choice of English as the subject to receive such intense policy focus in the tumultuous aftermath of the First World War is significant: the right course of action in the teaching of English was seen as capable of developing a 'new element of national unity' in the 'structure which we are hoping to rebuild' (Board of Education, 1921: p.13). Conceptions of creative writing in the report are strongly connected to views about spoken language



and the place and value of literature. The war had brought to the Newbolt Committee's attention a reported deficit in 'ordinary' soldiers, deemed 'pitiful' in their education compared to their overseas allies who displayed a 'wide outlook on life' (1921: p.17). It is inferred that the soldiers are representative of the working class generally at the time. Central to this failing, in the report's view, is 'the difference between educated and uneducated speech, which at present causes so much prejudice and difficulty of intercourse on both sides' (Board of Education, 1921: p.22). The 'both sides' in question here of course are not warring nations, but the English classes. The report identifies the teaching of English language and literature as key to eradicating class divisions, setting out an aim for the teaching of English to ensure that differences in speech will 'gradually disappear', allowing that dialect differences may continue and that the teacher's aim here should be to ensure that children become 'bi-lingual' (Board of Education, 1921: p.67).

We do not advocate the teaching of standard English on any grounds of social "superiority," but because it is manifestly desirable that all English people should be capable of speaking so as to be fully intelligible to each other and because inability to speak standard English is in practice a serious handicap in many ways. (Board of Education, 1921: p.67)

Although couched in democratising terms, the concept here may also be seen as the use of English as a controlling force to eradicate the unwanted influence of 'the masses', and, perhaps, the threat of antagonism that they pose (Marshall, 2000: p.27). The discourse about the role of 'standard English' in speech and writing that has occupied much ground since this time may have its roots in Newbolt's attempts to develop a common culture through 'a common tongue' (Sampson, 1921, cited in Marshall, 2000: p.28).

The report notes that the task is not just to change speech, but to change attitudes to the English language:

In France, we are told, this pride in the national language is strong and universal; the French artisan will often use his right to object that an expression “is not French.” Such a feeling for our own native language would be a bond of union between classes, and would beget the right kind of national pride. (Board of Education, 1921: p.22)

The report proposes that the teaching of English should aim to change people’s relationship with English, engendering not only ‘respect’ and ‘pride’ but ‘affection’. The emotional response to the language is seen as central, not only in ensuring that the national pride provoked is ‘the right kind’, but, the report goes on to say, in order that individuals can ‘step upon a higher level’. The Arnoldian concept of English as a morally improving force is evident, and the development of individual intellect is identified as entirely dependent on the development of the language, since ‘English is not merely the medium of our thought, it is the very stuff and process of it’ (Board of Education, 1921: p.20).

The conception of English as both an improving moral and intellectual force on the individual and a uniting influence on the post-war nation is developed in the report’s consideration of the teaching of literature. As a uniting influence, literature is a ‘perpetual reminder that through all social differences human nature and its strongest affections are fundamentally the same’ (1921: p.23). Literature is conceived as holding a special power, ‘revealing new values, relations of thought, feeling...by which the dull and superficial sight of the multitude is illuminated’ (1921: p.17). The teaching of literature, then, is a way of improving the intellect of the individual by ‘means of contact with great minds’ and of uniting the nation in ‘pride and joy in the national literature’ (1921: p.15). Literature is evoked here as a spiritual force that will cure the multitude through the revelation of universal human truths – ‘the best that is known and thought in the world’ (Arnold, 1865, in Allott, 1993: p.183).

It is possible to see then that the establishment of English as a core subject in the curriculum is based on the improving moral force of English language and literature on the individual and on society as whole, and this sets the context for Newbolt's aspirations about the purpose and value of writing in the curriculum.

### **2.3.3 The art of creative writing**

The conception of writing in the report – 'composition' - is strongly linked to the development of the individual intellect, and the report calls for composition to be given a new importance not only within English, but in education as a whole. The call is based on a claim that in teaching writing, teachers are 'concerned immediately and directly with the growth of the mind' in a way that cannot be claimed for other subjects, or indeed for other aspects of English (1921: p.72). Composition is 'the most valuable exercise in the school for the purpose of developing the specific abilities which enter most largely into our lives' and is clearly identified as an artistic act:

The teaching of composition... develops individuality...it has, indeed, a transforming influence on the children, on their whole outlook, on their whole judgment, on their sense of responsibility...If the habit of merely perfunctory or artificial writing is allowed to usurp its place the avenue to mental development will have been partly closed. (Board of Education, 1921: p.72)

The report consistently identifies 'the creative impulse' as the foremost concern of composition. In considering the role of the teacher in writing, the focus is firmly on the need to 'foster the creative impulse' (1921: p.75). The rationale behind this emphasis seems to lie in the philosophy that Newbolt expounds in the Introduction to the report:

It must be realised that education is not the same thing as information, nor does it deal with human knowledge as divided into so-called subjects. It is not the storing of compartments in the mind, but the development and training of faculties already existing. It proceeds, not by the presentation of lifeless facts, but by teaching the student to follow the different lines on which life may be explored and proficiency in living maybe obtained. (Board of Education, 1921: p.8)

In considering the teaching of writing, the report privileges the development of the learner's mind above other concerns. In responding to employers' complaints that too often young people leave school 'hopelessly deficient in their command of English', and that it is difficult to find young employees 'who can speak and write English clearly and correctly', Newbolt accepts the need for teachers and employers to 'see alike and pull together' (Board of Education, 1921: pp.72-73). However, the report rejects the notion that teaching and learning should be directed by 'the demands of short term utilitarianism', and refutes the view that pedagogy and curriculum in writing should be primarily concerned with matters of spelling and technical accuracy, in contrast with contemporary concerns expressed in the National Literacy Strategy (explored fully in 2.3.11 below). Indeed, Newbolt sees the tendency of teachers to focus on 'correction of all the errors of punctuation, spelling and grammar' as a negative, discouraging practice which is likely to 'repress the pupil into silence' (1921: p.75).

The aim in teaching writing is described as 'a genuine attempt by the pupil to express as well as he can what he is really capable of thinking and saying', and a pedagogy that conceives of composition as the correct use of spelling, punctuation and grammar alone misses the point: this is 'criticising bricks, not architecture' (1921: p.75). Newbolt asserts that 'grammar and philology should be recognised as scientific studies, and kept apart (so far as that is possible) from the lessons in which English is treated as an art, a means of creative expression, a record of human experience' (1921: p.11). The debate about how teachers are to balance technical accuracy against creative expression has been a consistent theme in the discourse for nearly a century, and the Newbolt report is an early policy articulation of the theory that making meaning through writing is closely connected to the capacity to develop thought through language.

The Hadow report of 1931 (Board of Education, 1931) developed Newbolt's conception that writing should be 'a genuine attempt by the pupil to express as well as he can what he is really capable of thinking and saying', identifying that 'The pupil must have something to say' (Board of Education, 1931: p.161). This conception of the teaching of writing has its foundations in Hadow's philosophical ideas about the purpose of education which he considers 'in terms of activity and experience rather than knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored' (Board of Education, 1931: p.93). Both Newbolt and Hadow were concerned with the essential need for the practice of writing to be connected to the pupil's lived experience, expressing a conception of writing as a contextualised act of expression and imagination.

Newbolt's experience as a writer may have been an influence on his insistent focus on creative expression, and he was the first to call for 'direct instruction in the art of writing English' for teachers, in order to advance a pedagogy that can fulfil the conception of writing as an artistic act for teachers (Board of Education, 1921: p.78). This has particular relevance for the case study that will be explored in this research, some 90 years later.

#### **2.3.4 The Spens Report (1938): narrowing conceptions of creative writing**

During the 1930s, the Arnoldian influence continued to assert itself in the policy discourse, clearly expressed in the Board of Education's 1938 report (the Spens report), where English was again conceived as a civilising force. By the 1930s, however, popular culture ('the infectious accents of Hollywood') and the mass market ('pervading influences of the hoarding') were felt to be new threats, corrupting forces that stood against the teachers' efforts to '[make] the normal citizen of this country conscious and proud of his unequalled literary heritage' (Board of Education, 1938: p.228). The presentation of literature as

heritage is reinforced throughout the report, and it is presented as a weapon against the emerging popular culture of the time: 'in days when literary standards are threatened on every side, there are few safeguards stronger than a widespread devotion to those great writers who "spoil our taste for twitterings"' (Board of Education, 1938: p.226). Popular culture is identified in the report as a part of the lived experience of working class children, and literature as a separate body of high culture and heritage, part of an educative process that is devoid of their agency. In fact, the 'normal citizen' may be unconscious of the nation's 'literary heritage' but, the report suggests, plays an active role in a quite separate cultural life.

English then is still seen as key to improving the working class, but there is perhaps a sense in the Spens Report that not only an attitude to language but an attitude to learning must be addressed in order to achieve this aim. The English in 'common usage' is 'slovenly, ungrammatical, and often incomprehensible to a stranger; yet it serves its purpose on all normal occasions, and so makes the child self-satisfied and impatient of attempts to implant a higher standard' (Board of Education, 1938: p.200). The 'higher standard' recalls Arnold, and the report's conception of the ideal teacher of English evokes an Arnoldian spiritual quality that it is hard to imagine being applied to other subjects:

But for the right teaching of literature something more is required, which no training can supply. This quality is sincerity; a belief in the value of English literature for its own sake, and a real love of its finest manifestations. This belief and this love can, like religion, be 'caught but not taught'. (Board of Education, 1938: p.288)

The Spens report has less to say than Newbolt on the subject of writing, perhaps because the report was primarily interested in reviewing the structure of schooling, laying the ground for developments that would be articulated in the 1944 Education Act (see 2.3.5

below). However, the clear conception of 'composition' as an artistic act evident in Newbolt's report is not present here. The report recommends that written compositions should be 'restricted in length, concrete in subject, and, in general, objective in treatment' going on to say that 'Once this discipline has had its effect some attempt should be made at more ambitious forms of expression' (Board of Education, 1938: p.221). Spens acknowledges that 'experts are still at variance' about the place of teaching formal grammar and technical aspects of writing but falls short of recommending action in the way that Newbolt had. Rather, he recommends that each teacher should decide their own course of action (Board of Education, 1938: p.220).

A divergence in the conception of writing in Newbolt and Spens is apparent in the perspectives expressed on the pedagogic approach to spelling. In Newbolt,

...mistakes in spelling are categorical things at which the critic can securely point an indignant finger. Yet ability to spell a word is but one of several conditions of being able to use it properly. What is stigmatised as bad spelling is often, in its essence, sheer poverty of vocabulary. (Board of Education, 1921: p.79)

The Newbolt report conceives of writing not as constituent parts that can be approached through distinct pedagogical methodology addressing technical criteria, but as a process of making meaning through language, where language is conceived of as inseparable from thought. The Spens report, however, asserts that 'Bad spelling is now recognised as a disease which submits reluctantly to slow treatment' (Board of Education, 1938: p.220). While both positions identify a need to improve spelling where necessary – a need that continues to be a focus of attention today, and to attract differing pedagogical views – Newbolt's view of language and meaning making accepts that correct spelling is only *one* way of using a word 'properly'. It is possible to see here that Newbolt's belief that 'the writing of English is essentially an art' (1921: p.20) was, by 1938, threatened by a

narrower conception that responded to the 'vocational value' of writing, rather than its literary or creative value (Board of Education, 1938: p.219).

#### **2.3.4.i The Leavis Influence**

Terry Eagleton's assertion that 'English students today are 'Leavisites' whether they know it or not' (Eagleton, 1983: p.29) is a clear reference to the influence of Leavis and the Cambridge school on the development of English studies in the university. However, the Leavis influence extended beyond English students in universities. The 1930s saw a concerted attempt by Leavis and his *Scrutiny* colleagues – particularly Denys Thompson – to influence the teachers of English in schools. *Scrutiny* published essays criticising broad aspects of the school system, which they saw as dehumanising in developing a factory like approach to education. The journal expressed specific concerns about elements of the English curriculum in secondary schools, which was seen as subject to inappropriate and damaging systems of examination, and orientated towards the needs of commerce and the market (Mulhern, 1979: pp.100-103). *Scrutiny's* 'symposium review' of the Spens Report published in 1939 attacked the report for its 'covert attempt to reduce secondary education to vocational training' (Mulhern, 1979: p.190) and deduced from the report a conception of education that that was anti-culture, anti-intellectual, and essentially opposed to liberal education. A comparison is made to the French lycée where 'the professor implies and the pupil acknowledges what is rarely acknowledged or understood in England – that it is not only possible but desirable for the intellect to play a part in the conduct of life' (*Scrutiny* 8:3, cited in Mulhern, 1979: p.189).

The views of *Scrutiny* converged with Spens however in a concern for the damaging influence of popular culture. Spens regarded popular culture as the enemy of teachers in



their attempts to ensure that pupils reach the 'higher standard', but *Scrutiny* identified teachers' own engagement in the mass market as part of the problem, identifying 'the cinema, newspapers, book societies and Big Business – the whole machinery of 'Democracy and standardization' as negative and pervasive influences in higher education teacher training colleges (Knights, 1932, cited in Mulhern, 1979: p.107). They perceived the education of teachers as indifferent to culture and entirely connected to the objectives of materialism. By 1939, enough sympathy for this view had been generated among the teaching community not only to develop a network of like-minded professionals, but for Denys Thompson to take the lead in founding *English in Schools*, a journal that would continue *Scrutiny's* interest in educational reform.

Despite *Scrutiny's* concerns, the 1930s are widely seen as a period when a broadly humanist conception of English dominated the educational agenda. Literature was seen principally as an improving force, particularly in relation to the development of working class children whose spoken and written language was identified as problematic. The 'higher standard' would be reached by exposure to literature that exhibited not only qualities of writing that would improve language (and thereby thought) but that exhibited universal themes that had a uniting influence on the nation.

Within this conception of English, creative writing is conceived as an act of making meaning, closely connected to experience, and technical accuracy in writing is assumed to be an outcome of exposure to high quality literature and oral communication, guided by pedagogical correction within the context of making meaning. By the late 1930s, however, the publication of the Spens report communicated early indications that it may not be useful to conceive of creative writing as an artistic act, and that the teaching of writing may

more profitably come to focus on technical aspects of the use of language. The tension between the creative and functional aspects of writing has continued to influence current conceptions of creative writing and its pedagogy, as explored later in this chapter.

### **2.3.5 Post war progressivism: The impact of changes in the education system on creative writing in schools**

The establishment of primary schools in place of elementary schools and a secondary system of grammar, technical and secondary modern schools came about in the 1940s as a result of the 1944 Education Act. Although the act gave no advice on the English curriculum, the establishment of a new administrative system of schooling did in fact have an impact on the way in which the subject developed, and so is relevant to examining evolving conceptions of creative writing.

The introduction of the 11+ as a means of identifying the top 15-25% of pupils who would go to grammar schools had the effect of 'restrain[ing] the primary language curriculum, particularly with the older children, in spite of the fact that more progressive child-centred measures were gaining ground with younger children' (Wyse and Jones, 2008: p.10). Comprehensive schools first emerged in the 1950s in response to three factors: the difficulty of establishing the system nationally as in rural areas it was not sustainable to maintain both grammar and secondary modern schools; concerns about the future pathways of children being so rigidly determined by the 11+ examination; and dissatisfaction with the kind of education that was on offer to pupils attending secondary modern schools. When the Labour government issued a circular to local authorities in 1965 requesting the reorganisation of secondary schools into comprehensives, the 11+

was abolished in almost all areas of the country, leading to the widespread establishment of comprehensive schools in the 1960s and 1970s.

Changing systems of education during the 1950s-1970s coincided with considerable social change in the country. Post war immigration had changed the population of schools considerably, and comprehensive schools in particular were addressing questions about how to engage learners in education as the world opened up and traditional routes of employment changed. English, as a core subject, was under particular pressure to respond to these demands, and to consider pedagogical practices that would respond to the needs of all children regardless of their social background. Conceptions of creative writing that emerged as part of this debate had a significant impact on its role within the curriculum.

#### **2.3.6 The impact of child centred pedagogy on the conception of English and creative writing**

Two reports published during this period, the Plowden Report (1967) and the Bullock Report (1975), had a significant impact on the ways in which the English subject area would respond to these pressures, and on developing conceptions of creative writing. Plowden (DES, 1967) echoed Newbolt's concept of the co-dependence of language and thought, and emphasised the pupil's lived experience as the domain in which 'words come to life in the setting of sensory experience and vivid imaginative experience' in pupils' writing (DES: p.210). The report's child-centred position welcomed the greater freedom in the English curriculum that followed the decline of the 11+, declaring that 'The gloomy forebodings of the decline of knowledge which would follow progressive methods have been discredited. Our review is a report of progress and a spur to more' (p.461).

Child-centeredness was particularly evident in Plowden's approach to English, which 'permeates the whole curriculum as it permeates the whole of life' (p.233). The conception of English here was less that of a body of knowledge about literature and language being handed down to pupils for their improvement, but rather a construction of meaning established through what was important to and 'deeply felt' by the child (p.220). By the 1960s, use of graded reading schemes was widespread, and Plowden raised concerns that this may 'clamp down on children's interests'. The value of literature was conceived still as an improving force, but here it was also portrayed in relation to the development of children's future aspirations, and to their ability to construct the narrative of their own lives.

We are convinced of the value of stories for children, stories told to them, stories read to them and the stories they read for themselves. It is through story as well as through drama and other forms of creative work that children grope for the meaning of the experiences that have already overtaken them, savour again their pleasures and reconcile themselves to their own inconsistencies and those of others...As children listen to stories, as they take down the books from the library shelves, they may, as Graham Greene suggests in 'The Lost Childhood', be choosing their future and the values that will dominate it. (DES, 1967: p.216)

Literature was conceived as requiring more from the teacher than knowledge alone; the teacher's own response to literature was significant in developing pedagogy because 'a teacher can only share with children what he understands and likes. He can only choose wisely what to share when he has both a well developed critical sense and an understanding of children' (p.221).

Where earlier reports conceived of English as a weapon to use against the 'slovenly, ungrammatical' speech of working class children (Board of Education, 1938: p.200), Plowden considered this unhelpful in developing the vitality of language in both speech and writing:

Usage is always changing and teachers must not burden their pupils with the observance of outworn conventions. Correctness should be sacrificed rather than fluency, vigour or clarity of meaning.... Speech is how people speak, not how some authority thinks they ought to speak. The test of good speech is whether any particular use of language is effective in the context in which it is used, not whether it conforms to certain 'rules'. (DES, 1967: p.211-212)

The approach here – both child-centred and pragmatic – was continued in Plowden's attitude to technical aspects of writing, which should be addressed 'without worrying about inessentials' when 'inaccuracy impedes communication':

Some 'correction', if so inadequate a word must be used, should be directed towards inaccuracies, not so much the careless slips that everyone makes throughout life, as the repeated errors in sentence construction, in punctuation and in spelling which get in the way of communication. Similarly such techniques as paragraphing can be taught when it can be made clear to children that the technique will serve their purpose in writing. With the abler children, there is room for some concern about form and style so long as it does not make children self-conscious. (DES, 1967: p.222)

For Plowden, like Newbolt, the functional and technical aspects of writing are important, but they do not detract from the essential conception of creative writing as an art form which permeates the report.

### **2.3.7 Creative writing as self-expression**

Plowden's report is scathing about the use of writing course books which attempt to offer structured exercises for children's writing, seeing no usefulness in the approaches that they promote: 'They [children] learn to write by writing and not by exercises in filling in missing words' (1967: p.222). In contrast, although unhappy with the term 'creative writing' which is considered 'rather grand', Plowden gives an 'unqualified welcome' to the significant growth that has taken place in the practice itself, which is reported as being widespread in a growing number of schools.

Plowden describes creative writing as that which is 'personal' and in which 'the writers are communicating something that has really engaged their minds and their imaginations... It is nearly always natural and real and sometimes has qualities which make it most moving to read' (p.219). Here, the conception of creative writing as intimately connected with self-expression is evident: '*their* minds', '*their* imaginations', 'natural', 'real', 'moving'. This is contrasted with practice which encourages children to 'copy the hackneyed phrases which adults often use as a substitute for thought' (p.221). The subjectiveness of terms such as 'natural', 'real' and 'moving' are not elaborated on in the report, and little is said about how such writing might be encouraged, although the need to validate the child's own life experiences runs throughout, and the conviction here, as in preceding reports, is that 'the quality of children's reading will certainly influence their writing' (1967: p.219).

### **2.3.8 'Personal development' and the English curriculum**

In the 1970s, an approach to English that developed Plowden's concerns established itself, challenging the Leavisite orthodoxy of English. The 'London School' emerged from University of London Institute of Education, and is most closely associated with Britton, Barnes, Rosen and Martin. Their approach has been described as the 'English as language' paradigm (Davison and Dowson, 2009: p. 29), emphasising speaking and listening as the key to all learning, including creative writing. Their work embraced the new comprehensives and diverse school populations, and promoted an approach to language development that affirmed the child's own language use and saw this as the starting point for all development of language, thought and learning. This period was significant in developing conceptions of creative writing that were primarily concerned with privileging the self-expressive, promoting the connection between speech and writing, and conceptualising creative writing as an act of personal development.

The London School influence can be seen in the major plank of policy development in English in the 1970s, *A Language for Life* (DES, 1975), also known as the Bullock Report. Language took a central place in the report's recommendations. There was a particular emphasis on speaking and listening, with a trend observed in the report that pupils appeared to do a great deal of the latter, and nowhere near enough of the former. The report estimated (on the basis of research) that teachers spent around 75% of all learning time talking to their pupils, and that the limited time available for dialogue and debate curtailed the development of genuine thinking (1975: p.142). The teacher dominance identified in the report was seen as a serious threat to a child-centred curriculum that promoted personal growth and intellectual development.

In relation to literature, the report called into question the concept of literature as an improving force on the individual and the nation.

In recent years it has been questioned whether literature does in fact make the reader a better and more sensitive human being. What was a matter of self-evident truth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is no longer exempt from question. Few would subscribe to the simple view that it offers models for living which the reader lifts from the pages. In fact, Sampson [in *English for the English*, 1921] made the point '... let me beg teachers to take a sane view of literature. Let us have no pose or affectation about it. Reading Blake to a class is not going to turn boys into saints'. (DES, 1975: p.124)

Bullock asserted that the real value of literature was in its ability to engage learners in 'an encounter with language in its most complex and varied forms' and to offer 'a valuable source of imaginative insight' (1975: p.125). This concept of English focussed on personal growth as opposed to moral improvement, and regarded the reader as able to empathise, to contemplate human experience, and to gain insight into personal experiences and dilemmas. The reader-response model of criticism was paramount here, stressing the

need to 'to ask questions of the text and use one's own framework of experience in interpreting it' (1975: p.129).

This conception was set against two opposing poles commonly at work in classrooms: the text as a springboard for discussion not of the text but of issues that it might raise; and the text as the focus for detailed analysis and close reading. This latter Leavisite approach to criticism was recognised as being dependant on the teacher's 'deeper knowledge of literature in general...[and] wider experience of life' (1975: p.135). The Bullock report indicated that by the 1970s, secondary school English teachers (most of whom were recognised in the report as holding an English Literature degree) were likely to be well versed in practical criticism. Bullock's concern was that the close critical analysis of text may threaten the pupil.

In a very real sense a pupil is himself being judged each time he responds in class to a piece of literature, particularly a poem. More is at stake than his knowledge of the text. Is the value judgement he forms the one the teacher finds acceptable? Is he betraying himself, he may well ask, as one who lacks discrimination? In no other area of classroom operations is there quite the same degree of vulnerability, with poetry the most exposing element of all. (DES, 1975: p.131)

Bullock conceived of literature as a deeply personal experience, and the classroom as a difficult environment in which to expose attitudes, views and opinions about it. The report identified that close reading may be a useful approach in the study of literature when used appropriately and well, but that its widespread use and misuse, and its dominance as a literary tool, was potentially harmful:

TS Eliot once said of practical criticism: 'It cannot be recommended to young people without grave danger of deadening their sensibility ... and confounding the genuine development of taste with the sham acquisition of it'. But it is to be found, in however skeletal or distorted a form, in some clearly inappropriate situations. (DES, 1975: p.135)



In pedagogical terms, the teacher's role was to 'share' the exploration of literature, and the ability to 'contain' literature knowledge in this process 'is a measure of his [sic] skill at its highest level.' (1975: p.134). The relationship between text, teacher and pupil that emerges as a concept of literary studies in the Bullock report was perhaps the first time that it had been articulated so strongly in the policy discourse.

Personal growth was also emphasised in the conception of creative writing constructed in the Bullock report, though not without some qualification. Again, the term 'creative writing' was seen as problematic, lacking a distinct definition, and therefore encompassing a wide range of activities and approaches, from 'an attempt to use language to recreate experience inventively'; to striving for 'effect' and producing a 'purple patch'; and adopting creative writing as a label to be applied 'to any kind of writing' (1975: p.164). The practice of presenting children with a prepared stimulus (an object, some music, an art work) in order to stimulate writing had become widespread at this stage, and was roundly criticised.

Bullock recommended that 'personal writing' should arise from the lived experience of children. The development of writing technique was seen as an area that had been largely absent in creative writing pedagogy, and one which was required for progression and for the pupil's satisfaction. The relationship between text, teacher and pupil explored in Bullock's views on literature was implicit too in the report's conception of creative writing, and was closely tied to the development of writer intention:

Moreover, the writing should be constantly developing in its capacity to fulfil the demands this context [the lived experience] produces. Wherever spontaneity is exclusively valued this kind of development can be inhibited. Children reach a point where they need new techniques, having run through the satisfaction of their spontaneous performances...The solution lies in a recognition on the part of

teachers that a writer's intention is prior to his need for techniques. The teacher who aims to extend the pupil's power as a writer must therefore work first upon his intentions, and then upon the techniques appropriate to them. (DES, 1975: pp.163-164)

Bullock identified 'expressive writing', using language that was 'close to the speaker', as central. The pedagogic approach in this conception is one of 'encouraging vitality and fluency in the expressive writing that is nearest to speech' (1975: p.167). This was seen as a way of validating the pupil's own experiences and opinions, and recognising the exposure of vulnerabilities that could be part of this process:

In offering his feelings and beliefs the child is in fact presenting himself in the light he would like to be seen in; acceptance of what he offers confirms for him that picture, and this is probably the deepest kind of satisfaction to be had from the whole process. Again, this is not an indiscriminate undertaking; it matters who plays the part of respondent. (DES, 1975: p.165-6)

The conception of English as a subject that is closely connected to the pupil 'self' was reinforced in the report, and the relationship between text, teacher and pupil was seen as vital.

The position taken in previous reports about the formal teaching of grammar in isolation from the use of language was reinforced by Bullock, and was presented alongside an evidence base that argued that formal, isolated grammar teaching was ineffective (pp.168-170). The report recommended that whilst all teachers should 'take deliberate measures to improve his pupil's ability to handle language' this should be carried out in the context of real language use. The teacher's role was to encourage natural curiosity about language, seizing 'the opportunity of pursuing some general question about language as it arises from usage' (p.162). Prescriptive methodologies were criticised for

tending towards negative responses to children's writing which had the effect of damaging the learner's confidence and consequently their aspiration to achieve.

### **2.3.9 Emerging challenges to creative writing pedagogy**

By the end of the 1970s, however, concern was mounting about 'falling standards' in English. Once again intense questions about the nature of English and how it should be taught coincided with a time of significant social, economic and political upheaval. The country was led by four prime ministers in the space of a decade; suffered severe economic recession; saw unprecedented cuts in all public services including education; experienced raised inflation and unemployment, and witnessed a near total breakdown in relations between government and the unions during the Winter of Discontent in 1978. Faith in the power of education to improve people's lives was shaken, and dissatisfaction with the quality of education in primary and secondary schools grew (Chitty, 2004: p.31).

In 1976, Prime Minister James Callaghan's 'Great Debate' speech at Ruskin College caused a new kind of consternation among the teaching profession. His speech called for a national debate on almost all aspects of education, on the premise that industry was unhappy with the level of skills demonstrated by school-leavers. Callaghan called for 'a more technological bias in science teaching that will lead towards practical applications in industry rather than towards academic studies' and for research to assess the skills required by industry so that a curriculum could be built around those needs (Callaghan, 1976). This adult-needs view of education was in direct opposition to child-centred and personal development focussed pedagogies, which Callaghan saw as 'dubious'. The needs of industry and science were foregrounded in the speech, with an implication that schools paid too much attention to the humanities. 'Why is it that 30,000 vacancies for

students in science and engineering in our universities and polytechnics were not taken up last year while the humanities courses were full?' (Callaghan, 1976). Teachers did not welcome the perceived political interference in curriculum, seeing it as an attack on their profession, and on their place in a democratic society (Timmins, 1996: p.321). Callaghan's speech foreshadowed a growing tendency in the 1980s and 1990s towards political interference in the curriculum that would have serious repercussions on creative writing pedagogy, as explored later in this chapter.

In the same period, the Black Papers, a series of five papers edited by C.B Cox (Professor of English Literature at Manchester University) added to teachers' discontent. They were highly critical of the impact of 'progressive education' on standards and behaviour and called for changes in choice, competition and parental control in order to attack the problem of 'failing schools'. 'Schools that few wish to attend should... be closed and their staff dispersed' (Cox and Boyson, cited in Chitty, 2004: p.46). The issue of identifying and tackling 'failure' in schools was to become a major theme in education for the next three decades, and creative writing was to become a particularly contentious issue in attempts to raise standards in education.

#### **2.3.10 Political control of English: the development of the National Curriculum**

In 1984 the Conservative government outlined its intention to raise standards in education through the development of a National Curriculum. The 1980s were dominated by neo-liberal policies, that 'accelerated the closing down of unprofitable industries and promoted a profound social and economic restructuring' (Jones, 2003: p.107). The principles of neo-liberalism were applied equally to public services, including education.

An emphasis on cost reduction, privatisation and deregulation was accompanied by vigorous measures against the institutional bases of Conservatism's opponents, and the promotion of new forms of public management. The outcome of these processes was a form of governance in which market principles were advanced at the same time as central authority was strengthened. (Jones, 2003: p.107).

The 'central authority' exerted in education was expressed through the prescription of curriculum content. However, exerting political control over the content of the English curriculum, and in particular over issues relating to creative writing, proved to be a difficult process.

Research carried out by the Assessment Performance Unit and the National Writing Project in the mid-1980s indicated that the absence of creative writing from children's experience of writing in schools contributed to negative attitudes to writing, and that a focus on 'transcription skills rather than composition' was unhelpful (Wyse and Jones, 2008: p.14). Davison and Dowson suggest that this did not correspond with the government's preferred approach, which was to raise standards in English by strengthening grammatical knowledge rather than developing understanding through experience of creative writing (Davison and Dowson, 2009: p.32). Two reports commissioned by the government to pursue this objective – *English from 5 to 16* (DES, 1984) chaired by C.B Cox and *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Teaching of English Language* chaired by Sir John Kingman (DES, 1988) – failed to endorse formal grammar teaching, recommending instead exploration of how knowledge about language could be developed meaningfully for pupils, and expressing views that were broadly in sympathy with Newbolt (Davison and Dowson, 2009: p.33).

Furthermore, Kingman promoted a view that the literary, creative context of English – including creative writing – was complementary to, rather than at odds with, an adult-

needs view of the curriculum, since 'Children who read Tolkien and then write their own fairy stories are engaged in a total process of language development which, among other advantages, may one day contribute to the writing of clear, persuasive reports about commerce or science' (DES, 1988: p.11). Despite the government's best efforts to exert political control over English and to focus curriculum attention on functional and technical aspects of writing, both Cox's and Kingman's reports supported the idea that creative writing was an artistic, literary activity which had the potential for practical and vocational applications and outcomes.

The Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) project was set up by the Department of Education and Science in 1989 partly in response to government frustration that the Kingman committee had failed to back formal grammar teaching in the curriculum (Davison and Dowson, 2009: p.33). It was a continuation of a political attempt to privilege the formal teaching of grammar over creative writing. However, the teaching package that emanated from LINC similarly rejected formal grammar teaching. The government's response was to refuse to publish the material, and furthermore to retain Crown copyright, so blocking the publication and dissemination of the materials. This is a highly significant moment in the history of the subject of English, as the political censorship of this act implies a claim of governmental ownership of the subject, its principles and its pedagogy (Davison and Dowson, 2009: p.33-35).

The first version of the National Curriculum for English, devised under the leadership of C. B. Cox and published in 1989 (DES, 1989), to some extent continued to confound political pressures to comply with a conception of the subject which was biased towards functional and technical aspects of English. It was greeted with some accord by teachers,

who perceived that the curriculum had been built on 'common good practice in English teaching' (Davison and Dowson, 2009: p.35). The professional judgement of teachers in selecting literature was respected, and the literary context of the creative writing process was acknowledged, as was teachers' expertise in identifying texts that would engage and respond to the needs and interests of their pupils. The description of writing practice set out an approach encouraged the development of collaborative writing and pupils as critical readers of each other's work.

However, the acceptance of the conception of English and creative writing promoted in the report did not necessarily reflect a change in view at government level; rather the publication of Cox's curriculum may have reflected the government's concern to expedite the publication of this core element of the National Curriculum. It has been suggested by Cox that the Secretary of State only agreed to publish the report 'as long as it was printed back to front, with the statements of attainment and programmes of study first...and the rationale last' (Cox, 1992: p.256), perhaps in an attempt to promote targets and content rather than the philosophy and educational theories that informed them. Cox agreed to the changes for fear that objections may have led to the entire report being withdrawn, damaging the aspect of the report which he identified as his 'greatest satisfaction...that children should practice the art of writing in a variety of forms' (Cox, 1992: p.257).

Subsequent revisions to the National Curriculum afforded the government with opportunities to reshape the position of literature and writing, with significant consequences for the conception of English and creative writing. The revisions aimed to 'slim down' an overburdened curriculum, and address issues about assessment. However, it has been argued that by 1995 (when the full revisions were in place) not only

was the curriculum still overloaded, but also that the publication of league tables based on a national testing framework had jeopardised the 'child-centred and experience-based integrated curriculum' (Webb and Vulliamy, 1999: p.132) on which much of the creative writing practice promoted by Cox and Kingman had been based. In its place was an emphasis on 'tackling the basics' that 'had more to do with the obsessions of the (then) Conservative administration than it does with the formation of an English curriculum to meet the needs of...pupils' (Boustead, 2000: p.14). In the revised curriculum, writing included the production of narrative, poems, script and non-fiction pieces, but without the conception of 'a writing classroom' that had been evident in the Cox curriculum (Davison and Dowson, 2009: p.40). Rather, an emphasis was placed on vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and grammar which could be 'easily measured' by teachers (Davison and Dowson, 2009: p.41).

The period in which the National Curriculum was developed and revised can therefore be seen as the beginning of the end of the conception of creative writing as an artistic practice in primary and secondary education. Conceptions of creative writing continued to narrow during the 1990s and into the first decade of the new century. This is a key concern of this research, which examines how teachers' practice of the *art* of creative writing affects their pedagogy.

### **2.3.11 Creative writing and the National Literacy Strategy: the politicisation of pedagogy**

When the Labour government came to power in 1997, its claimed aims for education were to raise standards and promote social inclusion. Key to achieving these aims was the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in 1998 (DfEE, 1998). The NLS



introduced target setting that determined the percentage of pupils who should reach the 'expected' level for writing at 7, 11 and 14 years old. As noted in Chapter One, by the end of the Labour government's 13 years in power, the target set for attainment in writing had still not been met (Ofsted, 2009).

The setting of, and difficulty in, reaching government targets has given rise to much research into the effects and effectiveness of the NLS and the Primary National and Secondary National Strategies that superseded it in 2003. Revisions to the National Curriculum and new frameworks for the implementation of the NLS have attempted to rationalise content and approach across the two policy strands. There has been a plethora of published frameworks and guidance, and the NLS has undergone a number of name changes. The table below summarises significant policy developments for the National Curriculum and the NLS. For clarity, I will refer to the suite of policy developed under the National Literacy Strategy (such as the Primary Framework and the Secondary National Strategy) as the NLS.

**Table 1: National Curriculum and National Literacy Strategy Developments 1989-2012**

<b>National Curriculum (NC)</b>		<b>National Literacy Strategy (NLS)</b>	
National Curriculum introduced in schools (DES, 1989)	1989	National Literacy Strategy: Framework for Teaching (Primary) (DfEE, 1998)	1998
Revised National Curriculum (DFE, 1995)	1995	Grammar for Writing introduced (DfEE, 2000)	2000
Revised National Curriculum for secondary schools (DfEE/QCA, 1999)	2000	Secondary National Strategy Framework (DfEE, 2001)	2001
Revised Secondary Curriculum (QCA, 2007a; 2007b)	2008	Primary National Strategy (Excellence and Enjoyment) (DfES, 2003)	2003
Review of the National Curriculum announced	2011	Primary Framework for Literacy (DfES, 2006)	2006
		Renewed Framework for Secondary English (QCA, 2008)	2008

The NLS has been the government's key tool in addressing the attainment shortfall in both reading and writing, setting out an approach to literacy teaching that attempts to make teaching both more accountable and more consistent. Much of the research that has taken place during the implementation of the strategy identifies a reductionist trend in the curriculum, in which the teaching of English has come to be concerned with 'basic reading and writing competence alone' (Alexander, 2004: p.25). The NLS has had a profound influence on the conception of what English is and what it is for, and has all but erased a conception of creative writing as an art in the curriculum in favour of functional and technical approaches to writing.

Evidence of the strategy's influence on the English subject area can be seen in the discourse that has developed in the scholarly response to the reform, which has identified a reduced conception of English to literacy 'standards' that are closely tied to a national assessment framework. The discourse identifies that the NLS extended political control beyond the realm of content, setting out a highly prescribed pedagogy. This is perhaps most clearly identified in the 'literacy hour' introduced in 1998, which required teachers to follow a set timetable of one hour broken into 15 minute units that included whole class, individual and group activities. The literacy hour, which was relaxed in 2003 following widespread criticism from teachers and academic researchers, was seen to be contradictory to the need to develop opportunities for extended reading and writing and counter to the development of positive teacher-pupil inter-action (English *et al.*, 2002: p.11). This is highly relevant to the nature of the pupil-teacher-text relationship that Bullock had identified as central to the development of successful pedagogy in writing (DES, 1975).

The NLS has been widely criticised not only for prescribing pedagogy, but for building pedagogy on a weak basis. Although the reforms claimed to be built on evidence from a variety of sources including inspection reports and research into school effectiveness and child development (Beard, 2003), it has been argued that there is a lack of 'empirical evidence related to language and literacy pedagogy' (Wyse, 2003: p.913). The conception of writing has been seen as dominated by inappropriate grammar teaching objectives (Wyse, 2003: p.913), reinforced by the Grammar for Writing guidelines which formed part of the development of the strategy in 2000 (DfEE, 2000).

Central to this wave of policy reform was a degree of pedagogical prescription that had not been seen before. In relation to literacy, teachers were being told not just what to teach, but how to teach. It has been argued that this has developed a conception of the teachers' role that recasts them as 'technicians' (Alexander, 2004: p.11) and 'managerialist' (Wray and Medwell, 2006: p.204), delivering pedagogy that has been developed elsewhere, but not bringing into play any of their own pedagogical knowledge or judgement, and suppressing their role as 'transformative intellectuals' (Giroux, 1985) .

Much of the ensuing research has focussed on the failure of government to develop evidence based approaches to pedagogy, in favour of a pressure-support management model that attempts to put pressure on schools through target setting, and offers support through directives about curriculum content and a highly prescriptive but weakly conceived pedagogic approach (see, for example, Shiel, 2003; Marshall, 2006; English *et al.*, 2002; Jolliffe, 2006; Moss, 2009; Alexander, 2004; Alexander *et al.*, 1996; Wyse, 2003; Andrews, 2002; Allison, 2010). This is a central concern of this research, which seeks to identify how the pedagogy of creative writing can be strengthened through

teachers' critical reflection on their engagement in creative practice, and aims to develop an evidence base of the influence of such practice on pedagogy.

Alexander contends that the strategy 'shows little awareness of evidence from outside the charmed circle of government and its agencies' (Alexander, 2004: p.17) and that this resistance to research means that 'Under our now highly centralised and interventive education system those who have the greatest power to prescribe pedagogy seem to display the poorest understanding of it' (Alexander, 2004: p.29). For some commentators, the prescription of pedagogy has led to a situation where 'knowledge about teaching is, as it were, externalised: the strategies, frameworks, curricula...are designed to be, to a considerable extent, immune to teacher influence' (Jones, 2006: pp.86-87). Much of the research also criticises the NLS for attempting to deal with the complexity inherent in measuring literacy by reducing its meaning to knowledge that can be contained and managed within a checklist:

The framework itself atomised what it meant to be literate, for 5- to 14-year-olds, by listing around one hundred competencies a year for pupils to cover. In the main these lists comprised items of knowledge, the implication being that pupils would know how to use them, having been taught them. Each item was arranged under one of three headings – word, sentence and text level. The nature of the lists suggested that these items were discrete, acting independently of one another. The idea that the effectiveness of a sentence might be dependent not so much on its grammatical make-up as on the meaning of the words and the force of their communication was absent from the document; so too was the context in which any given sentence or word might appear. (Marshall, 2006: pp.105-106)

The competencies listed in the NLS served not only as learning objectives for pupils, but as an accountability framework for teachers. The virtual 100% take up of the NLS (which was a voluntary plank of policy, unlike the National Curriculum) has been attributed to teachers' fear that 'they would fail their [Ofsted] inspection if they did not conform to the

suggestions of the government, which came via a very official looking ring binder carrying the DfEE's logo' (Marshall, 2006).

Literacy, language and literature were perceived in the NLS as almost entirely separate realms, and the dominance of literacy has left little time for other aspects of English in the curriculum, particularly creative writing. Curriculum time has been dominated by activities that are directed at helping pupils to accumulate knowledge that will enable them to achieve the expected level in national attainment tests. 'Washback' has been identified by a number of researchers as responsible for a degree of narrowing of the curriculum and elimination of creativity and imagination in teaching and learning (Marshall, 2008; Shiel, 2003). Webb and Vulliamy's research into the impact of the national strategies suggests that while some teachers perceive that the NLS has had some positive benefits on their classroom practice, including 'a more structured and focused approach to their teaching where lessons are more carefully planned and lesson objectives are shared and reviewed with pupils', this has been 'at great cost to the morale, confidence and creativity of the teaching profession' (2007: pp.577-578). They conclude that the continued pressures of testing 'seem likely to constrain severely the development of innovation and experimentation in teaching and continue to have deleterious consequences for pupil learning' (Webb and Vulliamy, 2007: p.578). The theme of teachers' own innovation and creativity in developing pedagogy is an important one in this research.

The NLS and subsequent strategies have been the constructs within which literature and creative writing have been housed in schools for over a decade. The dominance of literacy objectives that focus on technical and functional accuracy had the effect of diminishing the role of literature and creative writing within the English curriculum; within

this narrow conception of English, literature and creative writing became primarily devices for demonstrating literacy skill. By 2005, Ofsted's chief inspector David Bell expressed concern that one impact of the strategy was that pupils were increasingly denied the experience of reading whole novels, indeed whole texts of any kind, in favour of extracts that served the purpose of addressing the range of 'text types' advocated in the strategy (Bell, 2005, cited in Marshall, 2006: p.106). It seemed that within seven years of implementing a national strategy that aimed to raise attainment in literacy, books had become incidental to the process of reading.

The government ended its contract with Capita (the company who deliver the NLS) in 2011, and, in the context of the fifth National Curriculum review, the future of English and creative writing remains unclear. However, the NLS benefitted from unprecedented funding - £155 million over 5 years (Times Educational Supplement, 2010) - to support the dissemination of resources to all schools and the implementation of professional development to train teachers in its pedagogy. The resources remain available to teachers via an archived website<sup>8</sup>. It is likely, therefore, that conceptions of English and creative writing and pedagogical perspectives promoted in the NLS will continue to exert influence in classrooms for some time to come.

#### **2.4 Conceptualising literacy in the primary and secondary curriculum: implications for creative writing pedagogy**

Examination of the position of literacy in the English curriculum necessitates some exploration of the concept, since the dominance of literacy objectives seems to have diminished the role of creative writing and reduced conceptions of literature in the

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<sup>8</sup><http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110809091832/http://www.teachingandlearningresources.org.uk>

curriculum. Literacy came to occupy this central position as part of the government's attempts to raise standards, as explored earlier in this chapter. However, the targets set by government have not been reached. In the face then of both a failure to reach targets and a diminished English curriculum, I will explore the kinds of literacies that are conceptualised in the national strategies.

Literacy as a major element of education policy and distinct area of curricular planning is a relatively recent phenomenon. Lankshear and Knobel attribute the prioritisation of literacy in first world political discourse since the 1970s not only to the 'discovery' of a large adult 'illiterate' population who were unprepared for the workplace challenges of the post-industrial age, but to changes in the way that literacy is defined and conceived (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006: pp. 7-21). Lay interpretations and dictionary definitions simplify the matter of literacy to the ability to read and write. However, this does not address issues about how, what and why one reads and writes, and scholarly opinions about defining literacy vary in approach. What is broadly agreed is that at global and local levels literacy is 'conceived as an important determinant of the life chances of individuals and of social and economic well-being at the level of nations' (Thorn, 2009). In recent years, literacy has increasingly been identified as a factor not only in achieving economic benefit, but as a significant factor in social, cultural, civic and individual health and well-being (Johnson *et al.*, 2006: p.10). While this may be a matter of broad agreement, defining what literacy is and what it means to be literate invites a range of responses. In the quest to understand scholarly responses to the matter of literacy, Roberts identifies three major approaches that have been developed in constructing concepts of literacy over the last half century: quantitative, qualitative and pluralist (Roberts, 1995).

#### **2.4.1 Quantitative, qualitative and pluralist approaches to literacy**

Quantitative approaches to literacy rely on fixed measurements, sometimes determined by the number of years an individual has spent in formal education. Roberts identifies this as problematic because, 'a child with five years of schooling in one context may be no 'more' literate than a child with three years schooling in a different situation' (Roberts, 1995: p.415). In addition, such an approach does not allow for the variances that may exist among individual children's literacy even when their schooling situations are identical. More recently, quantitative approaches have been dictated not by the amount of schooling but by reading and writing tests that equate to 'reading ages' and attempt to determine an exact point at which an individual can be identified as literate or illiterate; a borderline that the literate can cross, and the illiterate cannot. This approach conceptualises literacy as a fixed, discrete entity. Roberts argues that such positivist approaches are of little use in helping us to understand what literacy means, and that their appeal (and widespread use) is in being able to claim to measure literacy 'levels' against policy implementation, allowing policy-makers to indicate whether or not policy has achieved success and plot the use of resources accordingly (Roberts, 1995: pp.414-417). The problem here is that without a deepened understanding of what literacy means, policy responses are based on a superficial understanding and weak conceptualisation of literacy. This can be seen as relevant to the criticism of the NLS's approach to literacy, and its impact on pedagogy.

Qualitative approaches to literacy have been developed in response both to increasing scepticism about the concept that reading ages can be reliably and precisely measured, and to a belief that quantitative approaches are inevitably subject to socio-cultural biases that are not reliably reflected in testing outcomes. The term qualitative is used by Roberts to describe those approaches that tend to be concerned with the qualities and attributes of



being a literate individual. Qualitative definitions of literacy are wide ranging, encompassing concepts that are bound up in notions of, for example, independence, social engagement, deepened understanding of the world, and self-efficacy. Definitions often focus on describing the effect of literacy on individuals, enabling people to be independent, to engage effectively in activities and in society, to broaden their understanding of the world, and to explore the self and the wider world (see, for example, Luna *et al.*, 2000; Luce-Kapler and Klinger, 2005; Johnson *et al.*, 2006). They seek to deepen understanding of what being literate means by exploring the power of literacy to influence individuals, but in doing so there is a risk of encompassing such a wide range of possible definitions as to be 'thoroughly confusing: literacy, it seems, can mean whatever people want it to mean' (Roberts, 1995: p.419). This is taken further by Kress, who discusses the idea that the term literacy has 'gathered up' a wide range of meanings, and concludes 'Something that has come to mean everything, is likely not to mean very much at all' (Kress, 2003: p.22). In addition, Roberts asserts that qualitative approaches are frequently prescriptive in nature, expressing an idealised form of what literacy *should* be, rather than helping us to understand what it is. This recalls Plowden's assertion, in relation to spoken language, that 'Speech is how people speak, not how some authority thinks they ought to speak' (DES, 1967: p.212). While the plethora of definitions found in qualitative approaches may be confusing, this reflects the complexity of literacy itself, and in this sense qualitative definitions resist the superficiality of quantitative approaches.

Pluralist approaches exist within a theoretical framework that recognises a range of literacies, rather than defining literacy as a single unitary concept. These multiple modes of literacy include basic and functional literacy (the decoding and encoding skills that enable individuals to take part in reading and writing activities in everyday life); social and cultural literacy, in which 'literacies are bound up with social, institutional and cultural

relationships, and can only be understood when they are situated within their social, cultural and historical contexts' (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006: p.12); higher-order literacy that enables people to 'work out multi-step problems by oneself' (Roberts, 1995: p.420); and critical literacy, emerging from and alongside critical pedagogies of Paulo Freire, that explore 'the need to understand the complex relationship between language and power' (Cooper and White, 2006: p.85). The pluralist approach clearly rejects the quantitative concept that literacy is a discrete, fixed entity that can be easily benchmarked and measured. It differs from the qualitative approach in its movement from an idealised concept of what literacy should be towards an understanding that the meaning of literacy is highly dependent on social and cultural context: 'what literacy *is* is entirely a matter of how reading and writing are conceived and practiced within particular social settings' (Lankshear and Lawler, 1987: p.43). Schools form the 'particular social setting' of the case study that is central to this research, and, as has been outlined in this chapter, conceptions of reading and writing – and of literature and creative writing – have been narrowed in the face of an increasingly high stakes, target driven curriculum and assessment framework.

Roberts concludes that efforts to arrive at a single definition of literacy are misdirected, since the conceptualisation of literacy as a fixed entity fails to comprehend its complexity. He sees more value in the opportunity to elucidate understanding of the specific traits of different *literacies*, identifying the need for future research to focus on writing, redressing the historical bias towards research that has focussed on reading (Roberts, 1995: pp.428-430). This may become more relevant as the term literacy increasingly takes on a metaphorical meaning in everyday life, where we frequently hear about visual, financial, emotional and other 'literacies' as a description of competence in the field. It certainly

becomes even more complex in responding to the new literacies that continue to emerge in the digital age (Kress, 2003; Lankshear and Knobel, 2006).

#### **2.4.2 Literacies and creative writing**

The pluralist approach recognises both the multiple modes of literacies and the crucial importance of context and setting to defining meaning in literacies. This is highly relevant to conceptions of creative writing in the curriculum, and in particular in relation to the assessment driven model of pedagogy. Meek identifies that when it comes to value, some literacies seem to be more equal than others:

The great divide in literacy is not between those who can read and write and those who have not yet learned how to. It is between those who have discovered what kinds of literacy society values and how to demonstrate their competencies in ways that earn recognition (Meek, 1991, cited in Roberts, 1995: p.421).

The competencies that 'earn recognition' within the NLS show 'a lamentable detachment from questions of identity, culture and history' (Alexander, 2004: p.28), rejecting a conception of literacy that acknowledges that 'To ask people to read or write is to ask them to engage in an act of self-identification that echoes biography, history and a sense of place' (Murphy, 2002, cited in Cremin and Baker, 2010: p.21). It similarly rejects Freire's concept of the teaching of writing as an 'artistic act' (Freire, 1985: p.79), and has eliminated the space for the negotiation of meaning-making that is associated with creative writing (English *et al.*, 2002: p.11). The perception of creative writing as an artistic act inextricably linked to other aspects of intellectual development was evident in the discourse of Newbolt, Plowden, Bullock and Cox between the 1920s and 1980s. This contrasts starkly with the reductionist 'checklist' conception of literacy promoted by the NLS.

It is perhaps interesting to note that the committees that contributed to the four reports mentioned above were either chaired by or included representation of writers, continuing the influence of writers on literary studies that began with Arnold. The literal presence of writers in influencing policy was evident throughout this period, during which creative writing was conceived as an act of meaning-making that was essentially artistic. Post Cox, the influence of writers has been largely absent from the policy making process, and creative writing has been marginalised in the pursuit of technical and functional conceptions of writing that can be tested through a narrow assessment framework. In the next section of this chapter, I move from the writer's presence in policy to the writer in the school, and consider how the writer's presence in classrooms has influenced conceptions of creative writing practice, and how cultural policy has stimulated changes in the role of the writer in school.

## **2.5 Culture, creativity and the writer in schools**

This research is concerned with the engagement of teachers in creative writing practice, and considers the role that professional writers may have in developing teachers' knowledge, experience and understanding of creative writing. It is therefore pertinent to explore the way in which writers tend to work in school, and to analyse how this exposes a conception of the writer's role. It is also necessary to consider the ways in which cultural policy and initiatives concerned with promoting creativity in education have influenced developing conceptions of the role of the writer in schools.

### **2.5.1 Dominant models of writers in schools**

An interesting seeming contradiction appeared to take place during the period of the NLS's grip on writing in the curriculum, from the late 1990s until the present day. Whilst literature appeared to become less important, the role of the professional writer in the classroom grew in breadth and scale, largely due to developments in cultural policy initiated by the Labour government.

By the late 1990s, writer visits to schools had become well established, and had been supported by national funding from the Arts Council of England for a generation. Two dominant models had emerged by this time; the author visit, and the 'writer-in-school', focussing on creative writing. The author visit was designed to interest pupils in a particular book or books, often engaging with large numbers of pupils, and focussing on reading for pleasure. The 'writer-in-school' tended to be concerned with sparking interest in the process of writing, and was most often built around a workshop format. For writers, the workshop format often tended to include a performance or reading, often to large numbers, followed by short workshops with individual classes.

Jones and Lockwood's analysis of the writer in education explores both the writers' intentions in taking part in these activities and a range of pupil benefits that result from such an event<sup>9</sup> (Jones and Lockwood, 1998). The writers' views varied considerably. Pullman believed that a prerequisite for a good workshop was that pupils were already engaged, active readers, familiar with his work; Mark however was more interested in how she could influence young people who find writing difficult. McCaughrean seemed

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<sup>9</sup> Jones and Lockwood interviewed and in some instances observed the practice of six writers whose work is read widely by young people and who have considerable experience of working in schools: fiction writers Jan Mark, Geraldine McCaughrean, and Philip Pullman; and poets John Foster, Judith Nicholls, and Michael Rosen.

unconcerned with whether pupils learn anything or not, but was highly concerned with their level of enjoyment; whereas Foster and Nicholls demonstrated interest in language development, confidence and writing skills. Rosen focussed on the role of the writer in validating not only young people's own use of language, but their life experiences. What is shared across these divergent views is a sense of 'writerliness'; the writers are in school *because* they are writers, and their purpose is strongly connected to reading and writing.

### **2.5.2 Cultural policy and the changing perception of writers in schools**

Over the last decade, however, writers in schools have increasingly been identified as 'creative practitioners', whose role is valued for the contribution they can make to developing broad aspects of young people's creativity rather than focussing on creative writing. This transformation has its roots in both cultural and educational policy, and is strongly connected to the dual ambitions of the Labour government to position culture within a framework of social inclusion, and to adopt a neo-liberal approach to the arts as part of the 'creative industries'.

In the late 1990s and first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, cultural policy was dominated by an instrumental approach that identified the value of culture largely in relation to social and educational outcomes, and promoted culture as a tool that could achieve wider public policy objectives (Belfiore, 2002; Belfiore and Bennett, 2007; Belfiore and Bennett, 2009; Caust, 2003; Cowling, 2004; Davies, 2008). When the Labour government came to power in 1997, there was a clear policy shift towards widening access and addressing social exclusion in cultural policy. *A New Cultural Framework* (DCMS, 1998) was underpinned by a belief that culture can play a part 'in delivering Government policies beyond this department's direct interests' (DCMS, 1998: p.2). Two government reports published

during this period, *Policy Action Team 10*, known as the PAT 10 report, and *All Our Futures*, proved to be particularly significant in shaping conceptions of creativity. They are significant in this research as they form part of the wider influence that continued to move thinking away from perceptions of creative writing as an art, with consequences for the role of the writer in schools.

#### **2.5.2.i Policy Action Team 10: the arts and social exclusion**

This report was led by the Department for Culture Media and Sport and set out the contribution that the arts could make to tackling social exclusion (DCMS, 1999). The *PAT 10* report set in place policy initiatives that had a significant impact on cultural policy for the next decade. It responded to the ambition expressed by the government in *Bringing Britain Together* (Social Exclusion Unit, 1997) to develop a co-ordinated cross-departmental response to social deprivation. The language of the report is therefore rooted in the concerns of social exclusion, with an emphasis on engaging ‘young residents and others particularly at risk of exclusion’, focussing on working in disadvantaged areas and monitoring ‘outcomes’ that are less concerned with arts and culture in themselves than with the way in which the arts can contribute to delivering ‘key outcomes of lower long-term unemployment, less crime, better health and better qualifications’, and ‘help to develop the individual pride, community spirit and capacity for responsibility that enable communities to run regeneration programmes themselves’ (DCMS, 1999: p.2). Thus, the *Policy Action Team 10* report emphasised an instrumental approach to the arts that focussed attention on a range of social outcomes including improving health and reducing unemployment and crime, where impact, at least in some areas, could be measured (Belfiore, 2002).

### **2.5.2.ii All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education**

The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) was jointly established in February 1998 by the departments for Education and Employment (DfEE) and Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) with the following terms of reference:

To make recommendations to the Secretaries of State on the creative and cultural development of young people through formal and informal education: to take stock of current provision and to make proposals for principles, policies and practice (Robinson, 1999: p.2).

The resulting report, *All Our Futures*, influenced cultural policy's engagement with the world of education, and challenged traditional perceptions of the role of creativity and culture in education. Within education research, interest in creativity had been growing throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Craft, 1999). Cultural policy developments began in early years education in 1997 (SCAA, 1997), and pedagogic interest in young people's creative development continued to grow throughout the 90s and into the 2000s (see for example Craft, 2005 ; Craft *et al.*, 2007; Jeffrey, 2006; Wilson, 2009). *All Our Futures* has been described as 'a critique of existing curricular and assessment regimes' (Jones and Thomson, 2008: p.716) that goes beyond promoting creativity as a tool for raising attainment, but rather questions the usefulness of existing systems in motivating and developing the potential of children and young people.

*All Our Futures* proposed three ways of thinking about creativity and culture in education: firstly, that issues of creativity and culture should concern all areas of education, and all subjects, rather than focus on a narrow band of arts subjects; secondly, that external partnerships with organisations and individuals should be seen as key to achieving success; and thirdly, that creative and cultural education could provide '*powerful and*



*direct ways*’ of addressing issues of poor motivation and low self-esteem that lay at the heart of underachievement (Robinson, 1999: pp.64-65).

### **2.5.3 Creativity as a public policy solution**

Jointly, these reports announced a step-change in the discourse surrounding the arts, artists and society in the new century, moving attention from the age old concern of ‘What is the value of the arts?’ to a more neo-liberal concern with ‘How can the value of creative and cultural activity be measured?’ The language in both these reports and subsequent initiatives and programmes reveals an uneasiness with a discourse about ‘the arts’, perhaps due to an historical sense in Britain that the arts are elitist and the preserve of the middle classes and therefore difficult to connect to arguments about tackling deprivation. ‘Creativity’ is perhaps seen as less problematic in this context. So, while the PAT 10 report is subtitled ‘The contribution *the arts* and sport can make’ (my emphasis), the recommendations focus on ‘encouraging schools in the use of *creative* and sporting activity’, ‘nurturing the *creative* talents of people living in deprived neighbourhoods’ (DCMS, 1999: p.10, my emphasis). *All Our Futures* identifies that emphasis on the arts is unhelpful as it contributes to a preceding educational dichotomy that identifies the arts and sciences as ‘exclusive alternatives’ (Robinson, 1999: p.10). The report implies that there may be a need to pursue creativity more vigorously in areas outside the arts since ‘Creative achievement is obvious in the arts but it is essential to achievement in all other fields including the sciences and business’ (Robinson, 1999: p.15). This is particularly relevant to creative writing, which, as has been explored earlier in this chapter, was not conceived in policy terms as an artistic practice. At the time of the report’s publication, the NLS had been published and the focus on literacy was already squeezing creative writing out of the curriculum.

In brief, the *Policy Action Team 10* and *All Our Futures* reports contributed to a discourse that conceives of creativity as a potential public policy solution to problems of deprivation, exclusion and underachievement, differentiated from the arts because creativity is seen as accessible and the arts as elitist. These reports and the initiatives that grew from them conceptualised creativity in ways that influenced the way in which writers in schools were perceived.

#### **2.5.4 Writers as ‘creative practitioners’**

Some of the aspirations articulated in *All Our Futures* were actualised in the Creative Partnerships programme, which was established by DCMS in 2002 and continued to receive funding via Arts Council England until 2011. The programme was established as a national broker for partnership work between schools and cultural organisations or ‘creative practitioners’. It aimed to

...raise standards achieved by children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Our work instils them with greater confidence and application to their studies. This improves their employability and breaks the cycle of deprivation caused by low educational attainment. (Creative Partnerships, 2010)

The aspiration to address inclusion and attainment by promoting creative teaching and learning underpinned Creative Partnerships. However, the term ‘creative learning’ is perhaps a concept that needs clearer exposition. *All Our Futures* offered a definition of creativity as ‘Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value’ (Robinson, 1999: p.29). But creativity is, perhaps, not the same thing as creative learning. The need for clarity of definition has been pointed out by Wyse and Spendlove, who offer their own definition: ‘creative learning is learning which leads to new

or original thinking which is accepted by appropriate observers as being of value' (Wyse and Spendlove, 2007: p.190).

Research into the work of Creative Partnerships has revealed some of the tensions that exist in implementing instrumental cultural policy within the education sector, which is subject to education policy and, as we have seen in relation to creative writing, is driven by an assessment and attainment driven agenda. The aspiration of collaboration inherent in the nomenclature of Creative Partnerships is not easily achieved when 'cultural activity is positioned outside the mainstream temporal and pedagogic relations of schooling' and 'expertise resides in the partner organisation or artist, and the emphasis is likely to be on practical activity rather than on cultural critique' (Hall and Thomson, 2007: p.320). It is suggested that in this context – with creativity remaining outside of mainstream educational structures and policy – the Creative Partnerships approach may in the end marginalise 'the transformative potential of involvement in the arts...in favour of a relatively weak form of social inclusion' (Hall and Thomson, 2007: p.315).

The recasting of writers as 'creative practitioners' may then have diminished the value of their expertise as writers. The prominence of the NLS during the same period had further reduced the capacity for the writer's presence in schools to be a focus for creative writing practice, as writers were increasingly asked to asked to 'focus on spelling or the use of the possessive apostrophe' (Arts Council England, 2006: p.3). It can be seen, then, that the combination of cultural policy, focussing on role of the 'creative practitioner' to address social inclusion, and educational policy, focussing on literacy objectives, have had detrimental consequences for the potential of the writer to engage the learner in creative writing practice.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The conception of creative writing that emerges from the academic and policy discourse is complex and presents a series of challenges to those involved in its pedagogy. The establishment of English as a subject in academia effectively closed the door on creative writing's place in the conception of literary studies in the early part of the last century. The advance of theoretical debates about the nature of English from the mid-1960s through to the 1980s did not, on the whole, specifically address the subject of creative writing, but opened the subject to investigation, and to the potential for those elements of literary studies that had been on the margins to be seen as worthy of academic attention.

During the same period, developments in primary and secondary education built on progressive approaches to creative writing that had been expressed in the 1920s. From the publication of the Newbolt report through to the emerging National Curriculum in the 1980s, creative writing was identified in the discourse as an arts discipline, concerned primarily with the use of language for making meaning through self-expression, and later as a focus for personal development. However, recurrent questions about the need to raise standards in English emerged more forcibly from the mid-1980s onwards, and have resulted in an English curriculum that reduces writing to a functional and technical skill. This has created a kind of disciplinary homelessness for creative writing; it is no longer an arts subject, and is seen as a potential distraction from the functional drivers of an assessment driven curriculum. However, the technical and functional approach to English has failed to deliver on the government's own terms, in its inability to reach the writing targets which it has set for children and young people. The methodology continues to attract widespread concern and criticism from teachers and academics who identify the approach as weakly conceived and pedagogically unsound.

It is within this context that this research will explore how teachers can develop a pedagogy that is informed by their own experience and understanding of creative writing. The near exclusion of creative writing from the English curriculum in schools has meant that relatively little research has been carried out in this field in recent years. This research therefore aims to contribute to developing an understanding of the way in which participants' experience of writing, and of working alongside professional writers, can develop an understanding of the theories and concepts that inform the writer's 'active critical sense' (Harper, 2008a: p.1), and to investigate the influence of their practice on participants' interpretation of policy.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses both the conceptual framework and the practical implementation of the research. It outlines the research paradigm that underpins the methodology and explores the ontological and epistemological perspectives that inform the research. The rationale for a case study approach is examined, and the selected case study is described in some detail. The different methods of data collection are described, with a focus on the reasons for selecting specific methods. This is followed by a discussion of some of the practical considerations and procedures in conducting data collection and management. The theoretical framework and thematic structure that inform the analysis of data emerging from the case study is discussed. An account of the ethical framework that supports the research concludes this chapter.

#### **3.2 Research questions**

This research sets out to explore the relationship between teachers' creative writing practice and their pedagogy. It aims to develop understanding of the premise that raising teachers' 'confidence as writers' will enable them to 'provide better models for pupils' (Ofsted, 2009: p.6). The principle research question of the thesis is therefore:

How is the pedagogy of creative writing in schools influenced by teachers' creative writing practice?

This raises a number of research sub-questions that have shaped the design of the research, influencing the choice of methods:

How has creative writing been conceptualised in educational policy, and how do these conceptions influence pedagogy in schools?

Does engaging in creative writing practice influence teachers' conceptualisations of creative writing, and, if so, what is the impact on pedagogy?

Does engaging in creative writing practice influence teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers, and, if so, what is the impact on pedagogy?

Does the experience of working with writers influence teachers' pedagogic approach in the classroom, and if so, how?

Thus the research examines the influence of practice on pedagogy by analysing the implications of practice for teachers' conceptualisations of creative writing; their understanding of themselves as writers; and on their pedagogical approaches and practices in the classroom.

### **3.3 Research paradigm**

The research questions reveal that this research sets out to develop an understanding of the relationship between teachers' creative writing practice and pedagogy. The research does not aim to 'discover' the relationship between practice and pedagogy as an objective, external reality. Nor does it set out to test theory. Rather, the aim of this research is to develop 'contextualised understanding' (Willis, 2007: p.173). This research aim is significant in the choice of research paradigm, since the fundamental philosophical position of the research to 'develop and construct' understanding signals towards an inductive paradigm (Trafford and Leshem, 2008: p.97).

In addition to reflecting research aims, the paradigmatic position reflects ontological and epistemological assumptions. Positivist research tends towards 'a belief that the world is describable and provable, measurable and deductive' (Wisker, 2008: p.65). A significant foundational premise of positivism is the belief that the nature of reality is external to the

human mind, that 'reality exists "out there" and is driven by immutable laws and mechanism' (Guba, 1990: p.20). Thus while positivist, deductive research is concerned with the explanation or discovery of laws and rules that prove theory, the inductive paradigm is concerned with arriving at an understanding located within a context, drawn from data (Blaikie, 2000: p.154). The central research question in this thesis and the sub questions that derive from it will be explored through analysis of participants' lived experience of creative writing practice. The processes that constitute creative writing practice are diverse, and resist classification into the laws and rules that underpin deductive approaches. Rather, knowledge about the relationship between creative writing practice and pedagogy in this research is developed from a perception that practice is exploratory, and that research into practice will develop understanding, but will not yield incontestable truths:

Creative writing investigates, explores, articulates and speculates. It is both communication and art, and it moves fluidly between these things in a monistic, connected way that cannot be distilled into convenient pots, or stopped and taken away for examination as if by beginning with material object under a scalpel will reveal the true living thing. And yet, it can certainly be considered, and it should be considered, in motion, in practice. (Harper, 2010: p.118)

For this research, an inductive approach was implemented so that participants' experiences could be explored and analysed in order to provide some understanding of the influence of creative writing practice on teachers' pedagogy. The theories and concepts regarding the relationship between practice and pedagogy have arisen out of the research. The relativist, inductive approach that underpins this research reflects my view that a deductive paradigm cannot help to develop an understanding of the complexity of participants' lived experience of creative writing practice and its relationship to pedagogy, and that the inductive paradigm has a conceptual correspondence with the overarching aims of the research.



### **3.4 Interpretive approach**

The ontological and epistemological foundations of this research drive the need for a framework and associated methodologies that are capable of viewing the research from different perspectives in order to explore the full complexity of the research questions. The interpretive approach to research is influenced by the idea that ‘the reality that we perceive is always conditioned by our experiences and our culture’ (Willis, 2007: p.48). In the case of this research, the interpretive approach enables the research not only to investigate the acts and processes that teacher-writers experience, but to acknowledge and analyse the subjective interpretations that are at play in their lived experiences.

In order to develop understanding of the relationship between creative writing practice and pedagogy, this research also takes into account educational policy, since policy forms part of the experience and culture of the participants’ world. It has been argued by Yanow that an interpretive approach is equally important to consider here, since ‘what implementers do, rather than what policy “says” in its explicit language, constitutes the “truth” of policy’ (Yanow, 2000: p.9). The research therefore seeks to come to an understanding of the research topic by investigating how participants’ interpretations of educational policy contribute to their creative writing pedagogy; and to explore how creative writing practice may influence re-conceptualisations and re-interpretations of policy.

This research aims to develop knowledge and understanding about creative writing practice and pedagogy that, whilst derived from a specific context, will be useful and valid to others in the field, informing their choices and decisions. However, an objection to interpretivism is that ‘truth is only relative and has no general application given that said truth is a mere construction created by a given social context’ (Matthews, 1998: p.16).

Conversely, Willis has argued that the authentic, situated knowledge produced by interpretive research produces 'contextual or local knowledge' that is applicable to new contexts (Willis, 2007: p.124). The Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* explores the usefulness of such knowledge.

Aristotle's knowledge, *phronesis*, is situated in context and is dependent on that context... That *phronesis*, or understanding, can be communicated to others, who use it as part of their context for making decisions. It is not truth, however, and does not lead to laws of human behaviour. The essential difference between understanding and truth is that truth can be exported to other settings and applied directly as a rule. Understanding informs a decision-maker (teacher, physician, social worker, politician). (Willis, 2007: pp.120-121)

It is acknowledged, then, that the findings from this research do not aim to create universally applicable models with regard to creative writing practice and pedagogy. The interpretive approach aims to contribute to building 'situated understanding' rather than 'lawlike generalization[s]' about the influence of teachers' creative writing practice on pedagogy (Willis, 2007: p.190).

### **3.5 The researcher self**

Pezalla asserts that the researcher is the principle research instrument, and as such influences empirical study (Pezalla *et al.*, 2012). Prior knowledge and experience of the research area and the researcher's ideological position inevitably shape the research, informing choices about the collection, selection and analysis of data (Holloway and Biley, 2011: p.971). My own interest in this area stems from my professional background. As a consultant working mainly in the cultural sector, I have been involved in the design, management and evaluation of a range of projects involving writers working in schools and with teachers for approximately fifteen years, and have taken part in numerous creative writing workshops as part of this process. Prior to this, I worked as an English

teacher in secondary schools in the 1980s, and was stimulated by involvement in professional debates about the nature of English and creative writing on the curriculum. My work with teachers and writers over a number of years, and my prior experience as a teacher, provoked my interest in the role of teachers' creative writing practice in developing pedagogy, and influenced my choice of research questions.

It has been argued that 'qualitative researchers need huge interest and enthusiasm' for their subject area (Holloway and Biley, 2011: p.971). However, it is also argued that this interest and enthusiasm can lead to researchers becoming 'over-engrossed and obsessive', leading to bias: 'We choose from the narratives, interviews, or observations that which we think will advance the research and often that which confirms our own ideas' (Holloway and Biley, 2011: p.971-972). Halliday claims that 'the values of the researcher cannot but affect the outcome of research...make reporting their meanings in a disinterested way impossible' (Halliday, 2002: p.49).

Simons argues that when researchers become more aware of and attentive to their subjectivity, subjectivity can contribute positively to research, since 'you can see how your personal qualities interact with the data to present a distinctive contribution' (Simons, 2009: p.84). Consciousness of subjectivity requires the researcher to seek out their own subjectivity 'in the subjective underbrush of our own research experience' (Peshkin, 1988: p.20), not as a retrospective activity in writing up data, but as part of the active research process.

I have, therefore, as an essential element of this research, tried to retain an awareness of my position in the study, and to be reflexive at all stages, considering my own reactions

and the reciprocity of the relationships encountered in the research. This critical stance does not attempt to eliminate subjectivity, since the researcher 'is an inescapable part of the situation' being studied (Simons, 2009: p.81). However, stating the inevitability of subjectivity and asserting an aim of objectivity is an insufficient researcher response (Peshkin, 1988: p.17). Rather, my reflexive approach is an attempt to recognise, respond to and manage subjectivity in order to 'escape the thwarting biases that that subjectivity engenders, while attaining the singular perspective its special persuasions promise' (Peshkin, 1988: p.21).

### **3.6 The rationale for the case study approach**

In order to explore the questions that are inherent in the research, I have focussed my field research on teachers who are involved in teaching creative writing in schools. This 'naturalistic' setting lends itself to the collection of data that emanates from real life situations (Denscombe, 2007: p.37). A case study approach enables depth and detail of study, raising the potential for gaining insight into individual experiences, and understanding their interconnection. This is important because pedagogic practice in creative writing is multifaceted: the research attempts to tackle the complexities of creative as well as pedagogic practice, and to retain an awareness of the education policy doxa that influence practice. The case study approach offers the possibility of going into enough detail to unravel some of these intricacies in a way that, for example, a survey approach would not.

A further advantage of a case study approach is the opportunity to go beyond identifying what happens, enabling me to investigate why and how pedagogical practice is formed and developed. This ability to go above and beyond description of what has happened -

'the opportunity to explain why certain outcomes might happen' - has been described as the 'real value' of the case study approach (Denscombe, 2007: p.36). The capacity for case study methodology to pursue investigation of how/why questions as a critical research concern has been cited as one of the foremost advantages of this approach (Yin, 1993: p.8).

In addition, a case study approach enables me to use a variety of data sources in the investigation, including interviews, focus groups, observation and written documentation. Case study methodology has the flexibility to cope with the aggregation of information towards an approach that is largely led by an inductive framework, in that it 'describes' events and processes, 'explores the key issues', and 'compares settings to learn from the similarities and differences between them' (Denscombe, 2007: p.38). The descriptive data gathered in the research will enable me to develop an interpretative approach, where the focus is on both 'understanding the intricacies of a particular situation', and developing this understanding by exploring relationships with 'prevailing theories or models' (Willis, 2007: p.243).

### **3.6.1 Potential shortcomings in case study methodology**

Perhaps the most common criticism of case studies is that they provide little credible basis for generalisation. This has already been referenced on a philosophical level as a problem for interpretive research (see 3.4 above). The use of a case study invites an additional objection, positing that the number of participants involved is too small to provide useful general learning (Wisker, 2008: p.216). It is not intended that the teachers involved in this case study represent a sample of the teaching population that can be expanded into statistical generalisation. However, case study research can provide 'rich detailed data in

an authentic setting' (Willis, 2007: p.240), capable of deepening understanding of how and why pedagogy is developed through creative writing practice.

The case study presented in this research involves 14 participants, and is therefore similar in size and scale to previous research in the field: the research seeks to build on three previous studies in 2005, 2006 and 2010 (see 1.7.4 above) which focussed on the experiences of 14, 3 and 2 participants respectively (Grainger, 2005; Cremin, 2006; Cremin and Baker, 2010). The case study thus has the potential to be expanded towards 'analytical generalisation' (Yin, 2009: p.15).

Another concern for case study methodology is the 'boundedness' of the research. The pedagogy of creative writing is not, in itself, a 'case': it is too general, lacking in specificity. A case study requires the identification of a case that has a sense of 'a boundary which is sufficiently clear and obvious to allow the researcher to see what is contained within the case and what is outside the case' (Denscombe, 2007: p.44). A key concern for the development of this case study, then, is identifying with clarity the 'boundedness' of the case. The boundaries of this case study are:

- Practising teachers who are, during the period of the research, engaged in similar activities that aim to develop their own creative writing practice
- The involvement of writers in a pedagogic role
- A clear time line that specifies the beginning and end of the case, enabling data to be collected at specified points in time

These boundaries separate the case from other potentially related aspects of teaching and learning, such as more general creative writing activity, and will help to retain focus

on the critical question that informs the research design: how is the pedagogy of creative writing influenced by teachers' creative writing practice?

Case studies can be criticised for lack of rigour, including a failure to follow systematic procedures, bias, and inclusion of equivocal data in presenting findings. These issues are acknowledged, and the potential to maximise rigorous research has been addressed in the development of a clear theoretical framework to shape the process; a reflexive approach to the researcher's role; the choice of research tools; and a robust strategy for analysing data. In particular, triangulation of data (interviews, focus groups, observations and documentation) will not only help to corroborate findings, but will provide a 'source of complimentary data' that gives a 'fuller picture' (Denscombe, 2007: p.138). Triangulation also has a part to play in construct validity 'because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon' (Yin, 2009: p.117).

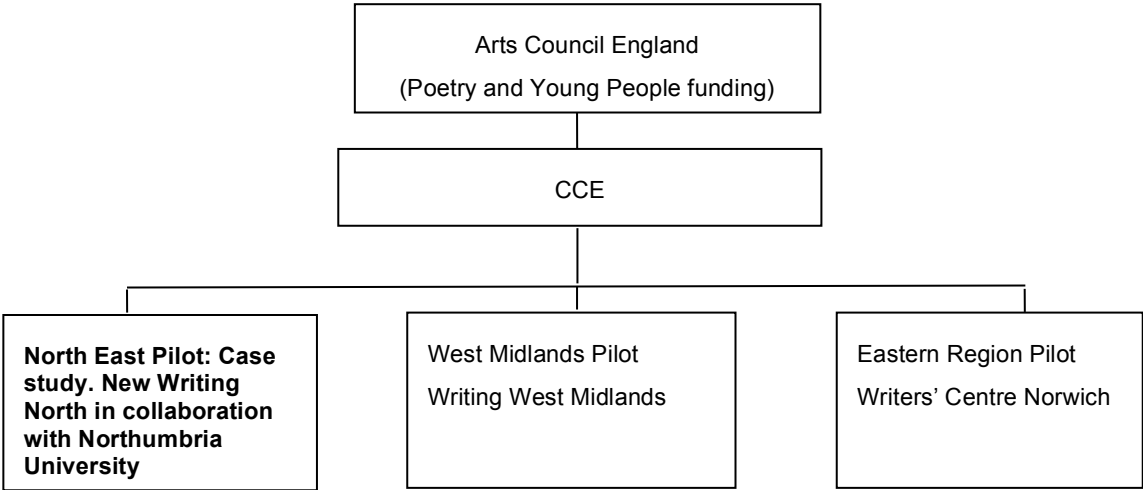
### **3.7 Selecting the case study: background and context**

The case study at the heart of this research is Well Versed North East, a project involving 14 teachers in the North East of England. As a central feature of their involvement in Well Versed, participating teachers have taken a Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom, delivered by Northumbria University in partnership with New Writing North, a literature development agency based in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Well Versed was a year-long national pilot project that aimed to improve young people's experience of engaging with poetry. Arts Council England allocated funding to a national partner, CCE, to oversee the pilot in three English regions: the North East, the West

Midlands and the Eastern region. CCE developed partnerships with literature organisations in these three regions to manage and develop the pilots. The North East project has been selected for this research because it was the only pilot with a clear focus on developing teachers' own experience of creative writing practice.

Figure 1: *Well Versed Partnership Structure*<sup>10</sup>



The development of Well Versed, as outlined above, presents a unique opportunity to research the experiences of teachers who are involved in a programme of developing their own creative writing, and applying their learning through this process into the pedagogical field.

### 3.7.1 Considering alternative case studies

Well Versed arose as an opportunity during the first six months of this research project. I had therefore had some opportunity to consider alternative ways of developing a case study. I considered identifying an individual school and working with teachers to identify

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<sup>10</sup> As noted previously, Well Versed in the East of England aimed to develop the skills of poets to work in schools, and to support teachers' engagement with live literature. Well Versed in the West Midlands focused on initial teacher education, supporting student teachers to use poetry across the curriculum, and on a mentoring scheme for emerging poets who work in schools.



their experience of creative writing practice. This could have revealed a range of experiences; however, it could equally have revealed a low level of practice experience, which would have required me to proceed in one of two ways.

Firstly, I could have gone on to carry out initial research again in another school, or with a number of schools, until I found a field which offered a potential base of creative writing practice from which an analysis of influence on pedagogy could be made. This could have provided a naturalistic setting. However, it could also present a number of problems. It would be difficult to develop a bounded case study from this base, since the diversity of participants' experience of creative writing practice could be extremely wide. This could make it difficult to collect and analyse the data emanating from such a case in a systematic way. Another difficulty from proceeding in this way is that it is possible that a significant amount of time would be devoted to carrying out initial research in a number of sites before finding a suitable field. This was not a practical solution to the research given the constraints of time.

A second response to this situation would have been to create a series of opportunities that enabled a group of teachers to participate in creative writing experiences. This would have the advantage of securing the boundaries of the case, and making it more possible to collect and analyse data in a systematic way. This is an approach that has been taken by Cremin in research into teachers developing their practice as writers (Cremin, 2006). However, for such an approach to respond to the research interests in this thesis, I would have needed to construct a project that enabled the teacher participants to work with writers, since this research seeks to explore the influence of working with writers on teachers' pedagogy. Constructing such a project would have had considerable financial

implications which could not have been met within the resources of this research project. I recognise that I could have proceeded with alternative research questions; however, the influence of writers working with teachers is a particularly under-researched area, and I was therefore keen to identify a case study that would enable me to investigate this question.

I then considered trying to identify teachers who had worked with writers in order to develop their own experience of practice. In the absence of a database that identifies such collaborations, I consulted Creative Partnerships. At the time of initiating this research, Creative Partnerships was the main funder and programmer of collaborations between artists and schools in England, and had a particular focus on teacher development. The organisation was able to support me in my search for a potential research site by making available details of writer-school partnerships that had taken place since 2005. However, although a number of collaborations had taken place during that time, none had focussed on the development of teachers' creative writing practice; they were traditional 'writer-in-school' partnerships, where the writer led workshops with pupils. The lack of focus on teacher experience therefore effectively eliminated teachers from these schools as potential research participants in this study.

During this early research stage, the Well Versed project was therefore identified as the most suitable case study. It focussed on teachers' practice as writers, and involved writers working with teachers. It had a clear time frame, and the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing offered a context within which teachers would have similar creative writing experiences. The Well Versed project therefore offered an opportunity to develop a

case study that enabled systematic collection of data that had the potential through analysis to develop meaningful responses to the research questions in this thesis.

### **3.7.2 Limitations of the case**

The advantages of using the Well Versed project as a case study had to be weighed against the limitations that such a study presents. In reflecting critically on the choice of case study, I identified three potential limitations, each of which raised separate questions. The first and perhaps most significant of these is that the Well Versed project was concerned specifically with the writing of poetry, rather than creative writing in general. This could be seen as a limiting factor since teachers' experience of creative writing practice would focus on a particular area, rather than a wide variety of types of creative writing. This raises the question: can a case study that is concerned with the writing of poetry draw conclusions that are relevant to a wider view of creative writing? A response to this question is discussed below, following brief consideration of other questions raised by the limitations of the case study.

The second potential limitation that I considered was that the teachers involved in Well Versed may not represent a wide range of their professional peers. It is reasonable to assume that teachers who enrol on a Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing and who are prepared to work with a writer in their school to develop their own practice may have relatively positive attitudes towards creative writing. Their involvement in Well Versed may indicate a pre-existing interest in the subject, possibly enjoyment of creative writing and/or poetry, and perhaps some experience in this area. This raises a second question: can the learning gained through the study of such participants be meaningful when considering a broader range of teachers?

The third potential limitation to consider was the fact that the participant group formed a cohort who were participating in an academic course of study. The course required them to submit both creative and critical writing which could form valuable data in the case study. However, it is possible that the responses that they make could be influenced by their desire to pass the course, and therefore could be seen as less valid as research data. Again, a question is raised: can the responses of the participants be trusted as valid data given the academic context that frames their experience?

I have reflected on each of these three potential limitations. In relation to the focus on poetry, I feel that this is not a serious limiting factor in designing an effective case study that responds to the research question. Poetry raises concerns and questions in relation to creative writing in the classroom (which are considered briefly here but in more detail in Chapters Five and Six), and the focus of the case study provides an opportunity to explore these issues through participants' lived experience. As has been previously noted (1.2 above) poetry has been identified as 'perhaps the most challenging form of writing' that is encountered by learners in schools (Wilson, 2007: p.441); as the 'hardest form of writing' to teach (Grainger, 2005: p.80); and as the literary genre that is most problematic to define (Kroll, 2008: p.18). Poetry has received less attention than other literary forms in both the primary and the secondary curriculum, which has been attributed to both a focus on national testing and weaknesses in teachers' knowledge about and experience of poetry (Ofsted, 2007: p.3; Cremin *et al.*, 2008b: pp.456-457). This perhaps places the study as having particular relevance, since it addresses an area of identified need within teacher pedagogy and has the potential to contribute to developing knowledge about teachers' responses to poetry in the classroom. Furthermore, as poetry is perceived by teachers to be the most difficult form to teach, it could be argued that research into this

area will help to address some of the more difficult questions that may apply to other forms of creative writing practice.

The second potential limitation is participants' predisposition to creative writing practice as demonstrated through their involvement in Well Versed. This would be a relevant concern if the main aim of the research were to examine how participants' attitudes to creative writing affect their pedagogy. However, although attitudinal issues inevitably arise in qualitative research of this kind, the (probable) predisposition of participants to creative writing practice does not threaten the potential of the case study to address the research questions in this thesis. The research is concerned with considering how the experience and practice of creative writing influences teachers' pedagogy in the classroom, and Well Versed provides an opportunity to study this phenomenon.

The third potential limitation – that participation in an academic course of study could have an effect on the data – is perhaps a more complex area. It may be the case, for example, that teachers' reflective writing on their pedagogy, submitted as a course requirement, is designed to ensure that a good pass mark is achieved, rather than to reflect real and felt reflections on pedagogy. I believe that this is a valid concern. I have addressed this issue by designing the research so that research questions are examined from a number of angles; triangulation of data through interviews, focus groups and observations of practice is key to this, and the data set is described in detail later in this chapter.

The Well Versed project thus provides a 'one-off chance' to illuminate understanding about poetry writing within pedagogical practice through 'depth of study' (Denscombe, 2007: p.42). Although Well Versed can be seen as a unique project, the events that take

place - creative writing practice and subsequent pedagogical development - are replicable. To this extent, the knowledge that is generated from the case study is generalisable on an analytical level.

### **3.7.3 Case study description**

The Well Versed project in the North East took place between February and September 2011. The project consisted of two main elements: a course leading to a Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom, and poet mentorships which enabled teachers to work with poets to develop pedagogic approaches in the classroom. The timetable for the project was as follows:

**Table 2: *Well Versed Timetable***

Post Graduate Certificate seminars	February – April 2011
Poet mentorships in schools	May – July 2011
Post Graduate Certificate: written submissions	September 2011

The Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom aimed to offer practising primary and secondary teachers the opportunity to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of approaches to creative writing and the delivery of creative writing in the classroom. Teachers attended six seminars which followed a workshop methodology led by poet tutors. The seminars (which are described more fully in Chapter Four) enabled teachers to explore a range of creative writing techniques that relate to the writing of poetry, and to reflect on both their own writing and their approach to the teaching of creative writing. The course required teachers to submit a portfolio consisting of 90 lines of poetry; a 1,000 word commentary on their creative work; and an essay discussing whether the experience of practice strengthens pedagogic practice.

Poet mentorships followed on from the seminars. Each teacher was allocated a poet mentor, who worked with them for the equivalent of 3 days. Their focus was to reflect on the learning that teachers had experienced during the course, and to consider how this learning might be translated into classroom practice with the support of the poet. Poets and teachers had an initial meeting to discuss the teachers' response to the seminars, and their aspirations for the teaching of creative writing with identified groups of pupils. From this, a plan was drawn up which included team teaching of sessions in the classroom; time for reflection and evaluation; and, if desired by the teacher, time for reflection on their own creative writing.

#### **3.7.4 Case study participants**

Well Versed was advertised through local authority and school networks throughout the North East. Fourteen teachers took part in the project; all were self-selecting. The teachers represent primary and secondary phase teachers, although the group was dominated by primary phase, as outlined below:

**Table 3:** *Participant breakdown by school type and teaching phase*

<b>School Type</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>	<b>Key stage teaching groups</b>
Primary	10	KS2
Middle	2	KS2 and KS3
Secondary	2	KS3, 4 and 5

Middle schools operate across the primary and secondary phases of education. However, the 2 participants from middle schools were responsible for teaching KS3 pupils at secondary phase (Years 7 and 8). In total, then, four participants in the case study teach at secondary phase. The inclusion of participants from across the key stages strengthens

the case study, since, as outlined in Chapter Two, the ‘problems’ of teaching writing emerge at all phases of education.

### **3.8 Research design**

It is possible to see Well Versed as a case study containing fourteen separate case studies, since each individual participant’s experience is unique. In designing the research, I therefore considered the extent to which this case study would follow single-case or multiple-case case design.

Yin advises the researcher that ‘when you focus on case-study “designs”, you are mainly dealing with the logic whereby initial hypothesis or research questions can be subjected to empirical testing’ (Yin, 1993: p.33). Denscombe identifies single-case study as the ideal, because of its ‘focus on just one instance of the thing that is to be investigated’ (Denscombe, 2007: p.36). A single-case study has the advantage of enabling the research to cast a spotlight on the individual experience, producing rich and deep data. As such, single-case design ‘can serve exploratory, descriptive, or even causal purposes’ in research (Yin, 1993: p.33).

Yin identifies that multiple-case design should not be seen as analogous with multiple participants. Rather, multiple-case design is based on replication logic:

For example, upon uncovering a significant finding from a single experiment, an ensuing and pressing priority would be to replicate this finding by conducting a second, third, or even more experiments...Each case must be carefully selected so that it (a) predicts similar results (*a literal replication*) or (b) predicts contrasting results for anticipatable reasons (*a theoretical replication*). (Yin, 2009: p.54, original emphasis)



The emphasis on predictable results is a prerequisite of multiple-case design, and therefore seems an inappropriate approach for this research, which does not state predictable results at the outset. Rather, this research attempts to describe and explore participants' experience of creative writing practice, and to analyse how such practice influences pedagogy. This points towards a single-case design as the most suitable way forward.

The next stage of consideration in designing the research was whether to proceed on a holistic or embedded single-case design. Holistic design gives attention to one 'unit of analysis' or participant within the case; embedded single-case design studies give consideration to a number of participants (Yin, 2009: p.50). Holistic single case studies have the advantage of enabling the researcher to invest considerable time and resources on investigating the single participant. This may lead to a particularly in-depth study, and could reveal insights into the individual's experiences that could shed light on creative writing practice and pedagogy.

However, the holistic single-case study presents a number of disadvantages for this research. The first is that it would limit the study to a particular phase of education: either primary or secondary. This is significant not only because it may limit interest in the findings to a particular group, but also because it would relate to either only the generalist or the English subject specialist teacher. In primary schools, teachers tend not to be subject specialists, and therefore the English curriculum (where creative writing is most commonly contained) is taught by generalist teachers. In secondary schools, English teachers tend to be specialists, and will most commonly have studied English literature at tertiary level. Whilst neither group of teachers is likely to have expertise in creative

writing, the study of literature at tertiary level may or may not have some bearing on pedagogical development. It is therefore desirable to include at least one primary and at least one secondary teacher in the case study.

In addition, an holistic single case study approach is highly vulnerable to any number of external factors that could seriously interfere with the continuation of the study, such as illness, other absence, the participant's role changing within the school or the teacher moving on from the school during the research period (Yin, 2009: p.61). Yin also points to a further vulnerability, that 'a case may not turn out to be the case it was thought to be at the outset' (2009: p.49). The nature of the case study could therefore shift in response to the context and concerns of the individual case study participant. Yin points out that while some may see such flexibility as a strength of case study research, it can result in 'slippage' from the original research questions, resulting in a study that fails to address the central questions of the thesis (2009: p.52).

I therefore considered whether the study of an embedded single-case involving two teachers (one primary, once secondary) would enable me to generate the required knowledge to reach a meaningful response to the research questions. However, I was aware that the case being studied requires the teachers to take steps that are significantly removed from their usual pedagogic practice: the writing of their own poetry. This process could be a high risk, and perhaps intensely personal, element of the case for some of the individuals involved. In planning the research I was mindful that the writing of poetry could provoke a range of responses, from very positive to more negative feelings. The varied emotional, personal responses of individuals to their experience of creative writing practice may be a significant factor in deciphering the way in which writing influences

pedagogy. The inclusion of only two teachers in the case study may limit the potential to capture this range of response to the writing of poetry, which is at the heart of the research. In addition, the vulnerability factors identified above (absence, illness, change of role) could come to bear on either the primary or the secondary setting, resulting in a single phase case study.

For this reason, I have decided to employ an embedded single-case design that includes all fourteen teachers as participants in the research. Yin identifies embedded single-case design as ‘an important device for focussing a case study inquiry’ since it helps to avoid the ‘slippage’ that may occur through single-case design.

### **3.9 Data collection**

The case being studied offers an opportunity to collect a variety of data from the participants. At the outset of the case study, I wrote to the 14 teachers to give them information about the research, and to request their consent as research participants. Permission was divided into three areas. The first was to obtain their consent for me to observe the creative writing seminars that formed part of the Creative Writing in the Classroom course, and to have access to written submissions that were made as part of the course. Secondly, participants were asked to consent to attending focus groups or interviews, and to give permission for me to use data emerging from these activities. Thirdly, participants were asked to consent to two research visits to their schools to observe planning sessions with their poet mentor and observe creative writing activities in the classroom. The staged approach to permission was employed so that those teachers who were happy to contribute at one level but not another could ‘opt out’ of certain levels

of commitment to the research. In the end, all of the teachers granted consent to be participants in all respects of the data collection processes.

In considering the kinds of data to collect, I was able to identify a number of naturally occurring data collection points that would take place during the project. These were the six creative writing seminars, and the written documentation submitted as a requirement of the course. This would provide a range of data. However, I was concerned that the academic context in which some of the data emerged may weaken the validity of findings. Specifically, the ideas and information presented in written documentation that is produced as a course requirement, and verbal contributions made during course sessions, may be influenced by actual or perceived academic requirements on the part of the participant. In addition, I was concerned that this process of data collection did not allow me to develop deeper knowledge and understanding of teachers' experiences as writers, and their understanding of how this influences pedagogy.

In order to address this, I developed a number of additional data collection opportunities. These included Stage 1 interviews held immediately after the end of the project; focus groups held towards the beginning and end of the project; observations of poet-mentor and teacher meetings; observations of classroom practice; and Stage 2 interviews held 9 months after the project had completed. A summary of data collection is provided below:

**Table 4: Data Collection Summary**

<b>Research tool</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Collection point</b>
<b>Observations</b>	Observation of 6 creative writing seminars	February- April 2011
	Observations of creative writing lessons in 4 schools	May – July 2011
	Observations of 3 meetings between teachers and their poet mentors	May – July 2011
<b>Focus Groups</b>	Focus Group 1. Attended by 8 teachers.	February 2011
	Focus Group 2. Attended by 4 teachers.	July 2011
<b>Interviews</b>	Stage 1 Interviews: One to one interviews with 4 teachers, closely after the completion of the course	September – October 2011
	Stage 2 Interviews: One to one interviews with 5 teachers, one year after the course	May 2012
<b>Written documentation</b>	Essays and poetry portfolio submitted as part of the course, 11 teachers	September 2011

### **3.9.1 Limits on data collection: participant involvement**

The embedded single-case design of the research enabled me to collect data from all participants. However, the number of participants involved in the research meant that it was not possible to include all participants in each data collection process during the research. Setting up and carrying out one to one interviews, observations of poet-mentor meetings and observations of classroom practice with all 14 teachers within the timescale of the Well Versed project would not have been achievable due to constraints on both researcher time and teacher participant time.

In considering how to proceed, I wanted to ensure that all teachers involved in the research had opportunities to contribute their views, ideas and opinions as part of the data collection process. Such opportunities already existed through the seminars and the written data submitted by participants. In order to add depth to and increase the validity of this data, I also held two focus groups to which all participants were invited.

However, when it came to establishing a method for collecting data through Stage 1 interviews, observations of poet-mentor meetings and observations of classroom practice, I invited 4 teachers to take part in these three elements of the research process. This was in order to ensure representation at primary and secondary levels of education: 2 of the participants are teachers in primary school, teaching pupils at Key Stage 2; 1 of the participants teaches secondary phase pupils in a middle school (Key Stage 3); and one of the participants teaches in a secondary school (Key Stages 3, 4 and 5). I also considered that including 4 teachers at this stage helped to mitigate against unforeseen circumstances, should the teachers' situation change. Due to poet-teacher meetings clashing across the four schools, T4 was unable to contribute to this element of the research; however, she remained keen to be involved in classroom observation and Stage 1 Interviews. Working through this process had the advantage of enabling me to develop effective researcher-participant relationships with the teachers, establishing trust and openness. Finally, in considering participant involvement in Stage 2 interviews I reflected on the kind of data that was emerging from the case study and identified teacher-participants who could represent a range of responses to the experience of creative writing practice and its impact on pedagogy. I therefore identified 5 teachers to take part in Stage 2 interviews. A summary of participant involvement is presented in the table below. Teacher participants are coded T1 to T14.

**Table 5: Participant Involvement Summary**

	<b>Data collection: open to all participants</b>					<b>Data collection: invited participants</b>			
<b>Participant</b>	Primary Phase (P) Secondary Phase (S)	Seminars	Written submissions	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Stage 1 Interviews	Observation: poet-mentor meetings	Observation: lessons in schools	Stage 2 interviews
T1	S	x	x	x	x				x
T2	S	x	x			x	x	x	
T3	P	x			x				x
T4	P	x		x	x	x		x	
T5	P	x		x					
T6	P	x	x	x	x				x
T7	P	x	x	x					
T8	S	x	x	x					
T9	S	x	x	x		x	x	x	
T10	P	x	x	x					
T11	P	x	x						x
T12	P	x	x						x
T13	P	x	x			x	x	x	
T14	P	x							

As can be seen from the table above, with the exception of T14 all participants were engaged in data collection beyond the academic context of the creative writing seminars and written submission. During the research process T14 secured a new job as a headteacher in a new school. His commitments to this post meant that he was unable to complete the written submissions or take part in any of the further research activities, although he did continue to attend creative writing seminars and took part in the poet-

mentoring in his school. T4 did not complete the written submission due to illness at this stage of the project. T5 did not complete written submissions as he was not interested in gaining accreditation for his involvement in the course; however, he did take part in the poet mentoring in his school.

### **3.9.2 Data Management**

The data collection process resulted in a considerable body of data emerging from the case study. My priorities in managing the data have been to respect participants and preserve the integrity of the data.

Audio recordings have been made during the observation of creative writing seminars, focus groups, and interviews. Recordings have been made with consideration for the privacy of participants, and stored anonymously, in a locked cabinet. Hand written field notes have been taken during creative writing seminars and classroom observations. Field notes have also been anonymised at all stages, and stored in the same way. Written submissions have had all identifying information removed. Transcripts of data have been held electronically on a secure server under password protection. The password has been changed regularly, and not be shared with any third party.

#### **3.9.2.i Anonymity and participant coding**

In order to protect the participants in the research, anonymity has been preserved at each stage of data collection. Teachers have been identified by codes T1 – T14. Poet-tutors and poet-mentors have been identified by codes P1 – P11. I have not distinguished between primary and secondary phase teachers in the coding for two reasons. Firstly, the



many of the issues that arise from the analysis of data apply to teachers at both phases. In some instances, where findings are more relevant to one phase than another, I have indicated this in the thesis (for example, see section 7.6 which pertains mostly to teachers at the secondary phase). Secondly, the small number of secondary phase participants in the study could lead to their anonymity being jeopardised through a coding system that identifies the teaching phase. I have therefore taken a precautionary principle and privileged participant anonymity in the coding of data. The attention to anonymity recognises the sensitivity that exists in collecting, analysing and disseminating evidence that enquires about the development of pedagogical practice. It also recognises that some of the data collected is participants' own poetry, and their reflection on the writing of that poetry. As a new activity for most participants, I have been aware that this may be a challenging and personal process, involving a degree of risk and tension for participants. The process of anonymising the case study contributes to paying due respect to the participants.

The schools which the teachers work in have also been anonymised. Details of both the teacher's context (for example, their age, their experience) and that of the school (its location, demographics and so on) have been collected only where they are relevant within the boundaries of the case study. This minimises the potential for personal identities to be revealed through association with a particular school.

### **3.9.3 Research tools**

#### **3.9.3.i Focus Groups**

Focus groups have been used in this case study as a way of enabling participants to interact with each other in order to build a 'rich sense' of individuals contributing to the

research (Wisker, 2008: pp.202-203) . A semi-structured format has been used in order to enable key themes for discussion to be introduced, whilst leaving enough flexibility to respond to the themes and ideas that appear to be most important or interesting to participants. Focus groups have been identified as a useful tool when addressing issues of empowerment (Morgan, 1996: p.133). This is relevant to research into the teaching of creative writing since research has suggested (as discussed in Chapter Two) that increasing pedagogical prescription has externalised knowledge about this area of teaching, reducing teacher's sense of authority as their voice has not been present in the development of such pedagogy. The focus group therefore offers an opportunity to 'those whose voices are otherwise muted' to support each other in exploring issues of mutual concern (Barbour and Flick, 2007: p.27).

The case study included a focus group at the outset of the participants' involvement in Well Versed, and one following the completion of all seminars and the poet-mentorships in schools. The decision to hold two focus groups has been informed by a desire to capture participants' views, ideas and opinions at start and end points of the process, in order to track any developing themes. In particular, as focus groups have the capacity to provide insights into process, the start and end point discussions enabled me to collect data that relates to changing perceptions of creative writing practice and pedagogy.

Focus Group 1 was attended by 8 teachers, and lasted for one hour and fifteen minutes. The teachers had at this stage attended only one creative writing seminar together. I was aware of the need to create a framework for the discussion that would enable participants to respond to themes and ideas that they found particularly interesting, while also

ensuring that the discussion was relevant to the research questions. I therefore used the following questions as prompts to frame the focus group:

**Table 6: Focus Group 1 Prompts**

<b>Focus Group 1 Prompts</b>
What can you remember about your learning in creative writing when you were a pupil in school?
Can you tell me what the term 'creative writing' means to you?
Is there anything in particular that you think is important in your teaching of creative writing?
What do you see as the value of creative writing in the curriculum?
Do you think writing poetry is different to other kinds of creative writing?
What do you see as the challenges in assessing creative writing?
Is there anything else that you'd like to bring up or discuss?

In designing these prompts, I reflected on my own position in the research, and deliberately avoided foregrounding questions about the influence of the National Literacy Strategy and subsequent frameworks on creative writing in schools. I employed this strategy in order to avoid suggesting that the strategies and frameworks have had a negative impact on creative writing in schools; I wanted to see whether teachers would identify a positive or negative influence of the NLS without being prompted to do so.

Focus Group 2 was attended by 4 teachers, and lasted one hour. Three teachers who had intended to attend were unable to do so because one had Ofsted inspection commitments; one had to attend a parents' evening; and one was involved in a school concert. By this stage in the project the participants were more familiar with each other and with me through attendance at the seminars. Focus Group 2 took place after seminars and the poet-mentorships in schools had been completed, but before the submission of written portfolios. I therefore designed prompts for this Focus Group that

would encourage participants to reflect on how their experiences of attending seminars, writing their own poetry, and working with their poet-mentor had influenced their conceptions of creative writing, and their pedagogic approaches.

**Table 7: Focus Group 2 Prompts**

<b>Focus Group 2 Prompts</b>
Could you talk about how your creative writing practice is going, what you're enjoying and maybe what you have been finding more challenging?
Can you tell me about how your work in the classroom with your poet-mentors has been developing?
Has the experience of writing your own poetry changed the way you think about creative writing? Could you talk about how?
Has the experience of writing your own poetry course affected the way that you think about the teaching of creative writing?
Are you doing anything differently in the classroom as a result of developing your own creative writing practice?
Is there anything else that you'd like to bring up or discuss?

### **3.9.3.ii Interviews**

Semi-structured one to one interviews with teacher participants were used as a way of 'accessing individuals' attitudes and values – things that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a formal questionnaire' (Byrne, 2004, cited in Silverman, 2006: p.114). This contributes to the depth required for the case study, and the semi structured format of interviews recognises that the interview is 'collaboratively produced', allowing interviewees not only to report on their ideas, or the facts of the matters as they see them, but to elaborate on areas of particular interest or complexity, and reflect on the interconnection of their responses (Silverman, 2006: p.112; Yin, 2009: p.107).

As a research tool, interviews have some acknowledged weaknesses, in particular the possibility of bias, inaccuracy due to poor recall, and reflexivity (Yin, 2009: p.102). I

attempt to address the problem of bias through attention to question-framing. For example, my experience of interviewing participants as part of evaluation processes has raised my awareness that a preponderance of 'why' questions can lead interviewees to feel that they need to defend a position. Framing the interview towards 'what' and 'how' questions can feel less threatening. This does not mean that 'why' questions are ignored. Just as Holstein and Gubrium's methodology combines concerns of 'how' and 'what' (cited in Silverman, 2006: p.131-132), my position in exploring all of the data emerging through the case study is to explore the interconnection of what participants do, how they do it, and the underlying causes and reasons that shape their decisions.

The problem of inaccurate recall cannot be fully eliminated, but is mitigated against because data is triangulated. Observations of classroom practice and meetings, as well as written submissions, provide data that can help to locate and frame experience within the case study context. Such data also provides an opportunity for interviewees to return to ideas and themes, to follow up on their initial thinking by returning to particular areas of discussion.

Yin defines reflexivity in the context of interviews as the possibility that 'the interviewee gives what [the] interviewer wants to hear' (Yin, 2009: p.102). This may be particularly relevant to this case study as teachers, particularly in the highly scrutinised area of the teaching of writing, may feel that their professionalism and ability lies at the heart of the interviewer's interest, leading them to think that the interviewer may have in mind a preferred response that will reflect positively on their ability. This is a sensitive area, and teachers may be reluctant to explore areas that they feel could be interpreted as gaps in their knowledge and understanding, or weaknesses in their practice. This has required

vigilance during the interview, as well as reassurance in the negotiation of participation agreement. Full understanding of the research process and the purpose of the research has helped to mitigate against teachers' fear of 'judgement' of their professional ability. In addition, participants have been given transcriptions of interviews, and have been offered the opportunity to provide further comment on any aspect of the interview.

Stage 1 Interviews were held with 4 teachers, and lasted for approximately one hour. These interviews were timed to take place towards the end of the project. The timing was important for two reasons. Firstly, the researcher-participant relationship had developed by this stage as I had been present at all of creative writing seminars, and taken part in the majority of creative writing exercises alongside the participants; I had also attended poet-mentor meetings in each of the 4 teachers' schools; and I had observed creative writing lessons in each school. Through these visits to their schools, I had encountered informal opportunities to engage with the teachers. I had therefore been able to build up effective relationships with each of the teachers prior to the interview taking place. This helped to counteract teachers' potential fear of judgements about their professional ability being made by the researcher through the interview process.

Secondly, the timing of Stage 1 interviews meant that I could use the interview as a space for teachers to reflect on the various aspects of the project, and consider the ways that different elements of Well Versed (such as writing their own poetry, or working with a poet in their classroom) had influenced their pedagogy. The closeness to completion of the project meant that the experiences were still present and fresh in participants' minds at the point of interview.

The Stage 1 interviews followed a semi structured format enabling teachers to focus on issues that were of particular significance or concern, while retaining a focus on the central research questions. The following questions were used as prompts for the interviews:

**Table 8: Stage 1 Interview Prompts**

<b>Stage 1 Interview Prompts</b>
Thinking about your experience on the project, is there anything that stands out for you as being important in developing your own writing?
Do you think that your conception of what creative writing is has changed as a result of your experience? If so, can you talk about how?
Are there any specific elements of your involvement in the project that stand out as being particularly important in developing your pedagogy?
How has your teaching of creative writing been influenced by your involvement in the project? Can you identify anything that you are now doing differently, or hope to do differently in the future?
The course encouraged you to reflect on your creative writing practice Have you found this useful or relevant in relation to your practice as a teacher? If so, in what ways?
Has your experience of developing your own creative writing influenced your approach to assessing and responding to pupils' creative writing in any way? How?
Is there anything else that you'd like to bring up or discuss?

Stage 2 interviews were held in May 2012, 9 months after the project had been completed. I decided to hold interviews at this distance from the project as I am aware that the impacts and effects of experiences can dissipate over time. I was therefore aware that the validity of findings from the case study may be weakened if all data was collected during or just after the project. I therefore invited 5 teachers to take part in Stage 2 Interviews. I identified teachers who had not taken part in Stage 1 interviews, in order to increase the opportunity for a range of voices to be heard through the research. One secondary and four primary teachers were involved in Stage 2 interviews.

The purpose of interviews held at this stage was to consider whether the influence creative writing practice on pedagogy continued to be felt by participants. The interviews at this stage offered an opportunity to investigate whether participants had continued to develop their own creative writing practice, and whether they continued to develop their creative writing pedagogy. Again, a semi-structured approach was taken. The following prompts were used in Stage 2 interviews:

**Table 9: Stage 2 Interview Prompts**

It is now some time since Well Versed finished. Thinking about your teaching now, can you identify any ways that you think your approach to creative writing in the classroom has changed as a result of developing your own practice in creative writing?
Have you continued to write, either for yourself or alongside pupils, since the project completed? Can you tell me something about the reasons for this?
Thinking about your teaching of creative writing before taking part in Well Versed and your teaching now, do you think you currently spend less time/more time/about the same amount of time in creative writing in the classroom? Can you tell me about some of the reasons for this?
Has your experience of developing your own creative writing influenced your approach to assessing and responding to pupils' creative writing in any way? How?
Has your experience of developing your practice and pedagogy in creative writing influenced your perception of the value of creative writing in the curriculum? In what ways?
Is there anything else that you'd like to bring up or discuss?

The interview prompts for Stage 1 and 2 interviews provided a structure for discussions that related to the research questions. In addition, the timing of interviews meant that I was able to follow specific lines of inquiry that individuals had considered in their essays. For example, T9 had considered the relationship between creative writing practice and critical practice in teaching GCSE English Literature students; T12 had reflected on the role of emotions in creative writing practice in the classroom; and T13 had suggested that the practice of creative writing had challenged her perceptions of what it means to teach creatively. The semi-structured format enabled me to raise these ideas in interview, in order to add depth to the study, and offer further validation of data.



### **3.9.3.iii Observation of seminars**

I observed all six of the creative writing seminars that took place during Well Versed. The seminars were the taught element of the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom. During the observation of seminars, I have been involved in participant-observation, in that I have become part of the group during seminars, participating in the creative writing activities, including the sharing of creative writing with the group. This has enabled me to access some part of the 'imaginative and emotional experience' of the participants (Lacey, 1976, cited in Wisker, 2008: p.203). Whilst it is accepted that I do not share the experiences of the participants fully – since I am not enrolled on the course – the role of participant-observer means that I am not 'entirely detached' from the experiences of the group (Wisker, 2008: p.203). The role of participant-observer has also been useful in helping to develop trust with the participants, and has heightened their interest in the research.

### **3.9.3.iv Observation of poet-teacher meetings**

I observed poet-teacher meetings in 3 schools. This has enabled me to develop an understanding of the concerns that inform discussions about the pedagogy of creative writing. As these meetings took place after teachers had completed the poetry writing seminars, they provided a useful indication of the issues taken through from practice into pedagogy. They also provided an intimate space in which the voice of the teacher and that of the poet were present in developing a dialogue about pedagogy. For this reason, my role during these interviews was to act as a non-participant observer, since a participant-observer in such a setting may intrude on and shape the dialogue.

### **3.9.3.v Observation of classroom practice**

Following poet-teacher meetings, a schedule for observations of classroom practice was established. The classroom practice involved poets and teachers delivering creative writing lessons which they had planned collaboratively. I observed classroom practice in four of the schools: two primary, one middle, and one secondary. The purpose of these observations was to collect evidence about what actually happened in pedagogic contexts, moving beyond what people intend to do, or what they say they do. The observations gave me an insight into the classroom lives of the teacher participants, which helped to develop my understanding of the context in which their pedagogy evolves. Observations also provided information about the approach to creative writing which could be returned to in Stage 1 interviews with the teachers.

I observed 3-4 hours of practice in each school, split across two 1.5 hour lessons in the primary schools and four 1 hour lessons in the middle and secondary school. The structure of sessions inevitably varied depending on the school context and the nature of the partnership that had been negotiated between teacher and poet mentor. In the primary schools, I observed one class; in the middle and secondary schools, I observed two classes.

### **3.9.3.vi Written documentation**

In order to fulfil the accreditation requirements of the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the course, teachers submitted a portfolio of writing consisting of 90 lines of poetry; a commentary on their creative writing process; and an essay discussing whether the experience of practice strengthens pedagogic practice. The academic context of these submissions has been taken into account, and triangulation of data strengthens the

validity of written documentation (see 3.7.2 above). The documents provide a rich data source when considering teachers' responses to developing their own creative writing practice, and in considering their reflections on the impact that practice might have on pedagogy.

Course accreditation required teachers to submit 90 lines of poetry developed from exercises given in seminars. The accompanying commentary asked teachers to address the aims of their writing and the extent to which they considered that their work achieved or confounded these ambitions; to consider what they had learned about writing poetry in producing the poems for the portfolio; to explore the weaknesses and strengths of the work; and to discuss the attempts that had been made to engage with the elements of craft and technique discussed in the module. The commentaries therefore offered individual insights into how teachers' approached the development of their writing.

Teachers were also required to write a 2,500 word essay reflecting on how the experience of writing the poetry for the Portfolio had affected pedagogy. The essay was framed as follows:

*'If teachers engage as writers, taking part in the creative process of composing, they arguably will be in a stronger position to develop the creative voice of the child.'*

(From T, Cremin (2006). 'Creativity, uncertainty and discomfort: teachers as writers.' *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36(3): 415 - 433.)

Reflecting on your own experience of both practising and teaching creative writing, and drawing on the literature that you have read for this module, discuss the theory that taking part in the creative process strengthens teachers' practice in the teaching of creative writing.

The essays therefore provide individual perspectives on the impact of practice on pedagogy, and provided reflections that were used as discussion points in subsequent one to one interviews.

### 3.9.4 The data set

The data set therefore consists of observations, interviews, focus groups and written documentation collected between February 2011 and May 2012. Sample transcripts and field notes of seminars, focus groups, interviews, classroom observations, poet-teacher meetings and participants' written submissions are included in the appendices. The table below identifies the full data set, participant involvement, and when data was collected:

**Table 10: Data Set Summary**

<b>Data source</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Date</b>
Seminar 1	T1-T14	01/02/11
Seminar 2	T1-T14	15/02/11
Seminar 3	T1-T14	01/03/11
Seminar 4	T1-T14	15/03/11
Seminar 5	T1-T14	29/03/11
Seminar 6	T1-T14	12/04/11
Focus Group 1	T1, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10	08/02/11
Focus Group 2	T1, T3, T4, T6	05/07/11
Poet Teacher Meeting 1	T13, P2	07/06/11
Poet Teacher Meeting 2	T9, P11	11/10/11
Poet Teacher Meeting 3	T2, P10	06/07/11
Interview 1	T13	20/09/11
Interview 2	T9	11/10/11
Interview 3	T2	28/09/11
Interview 4	T4	27/10/11
Interview 5	T6	12/05/12
Interview 6	T11	21/05/12
Interview 7	T1	21/05/12
Interview 8	T3	21/05/12
Interview 9	T12	22/05/12
Classroom Observation 1 (2 lessons)	T13, P2	24/06/11
Classroom Observation 2a, 2b (2 classes)	T2, P10	30/06/11
Classroom Observation 3 (1 class)	T4, P6	05/07/11
Classroom Observation 4a, 4b (2 classes)	T9, P11	06/07/11
Essays and Poetry Portfolios	T1, T2, T3, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11, T12, T13	21/09/11

### 3.10 Data analysis

The interpretive framework for the case study will draw on Bruner's four models of learners' minds and corresponding models of pedagogy (Bruner, 1996: pp.53-65). I have identified this as useful to my study because of its emphasis on 'folk pedagogies' that reflect attitudes and beliefs about how learners learn. Bruner asserts that these 'everyday, intuitive theories' are highly relevant to what actually takes place in the classroom, and that pedagogical analysis must take account of these beliefs.

Bruner describes four conceptions of learners' minds that determine pedagogical approaches. These conceptions are explored in detail in the context of data emerging from the case study in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. However, a brief overview of the four conceptions of the learners' mind and models of pedagogy is presented here for clarity, summarised from Bruner (1996: pp.53-65).

*Model 1: Imitative learners: the acquisition of 'know-how'.* This model assumes that the learner does not know how to do *x*, and can learn how to do it through adult modelling. The act of modelling also assumes that the learner wants to learn how to do *x*.

*Model 2: Learning from didactic exposure: the acquisition of propositional knowledge.* This model assumes that the learner is 'ignorant of facts, rules or principles' and that this can be addressed by the learner being 'told'. This model assumes that the information that the learner needs to know is contained elsewhere – in the mind of the teacher, books, or other material; and that the mind of the learner is 'passive, a receptacle waiting to be filled' (Bruner, 1996: p.56).

*Model 3: Learners as thinkers: the development of intersubjective interchange.* Learners are perceived as constructing their own model of the world. In this model, learning is

‘mutualist and dialectical’ and teachers are focussed on fostering learners’ understanding through ‘discussion and collaboration’ (1996: pp.56-57).

*Model 4: Learners as knowledgeable: the management of ‘objective’ knowledge.* Learners knowledge constitutes both personal knowledge and ‘what is taken to be known’ by the wider culture. In this model, teachers help learners to grasp the difference between the two, and to come to an understanding of how personal knowledge and ideas relate to ‘what is known’. ‘Objective knowledge’ draws on Popper’s Three Worlds: the physical world; the world of human thoughts, feelings, perceptions and observations; and the world of embodied products of the human mind (1996: pp.60-61)

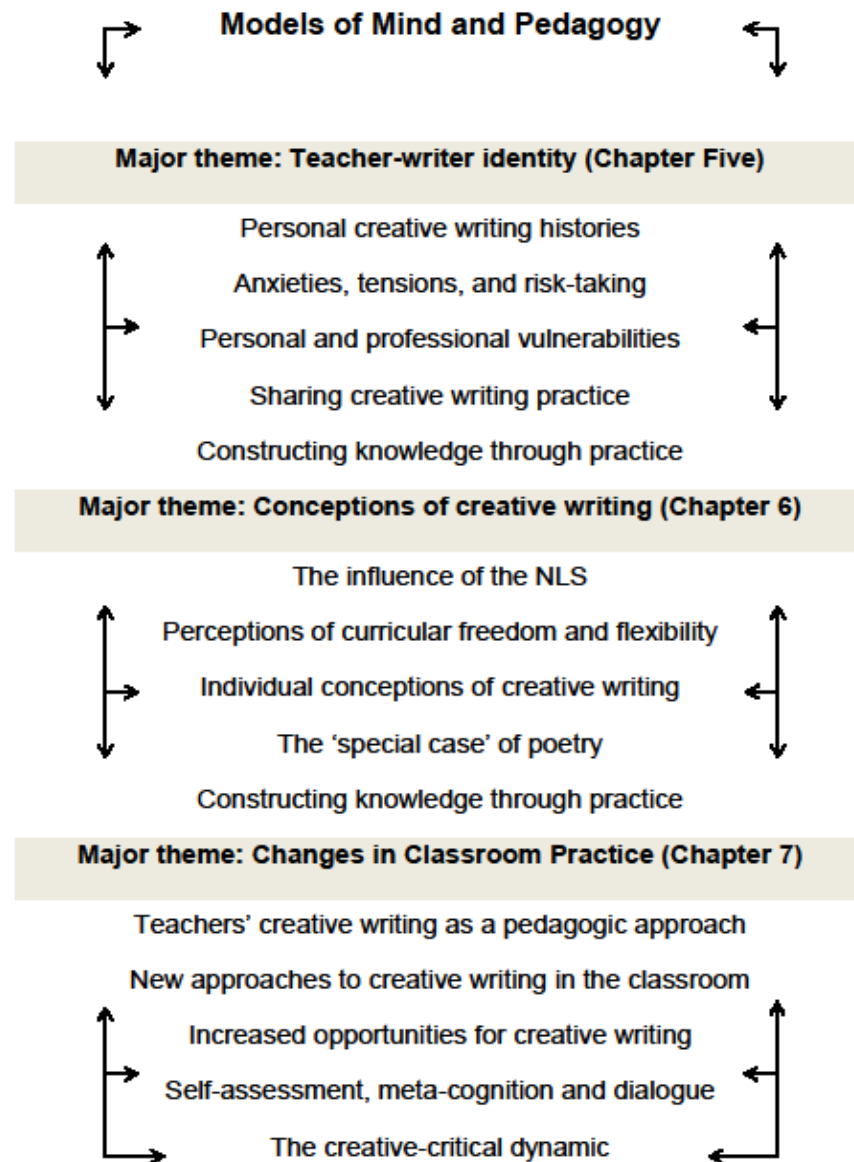
My approach to analysing data has been to create a set of thematic nodes which could operate as ways of organising the data against these theoretical models of learners’ minds. I undertook several readings of all of the data, noting the ideas, observations and opinions that occurred frequently, as well as individual or isolated insights that expressed meaningful observations of the relationship between practice and pedagogy. From this, I was able to create a set of potential themes, and position relevant data within each theme. I then went back to the body of literature relating to the field, re-examining it for information relating to individual themes. The aim here was to ensure that the thematic analysis of the case study was contextualised within the current body of knowledge, and to address the potential problem that subjective perception can result in relevant data being overlooked.

At this stage I adjusted the set of thematic nodes to ensure that they reflected the data and were relevant to current research. Each thematic node represented an area of meaning-making in participants’ experience of creative writing practice and pedagogy.

Themes were then grouped into major and sub-themes. This construction does not indicate that major themes are more important than sub-themes; rather, major themes can be seen as the overall conceptions around which patterns of meaning-making (sub-themes) congregate. The adjustment of themes was an iterative process: as additional readings of data were undertaken, and as the writing up process began, further insights and perspectives emerged in my thinking, and the thematic structure was adjusted accordingly.

Reflection on themes and sub themes continued through the subsequent writing stages, since writing itself forms part of the process of analysis. The major themes that emerged through this process were the influence of creative writing practice on teacher-writer identity; evolving conceptions of creative writing; and changes in classroom practice. These themes are conceived as interconnected elements of pedagogy rather than discrete features, and it is recognised that developments and change in one area may influence and shape developments in another. The analysis of data seeks to locate these interrelated domains within a conceptual framework that draws on Bruner's models of the learner's mind and pedagogy. This supports the process of progressing analysis from the organisation of patterns of meaning-making towards interpretation that seeks to theorise the significance of themes and their broader meanings and implications. The conceptual framework for thematic analysis is presented in the figure below:

Figure 2: *Analytical framework*





### **3.11 Research ethics**

The research project has been approved by Northumbria University, and has been guided by the University's Research Ethics and Governance Handbook (Northumbria University, 2011). I have also taken into consideration recent published ethical guidance (Denscombe, 2007: pp.141-151; Yin, 2009: pp. 73-74). The project received ethical approval in January 2010. The principles of respecting participants, avoiding harm, and operating with honesty and integrity have underpinned research design. Data protection processes have been shared with participants through informed consent, in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the research. The consent process provided participants with information about the nature, purpose and design of the research, including the process of collecting evidence through interviews, observation and documentation. This was introduced to participants in writing prior to the start of the Well Versed seminars, and was discussed in more detail with an opportunity to ask questions in the introductory seminar. Participants had the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

The risk of harm to participants involved in this investigation would arise if any of the information gathered and reported were perceived to reflect negatively on their abilities as teachers. Initial discussion with the teachers reassured them that the research focuses on describing and analysing the processes of teaching creative writing and exploring how and why pedagogy is developed, rather than making judgements about 'good' or 'poor' practice. This approach was felt to be particularly important to the teaching community, whose associations with 'observation' of their teaching are generally related to

performativity either as part of internal management processes or by external bodies such as Local Authority advisory staff and Ofsted inspectors.

It is acknowledged that the ethical framework that guides research can appear to be a somewhat technical exercise. However, I consider that a sound ethical framework plays an important role in developing a relationship of trust with participants, in which the values that underpin the research are explicitly stated as a form of partnership between researcher and participant. I feel that this is highly pertinent in the realm of teacher pedagogy, where the research involves the potentially invasive process of investigating teachers' thinking. Day has made a connection between ethics and 'caring' in carrying out such research.

The introduction of the word "caring" is deliberate, for it immediately identifies the need for researchers to have affective, human-relating skills and qualities and, by implication, places the researcher into an ethical relationship with the research object which now becomes a research subject. Caring also implies that...the researcher will not compartmentalise, override, or hijack the teachers' concerns, and will focus upon personal, professional, and interpersonal as well as cognitive development. The researcher thus becomes a person and not a mere functionary. (Day, 1991: p.537).

The ethical framework therefore extends beyond responsible practice, and supports a throughline of effective research practice. By reassuring and demonstrating to teachers that their consent is taken seriously, that their contribution to the research is vital, and that my interest in their experiences is deeply felt, a researcher-participant relationship has developed that is based on a shared objective of improving understanding of the creative writing practice-pedagogy dynamic.

## **4 Contextualising the findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this Chapter is to provide additional information which contextualises the findings from the data. Although the Well Versed case has been introduced in relation to methodology in Chapter Three, further details are given here for clarity. The Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom is described, and a summary of the seminars that formed part of teachers' experience is provided. The pedagogy of the seminars is explored. The role of poet-mentors in the project is explained, and the partnerships between poet-mentors and schools are described. The final section of the chapter provides further information about the written documentation that formed part of the data set in this study.

### **4.2 Seminars**

Six seminars took place during the Well Versed course. Each seminar lasted approximately 2.5 hours. The seminars were designed and delivered by two poet-tutors: one delivered four seminars, the other was responsible for the remaining two sessions. Both have experience of working with teachers in schools on creative writing projects, although they had not worked with any of the cohort prior to the course. Both of the tutors also have experience of delivering MA level creative writing modules in higher education.

In designing the course, the emphasis was on developing opportunities for teachers to explore their own creative writing practice. However, tutors were aware that that most of the participants in this case study were pursuing creative writing in order to support their teaching. This is a significant difference from the most MA level cohorts, who may have been writing for some time, may consider themselves to be emerging writers, and whose

motivations for taking part in an MA may be to develop their writing to publishable standard. In designing the seminars, tutors considered the needs of participants-as-writers and participants-as-teachers.

Each seminar included creative writing practice, based on workshop methodology. In most sessions, participants spent some time writing, usually individually, but occasionally collaboratively. Tutors wrote alongside participants. They were invited to share aspects of their writing with the group, and to offer and receive feedback on their work. Again, tutors joined in this process. I use the term feedback rather than critique, as this reflects the way in which the sharing of writing was approached in the seminars. In most cases, tutors invited participants to read a line or two of their work, occasionally a longer piece. Prior to the sharing of work, the tutor usually identified someone to start the feedback process, asking them to listen carefully and identify something that 'struck' them in the writing. This differs substantially from more robust critiquing of work, and was an approach which was pursued for two reasons. Firstly, the seminars were principally spaces for initiating writing, which was then developed by participants privately and through individual discussions with poet-mentors and tutors. It was therefore not appropriate to engage in evaluative critiquing of emergent writing at its initial stage of development in seminars. Secondly, feedback in seminars assisted in creating a dialogue about creative writing practice as participants considered their responses to writing tasks in an atmosphere that was inclusive and participatory, rather than evaluative. Seminars also included opportunities for participants to discuss the ways in which they were developing creative writing in their classroom as a result of taking part in the course. Sometimes this led into wider discussions about the position of creative writing in the curriculum in relation to the NLS.

Seminar 1 was an introductory session, and some time was therefore taken up by administrative procedures. The creative writing focus in this session was sound in poetry. Participants engaged in sound play, making hostile and soothing sounds from firstly the alphabet and then invented words. They used the sounds that they had invented to engage in 'sound battles', working in small groups to pitch sounds against each other, mimicking the rhythm of conversations. They then moved on to explore sound relationships between words, using orange as a starting word from which words which had sound associations were collected (eg carnage, lozenge, arrange).

Seminar 2 introduced participants to visualisation as a creative writing technique. The tutor led the participants through a visualisation in which they were asked to close their eyes and listen to 9 questions asking details about a specific memory of their grandfather/a grandfather figure. They were then asked to write down what they had seen/heard in the visualisation in prose, and were given ten minutes to complete the task. The next stage of the seminar was for participants to identify four complete sentences from the prose, lift them out of the text, and re-write them in 'what feels like the right order, the most appropriate order, the most beautiful or sensible order, whatever' (P3, Seminar 2). The rest of the session was spent sharing the work and giving and receiving feedback.

In seminar 3, the tutor used freewriting as a starting point, introduced as follows: 'I'm going to give you a line and give you five minutes, then just write and write and write and at the end of five minutes that's it' (P4, Seminar 3). Participants were asked to ensure that they kept writing, even if they could not think of what to write and so wrote nonsense: 'don't worry about it, nobody else is going to see this, it's just for you' (P4, Seminar 3). Participants were then asked to look back over what they had written and underline any

'interesting bits', which could be individual words, phrases, or sentences. These were then shared with the rest of the group. Participants then listened to an audio recording of and read a poem, 'Refrigerator, 1957' (Lux, 1997) and discussed their responses to it. The next exercise encouraged participants to engage their senses when developing their writing, and used a question framework to stimulate the writing. Each participant was given a sweet in a wrapper. The tutor then told participants that she was going to give them a series of instructions and questions, which they should respond to by writing one line. The five questions drew attention to the senses (eg 'Take off the wrapper, listen to the wrapper...what does it sound like?', P4, Seminar 3). Participants were then given 20 minutes to draw on the five lines of writing in whatever way they wished; they could choose to write on from that point or shape a poem from the text they had produced. The group then shared their writing giving feedback. The final exercise required participants to work in pairs. Each told the other an early childhood memory. Participants were then asked to write up their partner's memory, changing one small detail. This writing was shared in pairs. The changed details in the pieces of writing were discussed with the whole group.

In seminar 4, participants again explored visualisation, but this time working from imagination rather than memory. Participants were asked to close their eyes and imagine that they were holding a folded letter. The details in this visualisation were again very specific (eg 'It's folded; don't open it yet. It's nothing to do with you. How did you come by it?', P3, Seminar 4). They were then asked to turn to the third page of the letter they had visualised and copy out what was 'written' in the letter. The exercise at this point, then, moved from visualisation to freewriting. At this stage of the seminar, participants read 'Paula Becker to Clara Westhoff' by Adrienne Rich (Rich, 1980). They were then asked to copy five of the lines out as prose. This led to a discussion about the way that lines break

were used in other sections of the poem. The participants were then given a task to develop in their own time; to go back to the freewriting that they had developed from the letter visualisation and think about how they would move this piece from prose to poetry, focussing on their use of line breaks.

Seminar 5 concentrated on exploring vantage point in writing. Freewriting was used as a warm up activity for 5 minutes. Participants were then asked to leave the room and spend 15 minutes in close observation of specific place, or to spend the same amount of time choosing a colour and following it from one place to another (eg following the path of the colour orange through the building). Participants were asked to write notes, observations and ideas during this process. They were told that the idea of this part of the exercise was to generate a body of writing that could act as material in the next stage. When they returned to the room, participants were asked to go through the writing, underlining anything that they liked or found interesting, without limit. From this, they shaped the text into poems, which were shared for feedback.

The final seminar in the series used kennings as a way of exploring metaphor. The tutor introduced kennings as 'a way into using metaphor' (P3, Seminar 6) through the fusing of two nouns to create a new word that describes an object or concept. First, participants read 'Ruin', a fragment Anglo-Saxon poem, (Alexander, 1991) and discussed the imagery in the poem, identifying kennings (such as the use of 'showershield' to describe the roof). The tutor then asked a series of 20 questions about the sun (for example 'What does it do to your skin? What does it look like on water?', P3, Seminar 6), asking participants to write answers by inventing kennings. After sharing and discussing some of the kennings, participants were asked to work in small groups. Each group responded to a title (eg

Moon, Earth) by listing kennings. Still working as a group, they then developed riddle poems from the kennings, which were shared with the group.

#### **4.3 Poet-mentor partnerships**

Each of the 11 poet mentors attended seminars at different points, so that they developed an awareness of course content and methodology. After completing the course, each teacher worked with a poet mentor for the equivalent of three days. The role of the Well Versed poet mentors was to support teachers' implementation of the learning developed on the Creative Writing in the Classroom course, and support their continued creative writing practice. Partnerships took place between April and July 2011. The partnerships did not focus on traditional 'writer-in-school' roles, whereby writers lead writing workshops with pupils. Rather, poet mentors worked closely with teachers to identify how they wanted to implement learning from the course, and what kind of support would be useful. Approaches developed during the partnerships included team teaching; developing ideas for broadening and extending the use of literature in developing writing; and increasing reflective practice in writing. In most cases, poets also worked with teachers to deliver a staff professional development session focussing on developing teachers' creative writing.

#### **4.4 Written documentation**

As outlined in Chapter Three, participants submitted a 2500 word essay and a poetry portfolio, consisting of 90 lines of poetry and a 1000 word commentary, in fulfilment of course requirements for the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing. It is normally the case at MA level that creative writing assessment weightings are balanced towards creative rather than critical writing. The assessment weighting for the submissions made for this course were the subject of detailed discussion among staff at Northumbria University. It was decided that the assessment weighting for submissions would be 70%



of the available mark for the essay and 30% for the creative writing portfolio, inverting the usual creative-critical assessment balance. This reflects the fact that whilst the purpose of the course was to support teachers' creative writing so that they could develop their pedagogic approaches in the classroom, both their creative writing and their critical reflection were considered serious elements of the course.

#### **4.5 Conclusion: Pedagogical implications**

This study does not aim to examine of the pedagogy of the seminars that were delivered during the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom course in detail, since the research is focussed on how teachers' practice influences pedagogical change in schools. However, the seminars presented teachers with a model of pedagogy that differs substantially from the predominant model prescribed in the NLS. A number of the practices and approaches employed in seminars were used by teachers in developing their own pedagogy, as explored in Chapters Seven. A brief reflection on the pedagogical implications of the seminars is therefore presented here, drawing on Bruner's theoretical framework of folk pedagogy, which explores models of learners' minds and associated pedagogies.

The pedagogy of the seminars implies a conception of the learner as a 'thinker', and as a 'knowledgeable' individual, capable of constructing and reflecting on their personal knowledge within a context of 'past knowledge and reliable practice' (Bruner, 1996: pp.60-61). The mutualist, dialectical model of learning emphasises the construction of personal knowledge about creative writing within a framework of exchanges of understandings between learner and learner, and between learner and teacher (Bruner, 1996: p.57). The starting points for seminars frequently drew on the 'ingenious knowledge' of the learner

(Freire, 1998: p.62), accentuating a pedagogical interest in exploring the relationships between the 'intuitive' knowledge of the learner and the shared frame of reference that exists in the generation of text (Bruner, 1996: pp.58-59). Existing texts and literary schema existed as sites in which evolving personal knowledge about creative writing was tested, developed and explored, rather than serving as forms which could be mimicked, or used as representations of 'facts, principles and rules' which could be didactically applied (Bruner, 1996: pp.53-55).

The seminars demonstrated not only pedagogical models but epistemological assumptions. In the methodology implemented in seminars, knowledge does not exist as a fully formed, external truth that is brought to the learner by the teacher. Rather, 'both participants bring knowledge to the relationship, and one of the objects of the pedagogic process is to explore what each knows and what they can teach each other' (Aranowitz in Freire, 1998: p.8). This contrasts with the epistemological foundations of the NLS. The NLS atomises knowledge about writing into technical specifications; the object of pedagogy here is to transfer this knowledge from teacher to learner. Participants' engagement in the seminars formed part of their experience of creative writing practice, with implications for the development of pedagogy, as explored in the next three chapters.

## **5 Findings and Analysis 1: The influence of creative writing practice on the shaping of teacher-writer identity**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter is the first of three that present and analyse findings from the case study. These chapters explore the ways in which participants' experience of creative writing practice influence their identities as teacher-writers; their conceptions of creative writing; and the pedagogical choices and approaches that they make in the classroom. The three chapters are therefore inter-connected, examining different aspects of the influence of creative writing practice on pedagogy. This reflects a perception that pedagogy is multi-faceted; that teachers' identities and their conceptions of creative writing practice form part of their pedagogy; and that the choices that they make about classroom practice interplay with dynamic, evolving constructions of identity and conceptions of creative writing.

The strategy for thematic analysis in these chapters arises from the theoretical propositions that inform the research. As outlined in Chapter One, the theoretical orientation of the thesis is that creative writing, conceived as processes and acts that use imagination, reflection and language to create material texts, is an 'artistic event' (Freire, 1985: p.79) that sits within the discipline of literature; that pedagogy can be developed more effectively when the literary context of creating text is fully recognised; and that the experience of practising creative writing has the potential to deepen teachers' understanding of how the processes and acts of creative writing connect to the 'choice of pedagogical practice [that] implies a conception of the learner' (Bruner, 1996: p.63). Themes have therefore been developed in response to both literature and data captured during the case study. The rationale for this approach is to establish the analysis of data within a relevant research context, while remaining open to the possibilities of new and

unexpected findings emerging from participants through the case study. The thematic foci are contextualised with reference to Bruner's theoretical framework of models of learners' minds; particular emphasis on this concept is applied in Chapter Seven, which considers pedagogic changes achieved through creative writing practice. The focus in this chapter, however, is the presentation and interpretation of research findings relating to participants' identities as teacher-writers.

## **5.2 Contextualising teacher-writer identity**

Exploration of teacher-writer identity challenges the researcher to comprehend a wide spectrum of philosophical, psychological and anthropological concepts, including

...the close connection between identity and the self, the role of emotion in shaping identity, the power of stories and discourse in understanding identity, the role of reflection in shaping identity, the link between identity and agency, the contextual factors that promote or hinder the construction of identity. (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: p176)

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address the full range of issues explored in the growing body of research on teacher identity (see, for example, Beijaard *et al.*, 2004; Canrinus *et al.*, 2011; Day *et al.*, 2006; Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009), it is necessary to briefly consider the conceptualisation of teacher identity in the literature in order to contextualise how the identities of participants in the case study evolve and shift in relation to their creative writing practice.

The literature reveals that the concept of teacher identity is complex and resists definition, but reaches broad consensus that teacher identity is an evolving, dynamic and shifting facet of the self, rather than a static characteristic (Beijaard *et al.*, 2004; Beauchamp and

Thomas, 2009; Day *et al.*, 2006). It is conceived of as an 'ongoing process' of both individual and socio-cultural construction and reconstruction, and as a 'relational' concept (Beijaard *et al.*, 2004: p.108), responding to external, internal, professional and personal experiences and influences (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: p.177; Day *et al.*, 2006: p.610). Beijaard and colleagues propose that the formation of teacher identity 'is a process of practical knowledge-building characterized by an ongoing integration of what is individually and collectively seen as relevant to teaching' (2004: p.123).

Day, Kington *et al* suggest that while those aspects of identity that are contingent upon social construction are 'ever-remade', other facets concerned with 'dispositions, attitudes and behavioural responses...are durable and relatively stable' (2006: p.601). Thus, individual teacher identity may be usefully thought of as incorporating a 'core identity' capable of operating in multiple forms and encompassing multiple identities that respond to personal, professional and institutional realms of experience (Gee, cited in Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: p.177). Teachers' identities are 'mediated by their own experience in schools and outside of schools as well as their own beliefs and values about what it means to be a teacher and the type of teacher they aspire to be' (Sachs, 2001: p.154). Thus, multiple identities interplay as teachers engage in the business of 'creating themselves as teachers' (Coldron and Smith, 1999: p.172).

From this perception, teacher identities can be understood as the interaction between three inter-related domains: the personal domain, which is concerned with those experiences that take place outside of school; the professional dimension, which includes social and policy discourses as well as the teacher's own educational theories and ideas;

and the environmental domain, relating to the institution in which the teacher works (Day *et al.*, 2006).

Sachs proposes that identity is 'at the core of the teaching profession...a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of "how to be", "how to act" and "how to understand" their work and their place in society' (cited in Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: p.178).

Pedagogical actions, theories and reflection are, therefore, intimately connected to teachers' multiple identities. This centrality of teacher identity to pedagogy means that it is important in this research to consider how engagement in creative writing influences teachers' identities as writers.

Cremin and Myhill argue that research into teacher-writer identity is important because 'if few teachers see themselves as writers...the teaching of writing may be constrained by a lack of awareness of the complexities of composition and the significance of writers' identities' (2011: p.126). Analysing data drawn from seminars, focus groups, interviews and essays, this chapter explores the ways in which creative writing practice contributes to teacher-writer identities, creating interplay and tensions between the teacher-self and the writer-self. Four thematic strands emerge through this approach in relation to teachers' evolving identities as writers:

***Teachers' creative writing histories: an influence on teacher-writer identity***

This thematic strand explores how participants' prior experience of creative writing practice contributes to the development of writer-identity.

***Personal and professional anxieties, tensions and risk-taking: components in the construction of teacher-writer identity***

This strand is concerned with how personal and professional concerns and apprehensions about creative writing practice may be seen as both barriers to and essential elements of the emergence of teacher-writer identity.

***The sharing of creative writing practice: a co-constructive process in the development of teacher-writer identities***

The sharing of practice reveals another layer of potential risk and vulnerability in the interplay between teacher-self and writer-self, which has the potential to impede or contribute to constructing teacher-writer identity.

***Teachers' creative writing practice in the classroom: an articulation of teacher-writer identity***

This theme considers how teachers' engagement in creative writing practice is expressed in the classroom, and the implications that such developments may have on the construction of knowledge in creative writing.

**5.3 Teachers' creative writing histories: an influence on teacher-writer identity**

Of the fourteen teacher participants in this case study, most claimed no previous experience of or involvement in creative writing, despite the fact that, to varying degrees, all were involved in teaching creative writing in their schools. Five teachers identified themselves as having engaged in some creative writing prior to taking the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom course: one had attended some creative writing workshops in the past; two wrote privately for recreation and personal enjoyment; and two had experience of writing songs. None of the teachers felt that they were 'writers'

or 'teacher-writers'. On the whole, however, the language these participants used to describe their writing practice in the first seminar was self-deprecating:

I've dabbled in it (T13, Seminar 1)

...scribbling little things and then shoving them in a drawer and I never thought of myself as writing (T6, Seminar 1)

Cremin and Myhill's research (2011) suggests that teachers' 'multiple histories and experiences' of writing are significant in exploring teacher-writer identity, and that teachers' experiences of creative writing during their own schooldays may have relevance to later identity. In this case study, the most striking feature of teachers' recollections of their own creative writing histories as school children was its absence. When the teachers in this case study were asked for their memories of creative writing at school, most could not remember it as a significant feature of their school lives at all:

I don't remember any creative writing teaching at all, most of our writing in primary school even up to early secondary school or year 9 as it is now, was almost all recounts, you know the diary type stuff and actually in English classes we did loads and loads of reading and very little writing indeed...Very little at all on the actual creative writing, lots of grammar work, loads of old fashioned grammar work. (T5, Focus Group 1)

Actually I find it quite hard to think about creative writing and how that happened at school, I was very passionate about maths so I remember all my maths lessons vividly but clearly my English lessons didn't engage me in the same way. I remember having Letts books and everything being very prescriptive and from a workbook. (T7, Focus Group 1)

Perhaps it is significant, then, that the two teachers who could recall positive creative writing experiences as school children continued to engage in creative writing as adults, at least to some extent.



I had a teacher...who gave us things like...pictures, and tiny little bits of poetry...I think it was very much to do with her and she was very creative, and when she marked our work it was in the days when you got 'good' or 'not good' or 'excellent' and even when it was excellent you didn't know why it was excellent, but she would write quite detailed things like suggest a different word but not just say 'that was good'. So that you were actually getting a bit of critique and that was completely unusual, nothing like that ever happened at my school...but it was lovely to have her as a teacher for me because it built up a real proper relationship with writing...' (T1, Focus Group 1)

This teacher's experience of positive feedback reinforces Cremin and Myhill's assertion that such incidents may influence future attitudes towards writing, as T1 later says,

I cannot remember a time when I did not write or love writing, in all creative forms (T1, Essay)

It is also interesting to note that T1's perception of the importance of the feedback she received as a child is not located in raising self-confidence or self-esteem, although that may be implied, but in the way in which it 'built up a real proper relationship with writing'. In recalling her child-as-writer self at a later seminar, it is this relationship with writing that is central:

I've never not had anything to write about. That's all I did at school, in maths, in chemistry, wrote poems under the desk and novels in my rough book and pretend letters from kings and queens to each other...it never occurred to me that some people don't like doing this. There will be a little weirdo like me, probably one in every class, this is going back to being 6 or 7, I would imagine there's one little freak like me in every class...(T1, Seminar 3)

Although tongue in cheek, the descriptions here of her child-as-writer self –'a little weirdo like me', a 'little freak like me' perhaps betray some anxiety that her identity as a writer is eccentric, exists outside of most people's experience, and may, therefore, mean that she will not be easily accepted by her peers. Such anxiety is evident too in another teacher's

comment, reflecting on how her colleagues in school might respond to her development of a portfolio of poetry:

Creative writing's not airy fairy as such, but it's a bit '*who does she think she is?*' you know? (T13, Interview 1)

Here, there is a sense that others may consider the teacher's participation in creative writing as an inappropriate aspiration, somehow assuming a mantle which is not hers to claim. Another teacher recalled a specific creative writing experience which had struck her as significant at the time:

I can remember our English teacher, I must have been about 13 or 14 but he gave us each a different photograph from a magazine of a person, and asked us to imagine, not just how that person looked which we could see but imagine what that person's interests might be, and I remember thinking this is wonderful, this is really exciting and I just wonder if we hadn't been given too many tasks like that before if I can remember thinking this is really interesting. (T6, Focus Group 1)

Here, the kind of positive feedback identified by Cremin and Myhill as significant to the development of writer identity is not a feature of the memory. Rather the strength of the recollection seems to come from a sense of enjoyment and engagement ('this is wonderful, this is really exciting') that is achieved through 'essentially a problem-solving as opposed to a task-execution model' of writing (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987: p.341). The relationship with writing is a key facet of both of these positive recollections of writing as a child.

The data in this case study suggests then that creative writing histories are a factor in teachers' writing identities as adults. However, it is noted that even those teachers who could recall positive child-as-writer experiences and who continued, at least to some extent, to engage in creative writing activities as adults, resisted claiming a writing identity. Therefore although the connection between creative writing histories and writing identity in

teachers is evident, other factors are significant in shaping the construction of teacher-writer identity.

#### **5.4 Personal and professional anxieties, tensions and risk-taking: components in the construction of teacher-writer identity**

As described in 5.3 above, five of the teachers in the case study identified that they had some experience of creative writing in their adult lives. However, they did not see their creative writing as relating to their teacher selves. They considered their writing practice to be private, carried out for their own pleasure, and unconnected to their teacher identities, as noted above. Only one teacher had made any previous attempt to bring her own writing practice into the classroom – reading a poem she had written to her class - but had found this unsuccessful, feeling that it had ‘stalled them’ (T1, Seminar 1).

A second teacher said that she had begun writing ‘out of necessity’, largely for therapeutic reasons during a period of unhappiness (T4, Interview 4). Although this teacher had attended some creative writing workshops in the past, she again saw her writing as largely private, ‘I’m writing for myself...to let my feelings out’ (T4, Interview 4), distinguishing between the writer self and the teacher self.

Two teachers had written songs for some years. Of these, one had recently started to write fiction, again privately and for his own pleasure, describing writing as a ‘passion’. Again, he identified this as entirely separate from his teacher identity, and had never considered the link between his private creative writing experiences and his teaching of writing: ‘Until now it is something that has just never occurred to me’ (T11, Essay). This teacher’s comments echo Cremin and Myhill’s observation that generally there is little

reflection on teachers' 'identities as writers and the connections between writing identities and teaching writing' (Cremin and Myhill, 2011: p.126). It is significant to note that the teacher here prefaces his reflection with 'Until now', indicating that a change has taken place in his own conception of the relationship between his writing and teaching identities as a result of his participation in the Well Versed project.

All of the participants in the case study, including those who had some previous experience of engaging in creative writing practice, demonstrated significant anxiety at the prospect of developing their creative writing practice. This was revealed in the first creative writing seminar, when teachers were asked to introduce themselves and say why they had chosen to come on the course.

I teach English Language and Literature throughout the school, but I'd say that I'm really more of an English Literature person... I do like poetry – I love reading it – but writing it – I am quite petrified! (T9, Seminar 1)

I don't write – I am pretty scared too, but I want to have a go at writing really. (T3, Seminar 1)

I am really quite nervous about this, it's quite a challenge for me. ... I am looking forward to this – but with some trepidation. (T2, Seminar 1)

I've never done any writing. I'm scared, but I'm looking forward to my own development. (T12, Seminar 1)

New experiences often invoke feelings of anxiety, and it is therefore perhaps not surprising that the teachers expressed their fears at this early stage. Research has suggested, however, that their anxiety may reveal more than a personal sense of nervousness. In creative writing, teachers are 'positioned more overtly than usual as learners' and may therefore feel 'vulnerable about this role shift in the domain of writing' (Grainger, 2005: p.78). This may relate to the external/internal paradox of teachers who are positioned by others as 'experts' in writing, but who in reality may feel anxious and

insecure about their own knowledge and ability. This creates a sense of professional tension, since embarking on creative writing practice may be seen as a route to exposing areas of vulnerability.

The teachers involved in this case study reflected on where their anxiety came from. For many, a major hurdle to overcome was the perception that the other teachers involved in Well Versed would be able to approach creative writing with greater confidence and skill than themselves. The case study involved teachers from primary, middle and secondary schools. Three of the teachers were English teachers. For those teachers who were not English specialists, there was an expectation that others would be able to approach creative writing confidently:

... it is fair to say that an overall air of vulnerability was expressed at the beginning of our creative writing seminars by primary and secondary teachers alike. Initially, I was surprised by the secondary teachers on the course reporting that they were 'nervous' about the group writing sessions. Part of me expected this feeling more from my fellow primary teachers as we were not necessarily subject specialists. Nevertheless, the anxiety involved in writing and sharing our work with an audience seemed to be universal. (T3, Essay)

As this teacher points out, those with some background in English Literature felt that their knowledge did not form the basis for confidence in creative writing; although English subject specialists, they felt that they had no specialism in the field of creative writing practice. They experienced the same trepidation as their colleagues.

My usual confidence with English faded quickly and I felt somewhat intimidated by others around the table; automatically assuming that they would be accomplished writers to various degrees. (T9, Essay)

The use of the words 'confidence' and 'vulnerability' may go some way to coming to an understanding teachers' initial apprehension. The English word 'confidence' has its roots

in the Latin '*fidere*', to trust; and 'vulnerable' comes from the Latin '*vulnerare*', to wound. This perhaps implies that teachers are concerned that the process of creative writing in some ways lowers their defences, and that in order to address this they must build confidence, or trust. This begs the question trust in what, or in whom? As the teachers examined their own sense of vulnerability, potential answers to these questions began to emerge.

Teachers' sense that their peers would be 'better' than them at creative writing seems to imply that they each considered themselves to have a low level of competence, and that this would be discovered by others through the writing activities that took place in seminars. The awareness that their writing would be shared with their peers and with their poet tutors and mentors, contributed to this anxiety:

Trying to be creative, in the seminars, that intimidating feeling of having those poets, so skilled, that feeling that this is something that I can't connect with because maybe I don't have that creative side in me, that doubt. (T2, Interview 3)

The anxiety that is described here relates not only to what others will think but to a fear that 'I don't have that creative side in me'. The participant here, positioned as a learner, recognises that the knowledge that she seeks about creative writing cannot be transferred from teacher to learner; it is not 'a telling by one to the other' (Bruner, 1996: p.56). This participant's doubts rest on her capacity to 'be creative'. However, later in the interview she goes on to say:

I do think that everyone has the potential to unlock something that they didn't know was there and produce something they can be proud of...One of the things it's shown me, and brought to the fore, I'm prepared to look at things a little bit differently, as uncomfortable as that is at times...But that's been about as well working with my poet mentor, and when she has said, that's what you need to work with...and maybe it will emerge as something completely different. (T2, Interview 3)

The idea of 'unlocking' something can be seen in relation to Bruner's concept of learners as thinkers: knowledge may exist internally as well as externally, and internal, personal knowledge can be revealed and developed through intersubjective exchange (Bruner, 1996: p.56). However, in considering themselves as learners exploring and constructing their personal knowledge of creative writing, participants' sometimes revealed that the anxiety that accompanied the process was inhibiting:

I frequently felt the blind panic of a lack of ideas and the pressure to be genuine but interesting, honest while also engaging my audience (T9, Essay)

The anxiety expressed here may relate to a kind of performance anxiety, unconnected to creative writing. However, it is worth reflecting here that some of the vulnerabilities and anxieties may have been magnified because the course focussed on the writing of poetry. As discussed in Chapter Two, Romantic ideas about self-expression, catharsis, and the inspirational Muse permeate conceptions of poetry. The poem itself, in this conception, is brought about not by deliberate practice but by 'a sudden burst of creative energy – charged by a powerful emotion, vision or image' (Davidson and Fraser, 2006: p.29). It is an outpouring of the inner self.

Dymoke's research (2001) found that conceptions of poetry as an emotional and personal form of self-expression influenced teachers' attitudes to teaching poetry writing.

Teachers' views that 'if poetry is creative and individual who am I to assess it?..Because it's so personal it seems almost intrusive' reveal a sense that poetry, in comparison to other forms of creative writing is 'somehow precious and unassailable' (Dymoke, 2001: p.34). The lyricism associated with Romantic conceptions of poetry is evident here: poetry is viewed as 'an intense expression of subjective experience' (Wellek, cited in Culler, 2009: p.884). In this conception, ideas about poetry are concerned with intense personal

feelings, an inward gaze, and the exposure of personal feelings may thus add to participants' anxiety and apprehension at the prospect of writing poetry, and sharing their poetry with peers.

In the data, the perceptions of poetry as self-revelatory are evident in the way that participants described their ideas about poetry as a site of personal disclosure:

I was nervous about revealing too much of myself (T12, Poetry Portfolio)

Any initial concerns were not based on whether I was going to be able to write a poem of an acceptable standard. Despite not coming from a poetry background, I had had enough experience of creative writing to know that I would be able to have a decent stab at it at least. For me, it was simply a case of how much of myself I would be prepared to reveal. (T11, Essay)

In this context, then, trust emerges as a concept that, may relate to the self (trust in one's own capacity to behave creatively, and to have ideas, as well as one's fears about self-revelation), to the processes involved in writing poetry, and to those involved in those processes with you (both 'those poets, so skilled' and the 'audience' who must be 'engaged'). In early seminars, the 'pressure' to 'be creative' provoked, at times, intense self-doubt.

And I'll be honest after the first session – and it was great – and the tutor was lovely, it wasn't anything to do with that – I came away thinking, oh no no no, what's this all about? I can't do this...I can't write poems. It's very emotive, I was thinking, what am I doing? But then, no, I am going to do this, I'm going to face these uncomfortable situations, I don't want to be comfortable, I need to keep going. (T2, Interview 3)

At the heart of this teacher's fears then, is the risk of failure: 'I can't do this...I can't write poems'. The internal dialogue reported here, with the reply 'I don't want to be comfortable, I need to keep going' expresses an acknowledgement that personal risk-



taking is an element of developing creative writing practice, and of emerging teacher-writer identity. This is developed further in the teacher's essay, where she describes sharing work as 'an area of inner conflict... with feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness battling with the rational voice of the lifelong learner I am' (T2, Essay). The 'lifelong learner' seems to be closely connected to her identity as a teacher. As a teacher, she identifies self-doubt as a positive aspect of teacher reflection, and it is here that she attempts to reconcile the lack of confidence that she feels about creative writing.

Crisis of confidence was the recurrent theme for the entire length of the course, which, if I am entirely honest, is a position I professionally find myself in at times, with no bearing to the writing module. When you are responsible for engaging young minds, trying to foster a passion for learning and ensuring the children are fully equipped to tackle future study, it would be disastrous not to question personal practice, your colleagues and also incorporating the wider picture at policy level. I believe self-doubt is vital to ensure evaluation and reflection which is an essential component to continuing development. (T2, Essay)

Here, concepts of 'confidence' and 'self-doubt' are drawn on as elements that contribute to this teachers' reflective practice. The process of reflection is identified as a central aspect of both the practice and pedagogy of creative writing. In the next section of this chapter, I explore how the sharing of creative writing practice supports the process of reflection, and investigate how the sharing of practice contributes to the construction of teacher-writer identities.

### **5.5 The sharing of creative writing practice: a co-constructive process that contributes to the development of teacher-writer identities**

Some of the literature on the teaching of writing claims that that experience of creative writing practice can be a significant influence on teachers' confidence (for example Grainger, 2005; Cremin, 2006; Cremin and Myhill, 2011; Ofsted, 2009). There is less

analysis perhaps of how practice builds confidence, and which elements of creative writing practice are most relevant to the process of constructing teacher-writing identity. In this case study, the sharing of creative writing practice has emerged as a significant influence on teachers' emerging sense of confidence in their own writer identities.

### **5.5.1 Personal and professional vulnerability in sharing practice**

The 'distinct fear of comparison' (Grainger, 2005) felt by teachers in sharing writing experiences was, as outlined above, a feature of initial engagement in the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom course. Teachers frequently referenced writing poetry as connected to the personal sense of self, both for themselves and their pupils. They recognised 'the intensely personal nature of language and poetry' (T12, Essay) and its capacity to 'explore personal emotions' (T10, Essay). This is evident in the following remark:

I think I feel more confident now about actually correct...not correcting but speaking to people about poetry, because any other work that my students do, I'd say 'the beginning's weak' or 'this bit needs this' or 'the tenses here are all wrong' but when we do poetry I don't like giving it marks. (T1, Focus Group 2)

The issues to do with assessment of poetry in this exchange are significant. T1's assertion that she feels 'more confident now', and her suggestion that this confidence is connected to her ability to engage in dialogue about the writing of poetry, implies that the experience gained through the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom course has influenced the way she thinks about assessment of pupils' poetry. Her sense that assessing pupils' writing of poetry is somehow different from other kinds of writing is explored as the discussion continues:

- T1: I think as if I feel almost as if poetry is like, it's like criticising their appearance.
- T4: It's very personal.
- T1: Yes, and some people, I don't know about your schools, are in uniform but I'll say to someone 'that's not a uniform jumper' but I won't say 'your hair is a mess' whereas some people will, because I think the one is a fact and the other is my opinion - if the hair is a mess - and with poetry I always feel like it's so personal even if it isn't about a personal thing...

(Focus Group 2, July 2011)

Here, the focus on the teachers' role in assessing poetry is centred on an understanding that 'poetry is so personal even if it isn't about a personal thing'. This perhaps recalls Bullock's assertion that, while personal vulnerability and fear of value judgements may exist in all classroom activity, engagement with literature is high stakes, and poetry the highest stakes of all. Bullock notes:

In a very real sense a pupil is himself being judged each time he responds in class to a piece of literature, particularly a poem. More is at stake than his knowledge of the text. Is the value judgement he forms the one the teacher finds acceptable? Is he betraying himself, he may well ask, as one who lacks discrimination? In no other area of classroom operations is there quite the same degree of vulnerability, with poetry the most exposing element of all. (DES, 1975: p.131)

Although the teachers' discussion quoted above is about pupils' poetry, the sense of personal vulnerability is relevant to teachers' own writing practice. The analogy that is made with criticising someone's appearance - the factual truth of not wearing uniform as against the 'opinion' that someone looks a mess - is useful in considering that when teachers' assess poetry they feel 'obliged to make a value judgment, and value judgments make everyone uneasy, especially those who make them, because they are, in essence, indefinable' (Weldon, 2009: p.171). The anxieties that teachers feel in responding to pupils' writing is a recognition that the negotiation and ambiguity of meaning expressed in writing poetry is deeply connected to 'the self', a theme which is explored in some detail in

the next chapter (6.3.1 below). In this context, the sharing of teachers' practice with peers extends beyond knowledge, skill and craft, and implies a disclosure of the self, and a sense that judgements may be made not only about their writing, but about themselves.

The evidence suggests, then, that the sharing of creative writing practice presents considerable personal challenges, since teachers may feel, as they do of their pupils, that 'when they write poetry....it's not just words on a page' (T2, Seminar 1). Here, and in the discussion quoted above, teachers' engagement in responding to pupils' poetry is inhibited by their conception of poetry as deeply bound up in expression of the inner self. For teachers, the sense of self is often closely connected to teacher identity (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). The case study revealed anxieties about sharing creative writing practice that were directly concerned with teachers' sense of their professional identities.

We have seen that the teachers had preconceived expectations that teachers with some specialism in English Literature would be better equipped to engage in creative writing. Literature specialists, on the other hand, pointed out that they felt that their background afforded them no such position (see 5.4 above). However, all teachers tend to be positioned as holding 'considerable skill mastery' in writing by their pupils and perhaps wider society (Cremin and Myhill, 2011: p.129). The sharing of writing practice, then, may foster anxieties that lack of expertise, mastery and knowledge could be discovered, with a consequent sense that teacher identity may be compromised through creative writing practice.

### 5.5.2 Sharing creative writing practice with peers and professional writers

Situating the sharing of creative writing practice in the context of teachers' professional and personal vulnerabilities raises questions about whether the process will bolster confidence or impede its development. In this case study 'sharing writing practice' included reading work to peers, poet tutors and poet mentors in seminars and giving and receiving feedback; and receiving feedback from poet tutors and poet mentors in one to one tutorials and mentoring conversations. Such sharing of practice was an expectation of involvement in the course, explicitly referenced in the Module Guide<sup>11</sup>. Each of these contexts presented different challenges for the teacher participants, and contributed to the development of writer identity in different ways.

The seminars often followed a traditional workshop pedagogy in which participants were asked to write in response to a stimulus, reflect on the writing, and identify a number of lines or phrases to read out for responses from the group. In addition to the course participants and the poet tutor, two of the poet mentors usually attended and participated in seminars. The following extract from seminar 2 (the first seminar in which teachers were asked to share their writing) demonstrates how this process was introduced, and some of the issues that arise from it.

P3: I think it would be quite nice to go round and hear everyone's. T1? And T7, could you come up with the first response to T1?

T7: Oh, oh right okay, no pressure then...

(Laughter)

T1: It's called '*Hard bargain*' but I wasn't good with the title.

Everything everywhere smells of coal, he says give me a kiss and I'll give you sixpence, and I run squealing away, his black face only pinky brown in

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<sup>11</sup>The Module Guide states that students will 'offer feedback on the writing of other students' in seminars, and will receive feedback from tutors and mentors.

the creases, like his trousers are only blue there, under the table is my doll's house, with red roof, cream walls, green shutters, and diamond lettered windows.

- T7: I thought the title was quite appropriate, actually, when you said the title I thought oh what kind of bargain will it be and it got my interest quite a lot, and when you got to the second line and you mentioned the sixpence and that aspect I wondered what was going to happen as it continued. And from the first line, I already had an image in my mind and it reminded me of my Beamish trip and coalmining. So then as it continued on it built on that scene, and that imagery, that was really effective.

(Seminar 2)

The invitation to share, although quite low key ('it would be quite nice to go round and hear everyone's') is, nonetheless, delivered in a manner that conveys an expectation that all of the participants would also like to hear each other's work, and that they will be willing to contribute to the process. The semi-formality of this is reinforced by identifying another participant who is asked to 'come up with the first response'. It is interesting to note that it is T7, who has been asked to respond, rather than T1 who will read and receive the response who feels 'under pressure'. This reinforces the sense that assessment works in two ways: both for the person who has shared their work, and for the person offering their assessment – which may in turn, be judged. Although this comment is clearly delivered with humorous intent, it perhaps conveys some of the complexity of sharing practice. Just as reading work may be personally exposing, giving feedback may make participants feel vulnerable, raising concerns that their comments will be perceived as naïve, overly critical, or lacking in perception or validity. As such, the processes involved in both sharing and responding to creative writing practice incorporate elements of risk that potentially jeopardise teachers' identities, revealing a lack of skill or judgement (Cremin and Myhill, 2011: p.129).

It is also interesting to note that in introducing her work, T1 precedes the reading with a self-deprecating comment – 'I wasn't good with the title'. This comment is typical of the

kind of proviso used by participants in introducing their work – comments such as ‘this isn’t very good’ ‘I haven’t quite got there’ ‘I’m not sure about this’ were frequently used. Such comments may be indicative of authentic concerns about the work, and may equally work as warning signals to readers and potential critics, signalling that the writer is aware of faults and failings in the work before they are pointed out. Interestingly, T7’s first comment on the work is to refute the writer’s idea that the title is no good, by explaining how the title worked to draw her into the subject. This comment may be interpreted in a number of ways. It may, for example, be an attempt to bolster the writer’s confidence; a social device to contribute to a supportive and cohesive group dynamic; or a comment designed to show that the person responding is able to identify literary devices such as imagery. In other words, it is possible that the response to the sharing of work is in fact a response to a social situation that is loaded with vulnerability and exposure for both the writer and the person giving feedback.

The seminar continued by asking for further feedback from the group:

P3: Anybody’s favourite bit?

T4: I like the bit about the sixpence and give me a kiss and running away, I had an uncle who was a bit like that, say funny things and try and get a kiss and I used to visualise running away from him.

T10: I like the contrast between the coal imagery and the dark...then the really vivid green red silver in the doll’s house, the complete difference in colour between the child’s world and your granddad’s world, I like that, very clean images. Really surprising that last line. I really like that.

P3: Yes I agree.

T1: That was at the beginning of the prose, that was setting the scene then when you said put them in order (*referencing the poet tutor’s instructions during the writing exercise*) I was just going to put them in order that they happened, but now they’re completely jumbled up now....

T13: I loved ‘only pink at the creases, like his trousers are only blue there’, the sense of something underneath.

P3: I liked the way you extended it to the trousers whether as an afterthought or a refinement, it made it so much more interesting.

T1: Thank you.

(Seminar 2)

The feedback offered to the writer in the extract might be characterised as a mixture of response to the subject matter (for example 'I had an uncle who was a bit like that'), and response that concentrates on the writing choices (such as comments on the 'surprising' use of colour, and the way an image is extended). The process of giving and receiving feedback can be seen as a step in the process of intersubjective exchange that identifies learners as thinkers, engaged in 'mutualist and dialectical' learning that is 'concerned with interpretation and understanding' (Bruner, 1996: p.56). As such, it conceives of knowledge about creative writing being constructed through both an internal process and through a discourse that develops with others involved in taking the same creative writing actions. Such a conception relates to a pedagogical understanding of the learner as a 'thinker', capable of developing their understanding through intersubjective exchange (Bruner, 1996: p.56).

Evidence collected during the case study reveals that teachers located the value of sharing creative writing practice with peers not primarily in the feedback that they received, but in the way that the process of sharing work enabled them to develop a relationship with their own writing practice, and to start to overcome hurdles of self-consciousness and inadequacy that may impede the development of teacher-writer identity.

The fact that we were expected, though never pressed, to read something out was a positive (if initially uncomfortable) experience for me and as the weeks went on I found myself much more willing to read aloud. This was perhaps due to the positive and encouraging atmosphere in the class, coupled with a sense of achievement and sometimes pride at what I had written. (T11, Essay)



Once I began to write and share my poetry, the initial feelings of inadequacy started to subside. (T12, Essay)

The process of sharing writing practice in this context, then, can be seen as an integral element of the participants' experience of writing. The essentially private, internal process of carrying out a writing exercise is extended, developed, reconstructed through the process of sharing the work in the seminars. Such acts and actions deepen understanding of creative writing practice, thus contributing to pedagogical development. The development of participants' self-confidence in sharing writing practice may then be seen as a broader development of their experience of creative writing practice. As participants' confidence developed, emerging teacher-writer identities were articulated in participants' descriptions of themselves as 'writers' and 'teacher-writers'. Such descriptions - 'through my experience as a writer' (T9, Essay), 'my new found position as developing teacher-writer' (T2, Essay) 'I have started to consider myself as a writer' (T3, Essay) 'what is important to me as a writer' (T7, Poetry Portfolio) – contrast sharply with the rejection of a writer identity and self-deprecating references to participation in creative writing that were a trait of participants' early engagement in creative writing.

Perhaps understandably, there is some evidence that the feedback of professional poets – both poet-tutors and poet-mentors – was given a higher value than that of peers, both in seminars and in tutorials and mentoring sessions. Poet-tutors and poet-mentors were involved in the process of sharing work and giving and receiving feedback in seminars. It is possible that their presence, as professional poets, would add to teachers' feelings of inadequacy as writers. This was referenced by T2 (5.4 above) who described the feeling of having 'those poets, so skilled' present in seminars as she struggled with the thought 'maybe I don't have that creative side in me'. However, their presence in seminars also worked to increase teachers' sense of self-worth as writers:

You get a particular bit of feedback off somebody you think - one of the poets said something nice about one of mine, I couldn't tell you what it was I just know that they did, and I was like 'oh yeah!' (T4, Interview 4)

When she said 'oh it's good' I suppose that felt quite nice actually, to think alright, okay, well somebody's validated it... (T3, Focus Group 2)

As well as receiving feedback in seminars, participants attended one to one tutorials with poet- tutors to receive formative assessment on their poetry portfolios, and also engaged in dialogue about their work with their poet mentors. Given that their status as published poets represented a level of skill, expertise and knowledge beyond that of the participants, this process could be seen to represent an area where fragile, emergent writer identities may be particularly vulnerable. The prospect of sharing work on this more intimate one to one basis provoked a new level of anxiety for some participants:

Sharing my classroom and children with my poet mentor was easy; sharing my collection was not. I employed every childish tactic to avoid sharing my writing. Therefore, I would question whether the writing itself is the hurdle to overcome or the sharing of the work and who the selected audience are. (T2, Essay)

The anxiety reverberating here may be connected to fear that the work will be negatively evaluated, but a number of teachers – including the one quoted above – identified that whilst this may provoke anxiety, they were keen that the feedback they received from professional poets was honest and rigorous: 'I need somebody to be critical with me, that's what I want' (T2, Interview 3). Participants' experience of giving feedback to pupils informed their understanding of this process:

I thought is she [poet-mentor] going to feel like she has to say it's good. Yeah, when actually she might be thinking it's a bit crap, and I was also then thinking, I don't even mind if she does say that. I would rather that I knew she was being completely honest... (T9, Interview 2)

The process of receiving feedback was characterised by teachers as concentrating less on the ways in which a 'good' poem could be written, and more on a process of self and collaborative reflection. In considering how she approached poems in the context of feedback from her poet tutor, T9 explored the way in which reading her work in the knowledge that she was going to discuss it in a tutorial changed the way that she reflected on it:

When I re-read it I thought 'oh it's a bit rubbish' and I think the reason I was most disappointed was because when I was writing it I was thinking 'oh my God this is amazing, these line breaks are so telling' (laughs) and then when I looked later I was a bit 'oh, I'm not sure what I was thinking then'. But just the whole doing it at that time really made me think. (T9, Interview 2)

The process of sharing the work with a professional poet then does not solely rest on the professional poet 'giving feedback'. For this teacher, the process starts before the point of external feedback; there is firstly, a point of self-reflection, of giving oneself feedback. The process of sharing the work with her poet-tutor instigates a re-reading of the work, perhaps at more of a distance, which provokes reflection and review that may not otherwise have happened, and that emphasises the Brunerian concept of the learner seeing herself as a thinker. The sharing of work here, as in seminars, can thus be seen as an element of the teachers' writing practice, a space in which the teachers' relationship with their own writing practice is deepened and becomes more meaningful. As such, it can be seen as part of the construction of teacher-writer identity.

Similarly, the influence of professional poets is seen below as guiding participants towards a different way of engaging with the process of writing, rather than receiving feedback on a specific piece of work:

Yes, privately, there are a couple of lines in there, when I think – I like that line, I really, really like that line – not the whole thing, mind. But that's been about as well

working with my poet mentor, and when she has said, that's what you need to work with, take that away from this process, and maybe it will emerge as something completely different. (T2, Interview 3)

The teachers' growth in self-confidence as writers was evident in the ways in which some participants assessed feedback given about the development of their work against their own perception of the direction in which their poetry was moving, which was felt to be 'potentially risky' (T3, Poetry Portfolio).

Most of what she said was really positive and she made some suggestions like '*oh I would have started the poem here*' and actually when I thought yeah, that's...it's quite a strange introduction but it does make you intrigued straight away I agreed with all the other changes...but it was just this one thing...and I wasn't upset that she said people might not get it but it was just that for me that was almost the point (T3, Focus Group 2)

The relationship between writer and text is clear here, and this teacher goes on to examine how her experience as a teacher-writer, making decisions about writing, connects to her practice as a teacher engaged with pupils about their own writing:

...maybe that's a good place to take the kids to, where they get to a point where they say but miss, you weren't there and that's what that's about to me so if it's alright with you I'm going to leave it like that. And if they are that passionate about what they've written and they can justify their responses then that's a good thing. (T3, Focus Group 2)

Through sharing their creative writing with peers and professional writers, teachers were engaged in a process that developed their engagement with their own writing practice, and as such the process contributed to their emerging identities as teacher-writers. Teachers often, as in the case above, made comparisons between their own experiences as writers, and the experiences of their pupils. This reflects the fact that the central focus of the course was on the connection between creative writing practice and the teaching of creative writing. Taking the sharing of their practice into the classroom, however, presented a new set of potential challenges.

## **5.6 Teachers creative writing practice alongside pupils: an articulation of teacher-writer identity**

Whilst sharing practice with peers and professional poets was an explicit expectation of the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom course, teachers' sharing their creative writing practice with pupils was not. However, this became a considerable if unexpected feature of teachers' response to developing their own writing, and in some ways forms a bridge between teachers' creative writing practice and their teaching. Teachers' engagement in creative writing practice in the classroom is explored in Chapter Seven in relation to the development of a pedagogical approach to support pupils' learning. Here, participants' engagement in creative writing activities alongside pupils is explored as a facet of emerging teacher-writer identities.

For most of the participants, engaging in creative writing practice with pupils has involved joining in writing tasks with their class, sharing their work alongside pupils, and engaging in dialogue about the writing process as a learner. This is explored in the following conversation, which took place during Seminar 5:

P3     So you're writing with them sometimes? Any of the rest of you?

[Lots of nods and murmurs of agreement]

T3     Yes, and I think that does make a difference, it changes things...I think they can see that you are a writer too, that we're all learning about writing...

T10   I do too, and I think that they can see that...it's not just learning about writing, it's learning about writing *by* writing, not by me telling them how they are supposed to do it, the way to learn about it is to actually do it...

(Seminar 5)

The process described by teachers here – 'learning about writing *by* writing, not by me telling them' – articulates a very different identity from that of the teacher as expert writer.

It implies a perception of the learner as a thinker, and a pedagogy that is concerned with the learners' thoughts and understandings. This contrasts with a pedagogy that approaches the learner's mind as 'passive, a receptacle waiting to be filled' (Bruner, 1996: p.56). The process situates the teacher as a writer alongside pupils, engaged in a complex writing practice that may involve 'false starts, blank spots and uncertainties' (Grainger, 2005: p.81). This teacher's comment contrasts the two approaches:

I think it's only by doing the writing that you can possibly understand how writing, how actually doing the writing, how that makes you feel, and we have to acknowledge that. It's not just a case of do this, do this, add an adjective, remember punctuation and then Bob's your uncle. *You* can't do it like that, *they* can't do it like that, writing's not just a set of hoops to jump through. (T2, Seminar 5)

Tensions in emerging teacher-writer identity are evident here: the reference to understanding writing by 'doing the writing' and acknowledging 'how that makes you feel' recalls Sachs assertion that teacher identity is 'a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of "how to be", "how to act" and "how to understand" their work and their place in society' (cited in Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: p.178). This disrupts the conception of teacher identity which is exposed in policy discourse, where 'prescription and accountability' in literacy strategies and frameworks have advanced a 'technicist' approach to pedagogy (Alexander, 2004: p.11). It has been argued that this has led to a situation where 'knowledge about teaching is, as it were, externalised [in the] the strategies, frameworks, curricula...' (Jones, 2006: pp.86-87). This is recognised and rejected by the participant in the extract above, in her reference to 'do this, add an adjective...writing's not just a set of hoops to jump through'. The participants involved in the conversation above express an alternative pedagogic possibility, where internalised knowledge about writing gained through practice influences pedagogy, and is expressed in the classroom through creative writing practice alongside pupils. The positioning of the teacher alongside the pupils reflects deep connections with teacher identity, where 'being

a learner has been shown to be a key aspect of teacher professional identity, and has been linked to the notion of professional commitment' (Cohen, 2010: p.479).

Engaging in creative writing practice alongside pupils admits the possibility of teachers expressing a writing identity in the classroom. However, it is possible that such a pedagogical shift could increase teachers' insecurity as they position themselves as learners in creative writing practice, with a consequent detrimental effect on confidence. Indeed an alternative view of this pedagogical shift may be that it has the potential to undermine 'professional authority granted by students who affirm the teacher's expertise' (VanderStaay *et al.*, 2009: p.262). For the teachers involved in this case study, however, the shared exploration of the problems and complexities of creative writing strengthened their sense of equipping pupils to cope with the demands of creative writing practice:

- T3     ... they are really interested in the fact that I'm learning to write, that I am doing things that I enjoy, that I find difficult...
- P3     Have you talked to them about it being difficult?
- T8     Yeah, I think you have to, I think with writing, with creative writing, you shouldn't be going in there and saying right, I've got all the answers, I know how to do this, do x, y, and z and you'll know too...I just think that if they can see that you find it difficult too, that it's supposed to be that mix of difficult, enjoyable, frustrating, well, that is what it is...I think if you can do that with them, for me that has been a big thing, to do that with them, and they can see sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but you just keep on going.

(Seminar 5)

The articulation of a teacher-writer identity, then, involves not only a joint engagement in creative writing activities in the classroom, but an exploration of a creative writing practice that allows for individual and collaborative reflection and responses. The potential to share and explore frustrations and difficulties alongside satisfactions and achievements in creative writing practice is identified as a way of supporting pupils' learning. The process

of engaging in creative writing practice with pupils described here implies that to teach creative writing 'is not just *to transfer knowledge* but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge' (Freire, 1998: p.30, original emphasis). The explicit articulation of teacher-writer identity through engaging in creative writing practice may also have an impact on the development of pupil-writer identity, which is identified below as an aim of pedagogy.

So they need to explore...it's not me 'teaching' it – I'm facilitating the writing. ... I told them today about the course, and I said 'as a writer' and I actually said that! And I just [thought]...what? Who's that? Who are you saying you're a writer? But you want them to think of themselves as writers...(T2, Interview 3)

The teacher-writer, then, through engaging in creative writing practice alongside pupils, is able to articulate a writing identity that supports the development of learners' conceptual knowledge and understanding; such knowledge is 'most useful to the learner when it is discovered through the learners' own cognitive efforts ... The teacher, in this version of pedagogy, is a guide to understanding, someone who helps you to discover on your own' (Bruner, 1996: p.xii).

## **5.7 Conclusion**

It has been suggested that 'at the heart of any approach to the teaching of writing is the need to encourage pupils to compose' (Wyse, 2009: p.288). Through the experience of the participants involved in this case study, it is further suggested that the ability of teachers in schools to provide such encouragement is strengthened through teachers' perception of themselves as writers. The participants in this case study have negotiated a series of complex interactions between the self as teacher and the self as writer, in which the individual's relationship with the acts and processes of creative writing are deepened.



Emerging teacher-writer identities were articulated in teachers' descriptions of themselves as 'writers' and 'teacher-writers' subsequent to taking part in the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom course (5.5.2 above). Participants frequently located their writer identity as a facet of teacher identity, examining the ways in which their developing confidence as writers created a more positive 'attitude to the delivery and introduction of creative writing tasks' in the classroom (T7, Essay). The pedagogical implications of their own creative writing practice, and the reflection on how such practice may inform teachers' ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work (Sachs, 2005, in Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: p.178) are the subject of deeper exploration in Chapters Six and Seven.

The data emerging from the case study suggests that the process of becoming teacher-writers has engaged teachers in developing a relationship with their own creative writing practice, and through this relationship to explore the ways in which knowledge about creative writing is situated 'in the act and actions of writing creatively' (Harper, 2008b: p.161). Through generating their own poetry, participants in the case study have explored the complex relationship between the making and reception of text that is inherent in the creative writing process, and have engaged in 'methodologies and practices that enable them to criticise themselves' (McLoughlin, in Harper and Kroll, 2008: p.89). Such practices imply the possibility that individual experience of practice may influence broader conceptions of creative writing, as explored in the next chapter.

## **6 Findings and Analysis 2: The influence of creative writing practice on conceptions of creative writing**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the conceptions of creative writing held by participants in the case study, and to consider how such conceptions shift or evolve through engagement in creative writing practice. Drawing on themes examined in the literature in Chapter Two, I will explore participants' understandings of how national strategies have influenced their conceptions of creative writing in the classroom; and consider how such conceptions have evolved in response to a political narrative that claims increased freedom and flexibility within the curriculum. I will consider how a recently emerging political agenda of further freedom for schools impacts on conceptions of creative writing in the classroom. I will then move on to explore participants' conceptions of creative writing outside the classroom, and will examine how engagement in creative writing practice has informed their theories, assumptions and ideas, and shaped the construction of knowledge in creative writing.

### **6.2 The influence of national policy on participants' conceptions of creative writing and poetry in the classroom**

Chapter Two explored the marginalisation of creative writing in school curricula, and the pursuit of technical and functional conceptions of writing promoted through the introduction of the NLS. The reductionist trend in conceptions of writing was reinforced through a narrow assessment framework focussed on literacy, which it has been suggested leads to considerable 'washback' as teachers focus on preparing pupils to meet assessment criteria. This has particular relevance for creative writing, since key elements of creative writing seem to be marginalised in the assessment process:

The requirements for 'composition and effect' included the assessment focus to 'write imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts', yet the detail of the marking criteria did not require markers to make a judgement about whether the writing was 'imaginative' or 'interesting'. (Wyse and Torrance, 2009: p.220)

Participants in the case study reflected on the influence of the NLS on their teaching of creative writing in general, and poetry in particular:

My own teaching of poetry, can probably be categorised by an over reliance on literary forms...Teaching often involves using a template to teach a certain kind of poem, or providing the scaffolding to imitate a well-known verse. A perfectly valid and reasonable approach as part of the poetry experience, but, particularly as children grow in confidence as writers, a somewhat limiting one. In a general context, it is true to say, however wrong I know it to be, that poetry has not been a priority in my school for a long time. (T11, Essay)

The influence of the NLS is evident here, with a low priority for poetry in general, a focus on form, and a reliance on modelling or scaffolding. This teacher acknowledges some merit in the approach, but questions the limitations on creative engagement. This is a view reiterated by a number of teachers reflecting on their teaching:

On reflection, much of my poetry teaching has involved giving children a poem with a clear structure, and asking them to either change words or imitate the whole poem. (T12, Essay)

I believe that many of my previous assumptions about how children learn to write poetry were based on narrow guidance from the Literacy Strategy and an assumption that children behave as imitative learners, finding it difficult to generate ideas and original thought without structured didactic teaching. (T12, Essay)

In the National Curriculum poetry is taught like any fact-based subject: this is a limerick, this is a Haiku, this is a rap etc...Teachers generally read/ show examples then get their children to write their own, possibly giving a template to make it easier, but always placing the emphasis on copying the structure rather than the actual content...While it is a positive thing that children are playing with language and learning about poetic forms and parts of speech, true creativity is minimal in these lessons and the children's poetry is often mundane (T13, Essay)

Here again, it is acknowledged that while there is some merit in the approach promoted in the strategies, 'true creativity' is side-lined in the pursuit of narrow understandings of how meaning making operates in the realm of poetry. The atomised view of making poetry may, in the end, miss the point entirely, resulting in 'mundane' work that fails to capitalise on pupils' capacity to do anything more than imitate structures and models. Such a conception fails to recognise the complexity and creativity in writing processes, since 'It is not simply about spelling words correctly, or getting the syntax straight; it is about finding a way of conveying an idea or mood, an emotion or depiction. It is, in the end, about conveying meaning' (Marshall, 2002: p.109).

It should be noted here that participants' reflections on the teaching of creative writing advocated in the NLS do not present a polarised rejection of 'product' in favour of 'process'. Rather, they recognise that literary concerns with form and structure and pedagogic tools such as scaffold and modelling, have been narrowly conceived and implemented: they have been used to promote imitation and dependence, rather than to promote understanding, questioning, collaboration, problem solving, independence, and dealing with difficulty. This pedagogy locates learners as imitators, emphasising a 'how to' approach to learning which 'does not get one to the same level of flexible skill as when one learns by a combination of practice and conceptual explanation' (Bruner, 1996: p.54)

Participants recognised that assessment criteria not only restrained the potential for creative writing to occupy a pedagogic domain concerned with developing thinking and the expression of ideas, but severely limited their pupils' understandings of creative writing:

I have become very aware of the limitation and restraint targets and success criteria have on the content of children's writing. They had become so fixated with including certain criteria within their writing to progress in their levels that the imagination, enjoyment and originality of their work for me as the reader and them as the writer had dimmed. (T7, Essay)

You have to prepare for the SATs at the end of it, but you can almost reduce it to a formula...yep, good, semi-colon. When you're doing the peer marking the children focus on it too, oh yeah, wow, you got those connectives in...(T5, Focus Group 1)

Participants here feel that knowledge about language is held by pupils as a set of criteria to be applied in a mechanistic fashion. Assessment is also identified as responsible for constricting the validity of poetry as part of pupils' creative writing experience:

Prior to the course, I didn't spend a lot of time teaching poetry as I didn't think that by doing so I'd necessarily improve the children's writing levels (and subsequently our league table position)...With the pressure of SAT testing in primary school, there has been a tendency for teachers to prioritise narrative and non-fiction texts. Poetry is not often given the same weighting as other genres in primary schools and is generally given much less time. (T3, Essay)

I think the assessment as well, has a lot to do with it, because you can do a lot of creative writing but at the end of the day as a teacher you're assessed on how many kids got a level 4 at the end of Y6. (T6, Focus Group 1)

Here, participants identify that the decisions they make about creative writing are informed by judgements that may be made about themselves as individuals ('as a teacher you're assessed on how many kids got a level 4') and about their schools (since writing results will affect their position in school league tables). The driving force behind the National Literacy Strategy and subsequent frameworks has been to raise standards in literacy, tested through a national regime of literacy assessment. The consequences of failing to reach assessment targets are perceived here to be significant both for the individual teacher, and for the school as a whole. It is hardly surprising, then, that the participants in this case study feel that the strategies have had such a profound influence on their

conceptions of creative writing in the classroom, even though their instincts may tell them that 'Good writing cannot be created just by following the 'rules' of writing' (T6, Essay). The conceptualisation of creative writing within the NLS implies that learners will develop knowledge about creative writing through didactic exposure to 'facts, principles and rules of action which are to be learned, remembered and then applied' (Bruner, 1996: p.55).

### **6.2.1 'Freedom' and 'flexibility': the evolving policy context and its influence on conceptions of creative writing in the classroom**

The political narrative about the changes to curriculum and pedagogy in relation to literacy points to greater flexibility and freedom for teachers. The modification of the National Literacy Strategy into the Primary National Strategy in 2003 declared that 'a central message of this document is that teachers have the power to decide how they teach, and that the Government supports that' (DfES, 2003: p.16). The 'renewal' of the strategy in 2006 emphasised 'slimmed down objectives' and encouraged teachers to employ flexibility in meeting learners' needs (DfES, 2006: p.3). However, given a continued context of target driven assessment in a landscape of continued difficulty of reaching writing targets, it is questionable how far teachers have felt that they have been 'freed up' from narrow conceptions of creative writing in the curriculum, as demonstrated in participants' reflections on the influence of the NLS (see 6.2 above). In addition, underlying narrow conceptions of creative writing and prescriptions of pedagogy that situated learners as imitative and learning from didactic exposure, continued to pervade the 'renewed' versions of the NLS.

As we have seen, participants in the case study have identified that decisions about creative writing are sometimes made in light of judgements that may be made about

themselves as teachers, and about their schools. The consequences of such judgements about schools have been identified as jeopardising league table position. The impact of moving up or down the league table may affect perceptions of the school as successful or not, with the possible effect of parents choosing to send their children to a different school. However, participants in the case study identified further and potentially deleterious consequences for moving away from narrow conceptions of creative writing in the classroom:

The success criteria...and formulated writing, throw in some adjectives, give yourself some VCOP (*acronym: vocabulary, connectors, openers and punctuation*) and some wow words...it is very much chuck in a bit of this, sling in a bit of this, get a level 4 and get Ofsted off our back, if you're level 3 and you're year 5, you need to be level 5 so for god's sake sling in a simile or a metaphor whether you need it or not. And get that level 5 because before you know it we're in special measures... (T3, Seminar 3)

Here, a primary school teacher considers how the pressure on schools to achieve floor targets influences the teaching of creative writing. If a school falls below the 'floor' target, it may be placed in 'special measures'. Up until March 2011, this floor was set at 55%; that is to say, at least 55% of pupils had to reach a level 4 or above in writing. The sense here is that it is necessary to implement a narrow (and, it is implied, meaningless) conception of creative writing since this is the best way to ensure that schools avoids 'special measures', a status applied by Ofsted when they consider that a school fails to provide an acceptable level of education. Up until 2010, the consequences of being placed in special measures or under a 'notice to improve' were that schools were required to implement an improvement plan while continuing to undergo a regular inspection regime.

The pragmatic option for schools wishing to avoid this action, expressed by the participant above, is to continue to implement the narrow, prescribed pedagogy of the NLS,

notwithstanding the rhetoric of freedom and flexibility; and regardless of teachers' own understandings of what creative writing in the classroom is and what it means for pupils:

To assume that a teacher's role is simply to help a child to achieve statutory levels of attainment in terms of writing, is somewhat limiting. Surely the ability to write with originality is a greater gift that is more sustainable throughout a child's life. (T6, Essay)

This participant's focus on the potential impact of creative writing on young people's lives reveals a broader conception of creative writing, focussed on outcomes that extend beyond key stage testing. Participants also recognised that at times the quality of pupils' writing may be high, but may still fail to tick the right assessment boxes:

And some of their best writing is in these purple books [*journals*]...quite a lot of them take their time on it and they say to me 'oh I did a little bit more last night'. But it's very much the case that they come and we get our level descriptors out and we level how they're doing, and it's a shame because these children are writing all this amazing stuff and the imagery is great but they haven't quite ticked all the boxes so they can't get that great level. (T7, Seminar 3)

The idea of enhanced freedom and flexibility is compromised for pupils, then, who when they produce 'amazing' writing and 'the imagery is great' are not rewarded by the system. Participants expressed the desire to pursue curricular freedom, but retained a knowledge that testing and inspection are in the end more powerful forces in influencing pedagogy:

My best lessons are when I say, oh there's an election going on, do you know about it? Let's have a campaign. And the writing's brilliant...But we're panicked by Ofsted...because if you're not seen to be differentiating what the kids need to be getting level 5s...then you'll be crucified. (T3, Seminar 3)

The narrative of enhanced freedom and flexibility has, it seems, had little impact on shaping participants' freedom to express broader conceptions of creative writing in the classroom through their teaching, and curtails the possibility of expressing a teacher-writer



identity in the classroom. The testing agenda remains firmly at variance with participants' interest in developing a pedagogic approach that reflects the complexity of creative writing practice.

### **6.2.2 Greater freedom, higher stakes: the impact of emerging political agendas on conceptions of creative writing**

Further freedom from curriculum constraint has been identified as an objective of the review of the national curriculum that was announced in 2011. The review aims to 'give schools and teachers more freedom to decide how to teach...most effectively and to design a wider school curriculum that best meets the needs of their pupils' (DFE, 2011). This aim seems to offer opportunities for teachers to implement broader conceptions of creative writing within the curriculum. However, the emerging political agenda in relation to academy status schools increases the risks for teachers pursuing such thinking.

Established under New Labour in 2000, academies are schools which are directly funded by central government. They are independent of local authorities, and may receive additional support from individual or corporate sponsors. The Academies Act 2010 made it possible for a new wave of schools to apply for academy status, and benefit from financial incentives to do so. Academy numbers rose from 216 in May 2010 to over 600 in March 2012 (BBC, 2012). However, the Act also enshrined in law the power to take action when schools are perceived to be failing, with implications for conceptions of creative writing in the classroom.

The Act permits the Secretary of State to convert a school into an academy against its will 'if the school is eligible for intervention', which, the Act goes on to explain, means 'those

requiring significant improvement or special measures' (Academies Act 2011: p.3). It is pertinent here to recall that the participant quoted above, who made a direct link between her need to encourage children to employ literary devices in a meaningless way, and the drive to avoid punitive action for the school:

...for god's sake sling in a simile or a metaphor whether you need it or not. And get that level 5 because before you know it we're special measures... (T3, Seminar 3)

Ofsted may consider that a school should 'require significant improvement or special measures' if attainment levels fail to reach 'floor' target levels. Significantly, the target levels were changed in March 2011, so that 60% of pupils must achieve level 4 or above in writing, rising from 55%. At secondary level, an increase of 5% was also applied to pupils achieving 5 A\*s to Cs including English at the end of KS4. As has been discussed in Chapter Two, writing has consistently been the most difficult target to meet, lagging behind all other nationally tested areas of attainment. In the context of increased floor targets and higher stakes consequences for failing to meet such targets, the rhetoric of increased freedom and flexibility is perhaps even further at odds with the necessity to pursue narrow conceptions of writing in the curriculum. Indeed, it may be interpreted that the Academies Act is a further means by which not only policy but legislation is used to 'teacher-proof' conceptions of the curriculum (Brehany, 2006: p.33).

### **6.3 Individual conceptions of creative writing**

It is evident, then, that participants' conceptions of creative writing in the classroom are shaped by their experiences of implementing target driven policy. However, it is also recognised that 'How teachers go about constructing the classroom context in which young writers learn is influenced not only by the required curriculum but other societal,

institutional and individual understandings of writing and of learning' (Fisher, 2012: p.302).

Participants' personal ideas about creative writing reveal more complex conceptions about what creative writing is than are presented in the NLS:

I think of it maybe as being exploring. Where maybe you don't always know the outcome. (T1, Focus Group 1)

Here the conception of creative writing shifts the emphasis away from audience and product, so prominent in the strategies, towards the act of exploration, where 'you write to discover what you're going to write' (T6, Focus Group 1). Such conceptions perceive creative writing not only as an act of communication, but of exploration and artistic meaning making:

Because you're letting words capture the reader's emotions, the words, it's not, it's almost the raw material you're working with, like an artist creating something so it's not just the message that matters because the way you say the message is paramount too, you could tell the same story in so many different ways but the way you have chosen to do it is what matters for you at that time... you're working not just as a communicator but as an artist, you know, manufacturing something (T5, Focus Group 1)

Such a conception raises questions: if creative writing is an exploratory process, what is being explored? How is it explored? And what is the purpose of such exploration? The fact that the outcome is unknown reaches perhaps towards 'Romantic' conceptions of creative writing: the search for discovery is mysterious and elusive. The metaphor of exploration is further developed here:

The writing isn't actually just to communicate, but the writing is itself is a tool for them [the pupils] to explore, so you don't know what you're going to write, the writing takes you down a path you didn't expect. (T5, Focus Group 1)

Here, creative writing is a working instrument: it is not an act or process in itself but an implement needed in a process of exploration. The idea of creative writing as a tool implies that it is inert, that it requires the agency of the writer. Yet it is also conceived here as having a force of its own: 'the writing takes you down a path you didn't expect'. The conception embodies both 'Romantic' notions of creative writing as an external force that leads the writer into the unknown, and, conversely, as a tool that is used by the writer in order to explore the unknown. These seemingly contradictory conceptions converge around the idea of 'not knowing' as central to creative writing. The sense of creative writing as a mysterious process is developed in some participants' reflection on writing their own poetry:

I decided that the theme of my own poetry writing would be mainly focussed around family and my own personal experiences...This shaped the first two stanzas of the poem...They came out as they are and I have not redrafted them, I believe that this poem has been waiting to be written for a long time and as raw emotion, I felt I could not tamper with it. (T10, Poetry Commentary)

The conception here is of a 'Romantic' force releasing a poem that 'has been waiting to be written for a long time'. The fact that it is a poem, however, rather than a short story or script, may be significant. Romantic conceptions of creative writing as contingent upon intangible, ineffable powers that overwhelm the writer are particularly prevalent in relation to poetry, as discussed in relation to the construction of teacher-writer identities in Chapter Five. Poetry as a form raises specific ideas and theories about the writing process which further influence participants' conceptions of how and why it is written, whether or not it can be taught, and how it can be assessed.

### **6.3.1 The 'special case' of poetry: the prominence of the self**

Bizarro and McLanahan suggest that creative writing is 'a way of not only expressing, but discovering the self' (Ritter and Vanderslice, 2007: p.80). The suggested personal nature of creative writing is intensified when it comes to poetry. Dymoke finds that 'a belief in the personal, emotional and experiential nature of poetry' is common among teachers, and can limit their capacity to engage with pupils in a meaningful dialogue about the 'the cognitive and affective processes used by the developing writer' (Dymoke, 2001: p.34). Such a view was evident in the case study, exemplified by participants' comments on their sense of personal intrusion when attempting to assess their pupils' poetic writing:

Poetry is...a special case...and needs to be treated differently to other forms. For example, in a recent lesson, I suggested to a child that she change one simple word in a poem so that it made more sense to the reader. The pupil was obviously disappointed until I pointed out that this was just my opinion and that she could leave it if she really wanted to. To which she adamantly replied that the word must stay. If this had been a story or piece of non-fiction there would have been no such debate.(T11, Essay)

It does make me think how do the children feel when I go up to them and say 'well that could be more powerful' or 'that could be better' or 'I like this but I'm not sure about that'. They might be really sure about it and actually I might be hurting their feelings more than I think. (T3, Focus Group 2)

The issue for participants here is not that the content may be personally revealing or intimate, but that writing poetry is itself perceived as a personal act. The prominence of the self, then, disables meaningful dialogue in an assessment context, since discussion of the writing seems to be inevitably associated with the personal dimension.

It can be argued that all forms of writing, all artistic expression, indeed all utterance may in some way and perhaps to varying degrees, be seen as expressions of the self. However, the particular emphasis on the personal in poetry may be connected to understandings of why people write poetry:

...it was just something I did to let out my feelings...it didn't matter whether it was any good and it didn't matter that anybody was going to read it...it's about what's on the inside coming out. (T4, Interview 4)

The focus on writing poetry entirely and solely as a means of expressing inner emotion is one which some participants identify in the classroom:

The writing that this boy produced, seemed, to me, to be the outpouring of the 'creative voice' that I had been searching for. (T6, Essay, my italics)

The 'outpouring' of emotion described here seems to be identified as positive *because* the form is poetry: it is perhaps less likely that the description 'outpouring' would be used in such a positive way about a narrative piece. The focus on the 'inner self' raises a further question: beyond traditional 'romantic' conceptions of 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions' (Wordsworth, cited in Gill, 2003: p.109), why do participants identify poetry as so intensely personal, so deeply connected to the inner self?

Furman, in exploring the particular relevance of writing poetry (as opposed to other forms of writing) to psychotherapeutic practice asserts that 'poetry is the giving of voice to human experience' and that the act of writing poetry requires the writer 'to identify his or her emotions, and come to understand how these feelings relate to the natural and human worlds around them' (Furman, 2003: p.197). The link between poetry and the personal is at the heart of Wadeson's suggestion that poetry writing is more effective than prose in psychotherapy since its 'reliance on metaphor, imagery, sound, rhythm and economy of presentation' makes it 'a mode of exploration, expression, concretization and integration of...feelings' (Wadeson, 1981: p.225). The personal aspect of poetry, then, seems to be connected to the individual's attempt to make sense of the world and their place in it.

Poetry's particular relevance to this task lies in its dependence on imagery, sound, rhythm and economy of language to make abstract concepts, feelings and ideas concrete.

However, not all participants in the case study pursued the notion of poetry as lyrical self-expression. Indeed, some actively rejected this concept:

The process of writing and refining my poetry...has led my writing away from the personal and into using techniques such as found poetry which I had had only theoretical experience of before...Taking myself out of my poetry has, oddly, led me to feel more personally attached to my poems than I have before. (T1, Essay)

I purposefully stayed away from anything too personal in my writing and, if I did stray into this area while making notes, I would choose to leave it out when reading aloud. (T11, Essay)

For these participants, conceptions of writing poetry move away from self-expression, avoiding profiling the 'self' in the writing. This is reflected too in their aspirations for creative writing in the classroom, as when this participant describes an exercise based on the Fibonacci sequence developed with her poet mentor<sup>12</sup>:

Interestingly, this was an activity full of 'restraints': the Fibonacci sequence cannot be altered to suit your poem! Hughes writes of the 'few restraints' which are desirable in producing creative writing and also of the 'self-knowledge' that such writing might bring or express. The Fibonacci activity was far from this picture, taking pupils away from themselves, often into strange places! They felt fulfilled because they had produced the unexpected. The writing was exceptionally creative but in a 'confessional' sense did not come from within themselves. (T1, Essay)

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<sup>12</sup> In mathematics, the first two numbers in the Fibonacci sequence are 0 and 1, and each subsequent number is the sum of the previous two. Thus, when using the sequence to construct poetry, each of the first two lines contains one syllable; the third line has two syllables; the fourth line has three syllables, and so on. The challenge in construction quickly advances; by the eighth line, the sequence requires a line of 21 syllables.

Here, fulfilment comes not from inner exploration but from creating 'unexpected' poetry that confounds perceptions of what poetry is and what it can be. Internal, introspective conceptions are displaced here by a sharp focus on poetry as a cognitive activity, and a social constructivist view of the 'self' that is present in the perception of poetry as a product of the socially and culturally constructed world. Theoretically, issues about poetry being 'too personal' for teachers to make assessments should subside when this lyrical focus is displaced. Yet T1, who has welcomed an approach that rejects the lyrical and self-expressive, remains concerned about the assessment of pupils' poetry: 'with poetry I always feel like it's so personal even when it isn't about a personal thing' (T2, Focus Group 2).

Difficulties in responding to pupils' writing, then, may not only be connected to the sense that poetry is an expression of the self, but to teachers' concerns about their own levels of knowledge and understanding. Participants in this case study reflected that their own understanding and knowledge of poetry tended to rely heavily on narrow conceptions in the NLS, and that it was the form that they were least likely to use in the classroom (see 6.2 above). Hence, teachers may be reluctant to make what could be perceived of as value judgements in an area where they feel that their own knowledge is insecure.

It is interesting to note that engagement in writing poetry influenced some participants' conceptions of its value in the curriculum, reflecting that their experience of practice had encouraged them to approach poetry differently. As noted above, T3 had reflected that prior to the course she 'didn't spend a lot of time teaching poetry' because she perceived that it would not 'improve the children's writing levels (and subsequently our league table position)'. This participant also revealed that she had initially had reservations about the



potential of the course to impact on her classroom practice, before going on to consider how her approach had changed:

As the course was based on poetry I wasn't sure it would impact on my everyday teaching of writing as much as it has done. I've been surprised by how much I've been able to get from the appreciation of poetry in its own right but also how much it can impact on my enjoyment of writing and teaching other genres too. I now see how much can be learnt through writing poetry and also by using poetry as a stimulus for other types of writing. I think that I had categorised 'poetry' into a couple of two week units of work. I would have taught a structured form of poetry – perhaps haiku or rhyming couplets as this presented an easier way to teach poetry to children. By practising my own poetry, I now rely on formal structures less and feel I would be in a better position to help the children to discover their writer's 'voice'. (T3, Essay)

This participant connects a deepened understanding of the potential of poetry in the classroom to her own experience of creative writing, and recognises that her ability to experiment and explore outside of formal structures is also connected to this practical experience. The next section of this chapter considers how such engagement in practice enables participants to construct knowledge about creative writing.

#### **6.4 Knowing and not knowing: the construction of knowledge through practice**

Participants in this case study have explored concepts of creative writing where 'you don't always know the outcome' (T1, Focus Group 1) and the process 'takes you down a path you didn't expect' (T5, Focus Group 1). The concept of 'not knowing' presents a problem in a context that is driven by outcomes related to assessment and testing, and in which pedagogy has been influenced by a conception of literacy that marginalises creative writing in favour of those aspects of writing that can be securely measured. Some of the participants in the case study acknowledged that 'not knowing' contrasted with their usual objective-led framework for teaching, and that this added to their anxiety:

At first, in seminars, I found many of the activities puzzling or challenging because I was constantly trying to guess where they were going... To head out without a map is unusual for the pupils I teach and is precisely not what assessed writing at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 is about. There, writing must be planned, drafted, perfected and have a definite purpose in mind, usually one dictated from outside, such as by an exam setter. (T1, Essay)

Within the workshops the teachers were asked to perform a number of freewrites, often using freewriting from a small stimulus such as a sentence starter, visualisation or object... The lack of a specific form in which to present my work, made collecting my thoughts and words into a poem rather difficult to begin with. (T10, Essay)

The difficulty identified here connects to participants' expectation that the process of writing will start with the articulation of an anticipated outcome and a systematic plan for achieving that end. This is perhaps further evidence of the influence of the strategies on pedagogy, where clarity of teaching objectives is identified as paramount, and predictability in teaching and learning is highly valued (DfEE, 1998: p.10). In this way, we may see that participants' experiences of themselves as teachers implementing a didactic pedagogy influences their expectations of themselves as learners. The absence of a pedagogy that demonstrates or 'tells' practices, conventions, and rules (Bruner, 1996: p.55) is 'puzzling' and 'difficult'. As participants pursued their learning in this context, they explored the idea of creative writing practice as unpredictable:

Throughout the seminars I occasionally experienced moments of inspiration during the two hour sessions however, I also became aware that this was not something that was reliable and often the two hours in class were merely the beginning of a much longer process that was not confined to lesson times. (T9, Essay)

Here, the idea that writing requires time to develop is central. The workshop process is described as providing 'inspiration' (albeit unreliable) that provokes considerable further work. The understanding of the requirement of a considerable time investment was reinforced by other participants:

Becoming a writer allowed a number of revelations, first of which was to have a belief in myself, and to understand that it takes time to produce work that I am proud of. (T10, Essay)

The investment of time required in developing writing is identified by a number of teachers in the commentaries they produced to accompany their poetry. The commentaries also reveal how this time was used. The activities described by the participants depict recursive actions which include reading (of own text and the text of others), re-reading, writing, re-writing, thinking, and re-thinking. The actions are complex, interlinked, sometimes concurrent, and have the potential to confound intentions as well as to achieve them:

It was originally a short work and did not feel complete as a poem. I have since attempted to extend the piece...After leaving the poem for a while and returning to it to edit, I gradually found myself twisting the poem in a darker direction...I wanted to leave the reader thinking...I found after a while that I became a little muddled with it. Because I had changed the direction, I found the poem had become an amalgamation of two ideas and the beginning no longer matched the end. (T11, Poetry Portfolio)

Although all of the teachers wrote about enjoying the experience of writing their own poetry, and expressed a sense of pride in their overall achievement, many expressed the frustrations that can be seen in the extract above:

I have redrafted the poem many times. I have learned much about editing and the need to be wary of repetition. In order to redraft effectively and develop the poem, I found it necessary to again use the visualisation technique...I had still not edited sufficiently. The phrase...is perhaps overly sentimental...when I re-read this, I feel that it is still slightly contrived. (T6, Poetry Portfolio)

Although a cycle of creative actions are taken in the writing, the text itself continues to exist as a 'problem space' in which knowledge is 'worked out' (Bereiter and Scardamalia,

1987: p.11). This is reiterated in the reflections of other teachers in considering their completed poetry:

The result is a heavily edited poem that I still feel needs reworking. (T12, Poetry Portfolio)

I am less certain about its achievement overall; perhaps it is successful as a demonstration of one technique rather than a fully evolved poem. (T9, Poetry Portfolio)

Whilst I liked the idea, I could never finish the poem to my satisfaction. (T11, Poetry Portfolio)

Teachers' conceptions of the acts and actions involved in undertaking creative writing reflect notions of complexity, difficulty and uncertainty that relate to a 'knowledge transforming' rather than 'knowledge telling' model of practice (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987: p.11). Such conceptions are absent from the 'knowledge telling' focus of the plan-draft-revise pedagogy prescribed in the NLS.

Participants identified the seminars as sites in which knowledge about creative writing was constructed through both the writing acts and actions, and the rituals of reflection and sharing practice that emanate from the writing activities. Many participants in the case study identified the workshops as catalysts for not only writing, but for reflecting on the process of writing. Through practice and reflection, participants' began to construct new knowledge about creative writing:

By experiencing the process myself I was able to connect with the importance of 'incubating ideas' ...From my objective, disconnected position I had frequently instructed students to *redraft* work however, not until my own experience of the nature of this process and the importance of it to the creation of a piece of writing was I able to properly communicate how to go about this. (T7, Essay)

Experimenting on my own with sound play, visualisation, using the senses, line breaks, question prompts and other skills has developed new ways of approaching creative writing (T3, Essay)

This (*line breaks*) is a feature of poetic writing that I frequently encourage my students to identify when reading and responding to published poetry, however, until I became a writer and used this technique in my own work, I realise I was not really engaging with the effects it can have on meaning and tone. The impact this writing experience had on my ability to engage with previously overlooked aspects of familiar poetry is exactly the experience I wanted to recreate for my students. (T9, Essay)

Teachers here identify that beyond learning new techniques that they can employ in their own approach to teaching creative writing, they have been able to deepen their understanding and knowledge of the complexity of creative writing. This is achieved both through writing, and through reflection that enables them to 'critically engage with the forms and tropes from a writerly perspective' (McLoughlin, 2007: p.96). The complexity is often characterised by participants as connected to uncertainty, ambiguity and risk. This is, of course the antithesis of knowledge about writing contained in the strategies and frameworks that seek to define reliable processes that will achieve guaranteed outcomes.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

Participants in the case study express their evolving understandings of creative writing as actions and processes that encompass the exploration and contemplation of imaginative thoughts and ideas, and the capacity to tolerate risk and ambiguity in constructing and conveying meaning through written texts. Their conceptions of creative writing encompass an acknowledgement of knowledge constructed through experience of creative writing, gained at first hand, and seemingly unavailable through other processes. This personal knowledge is deepened through intersubjective exchange, and continues to evolve through internal reflection and mutual dialogue (Bruner, 1996: pp.56-57). This contrasts with a conception of knowledge about creative writing handed on from teacher to learner embedded in the NLS.

As conceptions of creative writing evolve to encompass new knowledge constructed through practice, teachers are presented with a dual pedagogical challenge: how can they develop an effective approach to creative writing that builds on their creative writing knowledge; and how can they implement such pedagogy in the face of punitive policy measures and rigid assessment frameworks that are driven by narrow conceptions of writing? Complex conceptions and deepened understandings of creative writing gained through their own experience of practice, shaped participants responses to these challenges, as explored in the next chapter.

## **7 Findings and Analysis 3: The influence of creative writing practice on changes in classroom practice**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which teachers' classroom practice in the teaching of creative writing has changed as a result of their experience of creative writing. I will explore the ways that creative writing practice has encouraged teachers to reflect on their pedagogy, and describe how they have implemented changes in their teaching of creative writing. I will consider the relationship between the pedagogy of the seminars in which teachers were positioned as learners of creative writing, and the pedagogy they have developed in their classrooms. The reasons for these changes in approach will be considered, as will their effects on teacher and learner. The pedagogic changes explored in this chapter are identified as:

- The development of teachers' creative writing practice as a pedagogical approach in the classroom
- The implementation of new approaches to pupils' experiences of creative writing in the classroom
- Increased opportunities for creative writing in the classroom
- A greater focus on self-assessment, dialogue and reflection as elements of pupils' creative writing practice
- A greater focus on the creative-critical dynamic in exploring creative writing

The data emerging from the case study is contextualised in an analysis of how changes in pedagogy reflect shifts in participants' perceptions of themselves as teacher-writers; their evolving conceptions of creative writing practice; and their perceptions of the learners' mind, drawing on Bruner's theory that 'Any choice of pedagogical practice implies a conception of the learner' (Bruner, 1996: p.63).

## **7.2 Teachers' creative writing practice as a pedagogical approach in the classroom**

Chapter Five explored the way in which teachers' creative writing practice in the classroom influenced the construction of teacher-writer identity. In this chapter, I examine participants' engagement in creative writing in the classroom as a pedagogical approach to support pupils' learning. The chapter explores two ways in which this has been evidenced in the case study: new approaches to modelling creative writing, and participants' engagement in creative writing practice alongside pupils.

### **7.2.1 New approaches to modelling creative writing in the classroom**

Modelling of writing has been advocated as a pedagogical tool in the NLS, and is a practice that has been widely taken up by teachers as part of their classroom practice (Grainger, 2005; Cremin, 2006; Cremin and Myhill, 2011). In this case study, participants explored new approaches to modelling, and it is therefore pertinent to briefly examine the modelling template that has been promoted through the NLS.

The theory of teacher modelling to support learning contends that the learner displays new behaviours as a result of observing a successful model. The theory rests, then, on the idea that teachers can model successful ways of writing different texts:

Observing competent models perform actions that result in success conveys information to observers about the sequence of actions to use to be successful. By watching models, observers form outcome expectations about the expected consequences of actions. Observers are more likely to perform modelled actions that have been successful and whose outcomes they value. (Schunk and Zimmerman, 2007: p.9)



In the NLS, modelling has been advocated as a central feature of writing pedagogy. It is identified as a 'direct', or didactic, form of pedagogy, involving 'a structured sequence' often used at the beginning of sessions to demonstrate how writing is to be achieved against a specific outcome, and is promoted as a particularly useful way of teaching pupils how to use different 'text types' (DfES, 2006: p.11). In the Strategy, modelling is described thus:

Most shared writing sessions begin with demonstration or modelling by the teacher. The teacher demonstrates how to write a text – how to use a particular feature, or compose a text type – maintaining a clear focus on the objective(s). She or he thinks the process through aloud, rehearsing the sentence before writing, making changes to its construction or word choice and explaining why one form or word is preferable to another. The teacher writes the sentence, rereads it and changes it again if necessary. She or he demonstrates at least two sentences. The teacher does not take contributions from the children at this point but will expect the children to offer opinions on her or his choice of words or construction of sentences. (DfEE, 2000: p.15)

In offering further guidance about modelling, the Strategy suggests that modelling will demonstrate how objectives are achieved 'within a fluent piece of writing' that maintains 'focus upon the objective is use' (DfEE, 2000: p.29). As can be seen below, this guidance is accompanied by a photograph that appears to show a teacher using a pre-prepared text rather than modelling the construction of text:

Figure 3: *NLS Modelling Guidance*

**4 Teacher demonstration and scribing** – demonstrating writing in front of the children, talking them through the process, and showing how to employ the objective within the course of a fluent piece of writing. Children may be involved in helping you compose – but always keep up the explanatory commentary and maintain the focus upon the objective in use.



(DfEE, 2000: p.29)

It is perhaps, then, unsurprising that using pre-prepared texts and scripting 'thought processes' became a widespread modelling method (Grainger, 2005). It is worth noting that this practice, which I term 'demonstration modelling' in this thesis, is promoted in the NLS as a pedagogical tool to support learning in all aspects of writing, including the wide range of text types notes above, and technical aspects of writing. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the impact and pedagogical implications of demonstration modelling across this range of objectives. Rather, I am concerned with exploring the influence of demonstration modelling on creative writing in the classroom.

Research into this aspect of pedagogy suggests that many teachers approach modelling by pre-preparing texts and scripting thought process which are subsequently performed to pupils as though they are at the point of composition, with the intention of demonstrating a series of steps that will lead to a successful outcome (Cremin and Myhill, 2011; Grainger, 2005; Luce-Kapler *et al.*, 2001). Participants in this case study identified that modelling

creative writing presented a problem, as teachers did not always feel that they had enough knowledge about 'the actions that result in success' in writing to model effectively (Schunk and Zimmerman, 2007), and that their 'insecurities and lack of confidence to think of ideas on demand' (T12, Essay) prompted them to use pre-prepared texts and scripted thought processes during modelling.

Participants reflected on their use of modelling in the light of their engagement in developing their creative writing practice, and identified that demonstration modelling as advocated in the NLS may fail to shed light on the sequence of actions that they associated with their own experience:

My teaching of writing often included a session where I would 'model' writing to the class, but the thought processes that I shared with the children, were scripted and did not include the hesitancy and sufficient periods of thought and reflection which are usually present in the composition of any piece of writing. This process of 'scripted modelling' was demonstrated to me during my one year PGCE course and was deemed wholly acceptable by my tutors. (T6, Essay)

While it is true that this style of teaching may provide clues towards how to structure a text and illustrate the writer's techniques, it does not help children to learn about the actual process of writing. How do we form ideas? Why do we make changes as we write? (T3, Essay)

It's not showing the process. It's showing 'this is a polished piece of writing that I did earlier, that probably you can't match...' (T12, Interview 9)

A significant motivation for shifting pedagogy, then, was recognition that direct modelling had limited effectiveness because it fails to admit the possibility of hesitancy, indecision, ambiguity and equivocation that formed part of participants' experience of the actions involved in creative writing practice. This recognition, and the increased confidence gained by participants through their own creative writing practice, led to participants' decision to model creative writing extemporaneously in the classroom, without using pre-prepared texts or scripted thought processes.

Research into this area of modelling writing in schools is limited. Grainger's 2005 study identifies 'authentic' modelling as a way of demonstrating 'the important principle of writing to learn' (Grainger, 2005: p.81). Grainger's study describes 'authentic' modelling as the process whereby teachers, as a result of gaining confidence through creative writing practice, 'began to consider their ideas, or lack of them, more explicitly' with their pupils and so were able to 'talk about their blank spots, false starts and uncertainties' (p.81). The word 'authentic' is used by Grainger to mean spontaneous writing undertaken by the teacher as part of a writing activity with children. It becomes 'modelling' when the teacher verbalises thoughts and reasons for taking certain actions in writing, demonstrating the difficulties she encounters.

However, in the context of creative writing practice, the term 'authentic' may raise associations with concepts such as the writers voice, and the value of genuine experience and emotion, which are not of central concern to modelling practice in the classroom (Dawson, 2005: pp. 107, 121). Furthermore, the term 'authentic modelling' may be interpreted as an implication that this form of modelling is a reliable representation of individual creative writing practice, replicated in front of a class. I would contend that the acts involved in modelling – exposition and verbalisation of the actions and decisions involved in creating text – may disturb, disrupt or alter the individual acts and actions of creative writing practice. In other words, the act of modelling influences the acts and actions of writing, and therefore modelling practice may not reliably represent individual practice. I have therefore chosen to describe the shift in practice evidenced in the case study as extemporaneous modelling, indicating that participants engaged in unrehearsed, unscripted creative writing practice as a way of exploring the acts and actions involved in creating text.

In moving towards extemporaneous modelling, participants developed a model of practice that explored the underlying complexity of creative writing more explicitly, by presenting themselves as teacher-writers who continue to learn about writing through engagement in writing:

By sharing my thoughts and inadequacies with the children, I hope to demonstrate that interesting and original writing cannot always be achieved by following a formula (T6, Essay)

I think I demonstrate difficulty more. I think I demonstrate the changing of ideas more. Not difficulty as in I can't do it but 'oh let's get to grips' with this, that kind of difficulty. (T12, Interview 9)

This approach goes beyond employing a different modelling technique, then; it is driven by both a different aim and a different understanding of the practice of creative writing. It reinforces the idea that writing is complex, and that the compositional process cannot easily be broken down into sequential instructions for pupils to follow. Additionally, extemporaneous modelling reflects a pedagogical emphasis on 'the importance of social exchange in constructing knowledge' (Bruner, 1996: p.60), and identifies modelling as a pedagogical site where difficulty and complexity can be explored with pupils as part of the experience of creative writing.

The following example taken from a classroom observation reveals how T4 went about the process of 'demonstrating difficulty' through extemporaneous creative writing. In the early part of the session, the teacher and her poet mentor had worked with the Year 5 class on the theme of 'The Old Man of the Sea'. Pupils had worked in groups, and collaboratively created metaphorical statements. The teacher introduced their next task, which was to start to make changes to the writing and shape the poem, modelling the process spontaneously.

**Table 11: Classroom Observation 3**

Classroom interaction	Notes
<p>T4: Okay, so here's what I've got  <i>His hair is big lumpy mossy rocks</i>  <i>His teeth are a sharks</i>  <i>He dreams of chip shop chips</i>  <i>He is afraid of the lost city</i>  <i>He cares for the little fish</i></p> <p>T4: It's different when you hear it, isn't it? Different to just seeing it written down, you might want to do that. So now, there's lots of different ways of approaching this now, to make it yours, to make it more yours. You can add your own ideas, you don't have to stick to what you've got. What I think, with this...I don't know why but I really love this, 'chip shop chips', I don't know why...I just...</p> <p>Pupil 1: Ch sh ch...</p> <p>T4: Yeah, ch, sh, ch..and ip op ip. I think you're right. The sound...</p> <p>Pupil 2: Just chips isn't as good.</p> <p>T4: That's right, I think you're right. So I think I'm going to start with that. That's my first line.  <i>He dreams of chip shop chips.</i></p> <p>T4: I'm not sure what next. But maybe...because if he's dreaming, maybe it's night. I think I might make this about the old man of the sea at night, what happens at night, because if he's dreaming...maybe that's when he's afraid of the lost city. So maybe it's..  <i>At night he dreams of chip shop chips</i>  <i>And the lost city</i>  That's not quite working. What's happening here? Why the lost city? Is it ...the something lost city? It needs to be...the something. The long lost city?</p> <p>Pupil 3: That's good</p> <p>T4: You think?</p> <p>Pupil 3: Because he's ancient, he remembers it</p> <p>T4: Oh yes, he remembers it...so...  <i>At night he dreams of chip shop chips</i>  <i>And remembers the long lost city</i></p> <p>T4: I think I want to do this...(on board)  <i>At night</i>  <i>He dreams of chip shop chips</i>  <i>And remembers the long lost city</i></p>	<p><i>The lines are written out on the board. The teacher reads them aloud.</i></p> <p><i>Draws a circle round the phrase 'chip shop chips'</i></p> <p><i>Lots of the pupils start to repeat 'chip shop chips' 'chshch' and 'ip op ip'</i></p> <p><i>Writes the line out again on a clear area of the whiteboard.</i></p> <p><i>At this point there is a pause, about 10 seconds. The teacher is studying the writing on the board. So are the pupils. She writes the next section up as she speaks, and reads as she writes</i></p> <p><i>Inserts 'remembers' and 'long' on the board.</i></p> <p><i>Scribbles out 'At night' in line 1, and rewrites it as shown here.</i></p>

The tentativeness of decision-making is evident here, as the teacher hesitates, questions her choices and grapples for expression through the writing. The pupils collaborate in this process, offering suggestions as to why something works – in one instance identifying sound as important ('ch sh ch'), in another, meaning ('because he's ancient, he remembers it'). The model of creative writing practice demonstrated here positions reflection as integral to practice, and positions the teacher as a learner. The learning is located in the actions she undertakes, and the model she presents is one of reflecting on the ideas in the writing and how the text is developing. This is a considerable development of modelling, moving away from the teacher 'performing' a series of rehearsed steps that pupils should follow in order to reach a successful outcome, towards showing the learner 'methodologies and practices that enable them to criticise and edit themselves. It is not about just saying: if you make these changes, it will be good. It is about enabling writers to learn from themselves' (McLoughlin, 2007: p.88).

The development of extemporaneous creative writing in teacher modelling implies a reconceptualising of learners' minds. Demonstration modelling implies seeing children as learning from didactic exposure. It is underpinned by the proposition that teachers present facts and rules to learners, who are then able to apply them to tasks. Bruner, while acknowledging that such pedagogy is effective and useful in certain situations, warns that this conception of the learner has the consequence of constricting pedagogy since 'In effect this view presumes the learner's mind is a tabula rasa, a blank slate...Most important is this view's assumption that the child's mind is passive, a vessel waiting to be filled. Active interpretation or construal does not enter the picture' (Bruner, 1996: p.56).

Extemporaneous modelling, with its focus on demonstrating difficulty so that writers can become more reflective and consequently 'learn from themselves', rejects both the conception of the learner as passive, and the possibility that creative writing can be atomised into a set of instructions and facts that can be applied prescriptively. This model sees the learner as a thinker, 'somebody able to reason, to make sense, both on her own and through discourse with others' (Bruner, 1996: p.57). The pedagogy of extemporaneous modelling is 'more concerned with interpretation and understanding than with the achievement of factual knowledge or skilled performance' (Bruner, 1996: p.57). It is also concerned with using modelling as a site in which the capacity to tolerate risk and ambiguity in constructing and conveying meaning through text can be explored. Additional consequences of this pedagogical approach can be seen in participants' decisions to take part in creative writing activity alongside pupils, which is explored in the next section of this chapter.

### **7.2.2 Engaging in creative writing practice alongside pupils**

Extemporaneous modelling, then, explores the possibility that the model presented by the teacher is that of a writer who continues to learn about writing *by* writing. The participants in this case study developed this exploration further by choosing to join in writing tasks with their pupils. In Chapter Five, participants' engagement in creative writing activities alongside pupils was explored as a facet of emergent teacher-writer identities. Here, engagement in creative writing alongside pupils is investigated as a pedagogical approach to support pupils' learning. This is an approach that was employed by all 14 of the participants during Well Versed, and 4 of the 5 participants interviewed 9 months after the completion of Well Versed continued to do this regularly, with the remaining one doing it occasionally.



One thing that I did not do at all prior to the course was to complete an entire piece of creative writing alongside the children. While I have, in the past, sat with the children and completed a painting alongside them (something both they and I enjoyed), I had not written alongside them. This just hadn't really occurred to me - I probably would have felt that I was not 'teaching' by doing so. There seems to be a pressure on teaching staff to be seen to be helping the pupils or leading a small guided group. The idea of sitting down to write yourself while the pupils were writing would have seemed somehow self-indulgent at the expense of 'helping' the children. My viewpoint here has changed. (T3, Essay)

[Previously] In creative writing lessons I considered my main role to be providing the stimulus then allowing the children time to write but since I started this course I have used the same model as our tutors, writing alongside the children then sharing my work when they shared theirs; acting as a facilitator rather than a traditional teacher. (T13, Essay)

The teachers here identify that the choice to write alongside pupils indicates a more facilitative role, reinforcing the shift from teaching writing didactically to developing a 'pedagogy of mutuality' that marks the perspective of seeing children as thinkers (Bruner, 1996: p.56). From this perspective, 'sharing joint attention on common objects' is part of the intersubjective interchange that forms the teaching-learning environment (Bruner, 1996: p.58).

Through engaging in creative writing practice alongside pupils, teachers identified this intersubjective interchange as a way of moving beyond a focus on imitation to include the modelling of 'desire, commitment, ownership and agency' in writing (Cremin and Myhill, 2011: p.95). The impact of this on learners has been identified by some participants as a raised enjoyment of writing, and a consequent increased engagement in writing activities.

I think I enjoy doing it and I think they can see that. I think it seems to kind of calm the whole class down and calm the children down while I'm doing it as well rather than me strolling around the class and so on. I think if I'm doing it, the whole class is doing it including me, we're all a bit calmer I think, and the children are more concentrated, more engaged in what they're doing because they can see I'm doing it. (T6, Interview 5)

It's always for the last however many years been encouraged to model writing for the children but usually that's just at the start of a lesson and you might model a bit and then they'll contribute or whatever and you've always done that to an extent. But I think there's a big difference between doing that at the beginning with the children watching you than actually you doing it on your own, trying your best for ten minutes, and then seeing you do that. Yeah and the kids as well I've found that since I've been doing it the kids are more willing to put their hands up and read things out. (T3, Interview 8)

Teachers also identified that by joining in creative writing activities alongside the children they were able to develop their own understanding of what was being asked of children:

I think it allows you to put yourself in their shoes and think about the problems that they might have. I think it's that they see you're interested in it as well and they can pick up on your interest level and feed off that. (T11, Interview 6)

When I first started to take part in the freewriting tasks, two of my pupils asked me if they could mark my work. Their comments came back with wry smiles, 'We love your ideas, but please don't scribble out. Put two small crosses either side of your mistake. Your handwriting could be neater.' It occurred to me that if I wanted the pupils to be engrossed in their writing (and to edit and improve along the way) I should be willing to forgo perfect presentation. If it wasn't viable for me to write in the stipulated fashion, what gave me the right to demand that my ten year old pupils did so? (T3, Essay)

The desire of these participants to put themselves in shoes of the learner may reflect the 'general modern effort to recognize the child's perspective in the process of learning' (Bruner, 1996: p.56). Significantly, T11 is also interested in demonstrating her own interest in creative writing practice to learners so that they can 'feed off that'. This infers that the pedagogical act of joining in creative writing alongside pupils forms part of a mutualist learning environment. The attempt to recognise and respond to the child's perspective reflects a pedagogy in which shared experiences and mutual dialogue build an exchange of understanding between teacher and learner. Participants' engagement in creative writing in the classroom is one way in which this focus on the learner's perspective in creative writing practice was expressed in this case study. The next section

of this chapter investigates how participants' interest in exploring the learners' perspective influenced the implementation of new approaches to creative writing in the classroom.

### **7.3 New approaches to creative writing in the classroom**

The data emerging from the case study reveals that the participants implemented techniques and approaches to teaching creative writing in the classroom that were, in almost all cases, new to their classroom practice. In order to assess the nature of this change, it is necessary to consider the creative writing activities that directed their practice prior to taking part in Well Versed.

As noted, participants identified that the writing activities that dominated in the classroom were driven by the National Literacy Strategy and subsequent frameworks and guidance that prescribed pedagogical approaches. The NLS identifies that pupils should learn to write in a variety of genres or 'text types', including recount, non-chronological report, instructions and procedures, explanation, persuasion, discussion, re-telling traditional tales, adventure stories, free verse, and haiku. The genres are atomised in the NLS into separate components, and pupils' writing is expected to demonstrate awareness of and competence in the form by adherence to these conventions.

The NLS prescribes the ways in which teachers should set about teaching children the conventions of the various text types. Teachers are expected to familiarise pupils with the conventions of the genre through an example text, model the construction of text, and create opportunities for pupils to develop their writing firstly with support and then

independently (DCSF, 2007: p.8). The demonstration modelling of text advocated in the strategy has been analysed in 7.2.1 above.

The process of moving from demonstration modelling to independent writing is seen to rest on the provision of 'scaffold' materials such as skeleton frames where pupils complete the blanks in a partially worked texts; write a story based on a plan that has been given to them; join sentences and statements that have been given to them in order to produce a 'cohesive whole text'; or change the purpose of a text that has been given to them, for example changing a recount to a third person narrative (DfEE, 2000: pp16-17). In the process of producing texts within these scaffolds, teachers are expected to direct pupils' learning towards using specific grammatical features and ensuring that punctuation and spelling are attended to. For example, a pupil may be asked to write a diary entry with a specific learning objective of using adverbial clauses.

Teachers in this case study recognised that the pedagogy prescribed in the NLS was a major influence on both the kind of creative writing activities that they provided for pupils, and the way that they approached the teaching of creative writing.

Throughout my initial teacher training I had been shown the skeleton frames and logical sequences of instructions you introduce to children to help them structure their writing, I knew the characteristics of a good piece of writing but did not have the confidence or subject knowledge to challenge and extend the creativity of those writers in the class that wanted to be expressive and use the styles and techniques professional authors use. (T7, Essay)

I have usually concentrated on achieving a 'learning outcome' e.g. the composition of rhyming couplets around a theme of winter, based on a published poem. Thus, the technicalities of writing were being addressed, but the scope for inspiration was somewhat limited. (T6, Essay)

Knowledge about genres and forms in writing can be seen as a powerful way of developing a pedagogy in which learners can construct their own personal knowledge of writing with reference to a wider perspective of existing knowledge. Knowledge about conventions can thus support pupils' progression towards generative and exploratory writing. Such a perspective relates to Bruner's fourth model of the learner's mind: the learner as knowledgeable, and able to manage 'objective' knowledge. From this perspective, pedagogy 'should help children to grasp the distinction between personal knowledge, on the one side, and "what is taken to be known" by the culture, on the other' (Bruner, 1996: p.61). Cremin and Myhill (2011) have observed that theoretical perspectives recognise that written genres are socio-cultural constructions 'representing particular views and values, and shaped by the communities who use them...[they] have an essential stability, but they are also flexible and negotiable'. However, they note that in the NLS genre is seen 'as a fixed set of conventions' (2011: p.12). The focus on imitating fixed conventions within the NLS is seen as emphasising a reproductive, rather than generative, approach to creative writing:

Children receive direct instruction in the forms and structures of different text types. Politically, the induction of young writers to different genres and the communicative discourses they inhabit is concerned with the rhetoric of social justice, and with 'empowerment through appropriation' (Morgan, 1997, p. 59). But educationally, the focus is upon the reproduction of generic conventions, upon mere obedience to forms: the genre, and its values are uncontested. (Myhill, 2005: p.299)

Through the development of their own practice, and their subsequent reflection on the teaching of creative writing, participants began to identify the way in which the pedagogy prescribed in the NLS has detrimental consequences for the learner.

Previously my poetry and creative writing was very closely linked to the Primary Framework and the suggested texts provided, the work the children would produce was closely linked to the structure and form of the featured poet and did not encourage a great deal of imagination and inspiration. (T7, Essay)

I have sought to ensure coverage of the poetry genres and forms demanded in the Literacy Strategy. This has arguably been at the expense of creativity, a clear understanding of the writing process and an appreciation of the importance of poetry writing in exploring feelings and experiences. (T12, Essay)

The participants here recognise that directing pupils' attention towards imitating separate features of form or grammatical constructs within fixed genre conventions may fail to develop learners' understanding of their own practice. The focus on imitating form may inhibit the construction of personal knowledge developed through writing practice, since the individual learner's ideas, experiences and imaginative responses are marginalised. In effect, the learner's 'ingenious knowledge, which is the starting point from which his/her epistemological curiosity' will grow is excluded from the teaching-learning context (Freire, 1998: p.62).

Through their own practice as writers, participants began to reflect on whether focussing attention on knowledge *about* writing rather than knowledge through writing might be unhelpful:

I would often be heard in parents' meeting saying that a child knew all the technicalities of writing, for example, correct sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, but just needed them all to fall into place when writing. I now understand that when writing down new ideas, these technicalities are often forgotten, many of my early drafts of poetry had little, or no punctuation at all. The most important aspect for me was to get my inspiration down in the form of words, refining these at a later date with regards to presentation and grammar. This affected my classroom practice, not only allowing, but encouraging extra time for composition, asking the children to come back to their writing with fresh eyes after some time spent away and editing for effect or content and not just grammatical or spelling mistakes. (T10, Essay)

Here, the teacher adopts a pedagogical approach that recognises the learner as a thinker, someone who will be able to develop their own understanding through a recursive process

of writing and reflection. This arises from a realisation that a didactic approach to creative writing practice may have a limited effect on learning. This is clear in the suggestion that having grasped the technicalities of writing the learner ‘just needed them all to fall into place when writing’. ‘Just’ implies that this is a simple step; however, the experience of practice has influenced the pedagogic approach here to include time for reflection, and to return to the work. The need to spend time away from writing before returning to it to consider ‘effect or content’ rather than only grammar and spelling is indicative of another change in approach that comes from the teachers’ own creative writing practice.

Pedagogical changes resulting from the experience of practice were often motivated by a desire to increase pupils’ ‘experience of ambiguity, their artistic involvement and their understanding of the writing process’ (T6, Essay). Such aspirations led teachers to introduce techniques that they had experienced in seminars into their classrooms, which I explore below. While these techniques may be mainstream in creative writing courses in universities and community learning, they represent a radical departure from the pedagogy advocated in the NLS.

For some, freewriting has been used a starting point for developing further writing. This is a significant variation from the NLS pedagogy, where the starting point and process is described as a linear procedure: teachers should introduce the genre, then model the conventions, then provide guidance/scaffold for pupils to write within, before moving on to allow pupils to engage in independent writing. Furthermore, at the independent writing stage, teachers are advised that pupils should ‘rehearse each sentence before committing it to paper’ (DfEE, 2000: p.71). In brief, the process of independent writing that teachers

are advised to instil in learners is to rehearse each sentence before it is written; write the sentence; check it for accuracy; and then move on to the next sentence.

Participants identified that this process influenced their responses to pupils' writing: one reflected that she had developed a 'very pedantic method of reviewing each phrase and clause to produce greater clarity of meaning, followed by punctuation check' (T2, Essay). Participants also recognised that this teaching approach may impede pupils' writing, creating tension, anxiety and perhaps tedium at each stage of the process, and that the freedom offered by freewriting had the potential to offer pupils more engaging starting points for developing their writing practice.

I was keen to use this to allow the children a little more freedom than I had done previously and observe if it would be successful in removing the anxiety of writing that some children obviously feel. Furthermore, I was interested in how they would view a way of writing which was in opposition to everything I had been telling them for the past few months in the lead up to SATS tests: 'you must have a plan' 'check it through to see if makes sense' and so on. (T11, Essay)

I think as well that the fact that they know, this is just for me, it makes it ok. They don't have to check every phrase, every clause, it's just, when you think about it if you actually tried to write like that, well, it's deadly. It sucks any joy out of it. I think that's what they like, just enjoying actually getting on and writing... (T5, Seminar 4)

Freewriting is identified as an effective technique because pupils became engaged quickly and enjoyed 'getting on and writing' (T5, Seminar 4). Their involvement with the text that they are producing is direct and uninterrupted by the steps of rehearse-write-check, which may have the effect of distancing the learner from the text at each stage. The strategy for writing prescribed in the NLS may disengage the writer from the writing by reinforcing the natural tendency for 'compulsive, premature editing' (Elbow, 1998: p.6) that accompanies most writing:



Almost everybody interposes a massive and complex series of editings between the time words start to be born into consciousness and when they finally come off the end of the pencil or typewriter onto the page...The problem is that editing goes on at the same time as producing...No wonder the producer gets nervous, jumpy, inhibited and finally can't be coherent. (Elbow, 1998: p.5)

As a starting point for further writing, then, freewriting is recognised by participants as a way of increasing pupils' enjoyment and engagement in the generation of text, by removing the anxiety and monotony that they associate with rehearse-write-check methodology.

Freewriting has not only been used by participants as a starting point for further writing, however. It has also been used as a regular, frequent activity which does not lead to further writing, but enables pupils to take part in writing for pleasure as part of their everyday experience of writing in the classroom. This emphasises a conception that exploratory, fragmentary and unfinished texts exist as part of creative writing practice, and are not always in process towards 'works that are (or sometimes only 'seem') finished' (Harper, 2010: p.30). Furthermore, both T5 and T11 (above) reference the importance of the fact that freewriting is 'just for them'. Again, this is a significant departure from the NLS, where there is no indication that personal writing will take place. Indeed, the NLS suggested that primary schools should purchase hand held dry wipe boards for pupils, so that as each sentence was completed the board could be held up for the teacher to check accuracy (DfEE, 2000). In this context, all writing becomes high stakes for the learner. In contrast, the implementation of freewriting emphasises low stakes, fragmentary, spontaneous and incomplete writing as part of the learner's creative writing practice.

On one level, freewriting can be seen simply as another teaching tool. However, when viewed through the lens of Bruner's folk pedagogy, implications for teachers and learners

are revealed. The pedagogy underlying this approach is concerned with seeing learners as thinkers, where what is to be learned is conceived as being 'in' the mind of the learner as well as in 'the minds of teachers...books.. or wherever' (Bruner, 1996: p.55). The valuing of learners' own ideas and methods is central. This shift towards developing creative writing activities that valued the 'ingenious knowledge' of the learner was evident in teachers' continued implementation of creative writing activities that relied less on the NLS, and more on engaging learners in experiences that allowed them to develop their own knowledge through the actions involved in creative writing.

Teachers recognised that the plethora of writing frames and 'scaffolds' promoted in the NLS, which emphasise the usefulness of filling in the blanks in existing texts and directly imitating pre-existing structures, were not always helpful in enabling pupils to develop their own knowledge about writing.

Whilst I still see a place for writing frames...particularly with less confident children, I am now more prepared to let the children experiment and find their own way, even if they are not always successful. Afterall, risk-taking is a central component in creativity. (T11, Essay)

To head out without a map is unusual for the pupils I teach and is precisely not what assessed writing at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 is about. There, writing must be planned, drafted, perfected and have a definite purpose in mind, usually one dictated from outside, such as by an exam setter. My classes and I were starting to thoroughly enjoy breaking out from these constraints (T1, Essay)

However, teachers recognise that learners who are developing their writing will benefit from activities that offer structure in order to 'scaffold' the writing. Many participants saw visualisation techniques, which they had experienced during the seminars, as a way of providing a different kind of scaffold for writing which provided support for writing but also valued the 'ingenious knowledge' of the learner. The implementation of this method was

observed during a Year 9 lesson which revealed how this kind of scaffolding was used by T9 to help learners to develop their creative writing practice.

The teacher and poet-mentor had planned the session jointly, and worked together in the classroom in its delivery. The teacher had used visualisation as a technique in her own creative writing practice, and had at this stage also used it in class with a number of teaching groups. The teacher had brought a selection of shards of broken crockery into the classroom. Each pupil chose a shard, and was firstly asked to spend some time studying it. The teacher then asked 8 questions, paced so that pupils could respond to each question in turn. After asking each question, pupils were given some time to 'visualise' their response to the question, and then to write a response for 2 or 3 minutes.

The questions were as follows:

*What is your object's name? From now on I want you to consider that you are that object, and you're going to be thinking and writing from the object's point of view. We've written from other people's points of view, now you're going to be doing it for an object.*

*When and how were you made? Perhaps you were made in a factory, or you may have been hand made. You may have been made for a special purpose, or you might be quite ordinary. Think about how you were made.*

*What were you before you were broken? You might want to think about how often you were used, and who used you. Be as specific as you like. If you were a plate, think about who ate from you.*

*How were you broken? Think about whether it was accidental or on purpose, think about who broke you.*

*What were the last words you heard spoken before you were broken?*

*Who was the last person to hold you before you were broken? You can think about details here, get a picture of that person, think about what they were wearing, for example.*

*What were the first words or sounds you heard after you were broken?*

*What happened to you after you were broken?*

(T9, Classroom Observation 4b)

The questions here are specific and focussed, offering a clear 'scaffold'. However, the writing actions that they invite imply that the pupil has choices ahead of her in interpreting the scaffold since ambiguity and uncertainty are present at each stage. The questioning framework, with spaces for thinking and writing, provides space for reflection in the act of writing, recognising that writers think as they write, and that the act of writing generates new ideas.

Later in the session, following some shared reflection on the exercise (which is returned to in 7.5 below), pupils were asked to identify three or four lines from the writing which they liked, or found interesting in some way, and which they then developed to start to 'shape' into a poem. This method of selecting a few lines from the initial text produced by pupils was used extensively as a way of developing writing from both visualisations and freewriting in the seminars. The move from filling in blanks or directly imitating pre-existing texts, to generating texts from pupils' own starting points implies a recognition of the 'ingenious knowledge' of the learner, which is used as the basis of constructing learning in a way that engages the pupil more directly in the production of text, and perceives the learner as a thinker. In a sense, pupils are seen as capable of building their own 'scaffold' from the writing that they have generated, in order to support their continued creative writing practice.

It is noted, however, that the sequence of activities observed and described above are essentially concerned with generating text, and the early stages of shaping text. The limitations of this case study meant that it was not possible to observe teachers and learners working together at all stages of creative writing practice; it is possible therefore that participants were able to implement approaches that moved beyond initial generation

and early shaping of writing, but which were not observed during the case study.

However, there is evidence from the study that participants reflected on their increased awareness of the difficulties of guiding learners through the disciplined compositional control that may be required to shape text beyond this early stage. Participants identified that the process of reflection was essential in supporting learners' deeper interrogation of their creative writing, helping them to 'question, understand and hone their own creative processes' as texts are constructed and reconstructed (McLoughlin, 2007: p.96). As participants became more aware of the need to address this concern in their pedagogy, they began to explore ways in which this could be achieved:

My initial concerns about getting students inspired seemed no longer an issue and the new challenge I identified was that of providing my students with a 'space for reflection' which is where they could start to understand for themselves the link between form and meaning...(T9, Essay)

The 'space for reflection' is identified here as an essential element of developing the learner's creative writing practice. T9 considered that the process (described above) of selecting specific lines from their response to a visualisation exercise helped to create such a reflective space in the classroom, focussing attention on how writing could be further shaped and developed. Following this session, when learners were asked to develop the writing that they had started in the lesson, T9 noted that learners' engagement in this task differed from their usual practice:

They wouldn't normally work on them at all, they would normally go "oh I'm just going to write it out neatly" but they didn't. They spent a bit of time thinking about what they'd done and making changes and things like that so in a small way I think that way of concentrating them on reflecting there and then, of valuing that part of the process in the lesson, I think that does make a difference to how they think about it...(T9, Interview 2)

In considering the issue further, T9 reflected on how 'space for reflection' had influenced the development of her own writing. In developing her poetry portfolio, T9 had a period of two or three weeks when her creative writing was put to one side, and found that 'being away from it and then getting back to it was really, really useful which is...exactly the type of circumstance that you don't have in class, that kind of distance' (T9, Interview 2). Her experience motivated her to review the way that learners can build a body of creative writing practice over extended periods, so that they are involved in 'building their own body of work' which can be returned to at various points, rather than completing discrete, unconnected tasks (T9, Interview 2).

In considering the need to develop learners' writing beyond initial generation and shaping of text, participants also considered the role of the developing a dialogue about creative writing in the classroom that supported learners to inquire into their own practice, moving beyond a focus on 'redrafting' work:

In my experience, children find the concept of redrafting incredibly difficult and will often simply alter a spelling or two when asked to redraft. It is therefore even more vital that we model this integral part of the writing process on a regular basis. My attitude towards this key part of the writing process has now changed emphasis, particularly since I found that children responded positively to being given the time and guidance to redraft in the classroom. (T12, Essay)

It's about the way you talk to them – how did you know that comes here? How did you *know* that? It can't just be about 'yes, this is good, but can you do this now please'. It needs to be more about, look, you made some choices, some decisions here, getting them to notice that, to think, why does this work? What's happening here? What happens if I do this? (T2, Interview 3)

The need to deepen learners' engagement with understanding their own writing practice therefore emerged as potential route to enhancing their ability to master more developed approaches to composition. Such an approach reflects a pedagogic interest in 'how children understand and manage their own learning' (Bruner, 1996: p.58).

The creative writing methods explored in the seminars formed the basis of the pedagogical development that teachers explored in their classrooms. These new approaches were seen to have consequences for learners that included a new focus on providing pupils with 'the room that has to be given to generative thought' (Robinson, 1999: p.105). While freewriting is concerned with pupils' uninhibited expression, the development of writing from this starting point tended to involve more structured methodologies, such as visualisation, and identifying specific lines for further development. This focussed approach to developing text involved a range of approaches that move beyond the Strategy's process of 'rehearse-write-check', and have a greater focus on pupils' self-assessment, metacognition and dialogue (as explored in 7.5 below).

The implementation of new techniques and approaches to creative writing implies a pedagogy that recognises the pupil as a thinker, moving away from a model of didactic and imitative learning. However, it is recognised that for some teachers, this has been a cautious move: 'not a completely radical change of approach, but a move towards a more adventurous, informed and balanced one, less reliant on the literary forms...more open to experimentation' (T11, Essay). The reasons that underlie this caution are considered in the next section of this chapter, which considers the greater amount of opportunities made available for creative writing in the classroom following teachers' experience of developing their own practice.

#### **7.4 Increased opportunities for creative writing in the classroom**

As discussed in some detail in Chapter Two, the NLS had the effect of marginalising creative writing from many pupils' classroom experiences. The requirement to cover a wide range of different text types limited the amount of time available for exploratory

writing. It has been suggested that the focus on what Frater terms 'discrete exercises' such as filling in blanks, imitating form and completing sentences 'substantially displaced the practice of written composition' in many classrooms, leaving few opportunities for learners to write in continuous prose, or to write poems or play scripts (Frater, 2000: p.109). It has also been suggested that such exercises have fundamentally influenced learners' conceptions of creative writing: 'Rather than promoting writing as a powerful tool for thinking and expressing ideas, students understood writing to be a fill-in-the-blanks response to particular genres' (Luce-Kapler and Klinger, 2005: p.157).

As participants in the case study developed their own experience of and more complex conceptions of creative writing, and as the development of teacher-writer identities increased their confidence in implementing approaches that they had used in developing this practice, they began to make space in the curriculum for more opportunities for creative writing:

Following each session on the course I would enthusiastically return to the class with the starting point or task for us to complete together....Throughout the different creative writing sessions in class, the children's attitudes and opinions of their writing started to change. They were enthusiastic to share their compositions with the class, enjoyed giving feedback and expressing their favourite parts of their peers work. They listened intently to each other and worked quietly and absorbed in the varied tasks they were introduced to. Those that usually found it hard to stay on task or those that were usually reluctant writers, were engaged due to the short time allowance for the activity or the personal engagement they could relate to in the writing brief. (T7, Essay)

By seminar 5 of the course all of the teachers had created space in the curriculum to develop more opportunities for creative writing in the classroom. In an overcrowded curriculum, developing this space is challenging, but teachers identified their reasons for this move as connected with raised pupil engagement in developing writing, and in the



possibilities that engagement in creative writing offered to those pupils who may not always succeed in traditional literacy tasks to surpass teachers' expectations:

In the last few months I have tried new approaches with children of all ability ranges and what struck me more than anything else was the fact that there was actually very little difference in quality of poetry between the higher and lower ability set. In fact, if anything, the overall quality was probably better in the lower set. (T11, Essay)

I did the [sound] activities that we did, and what struck me... was that I think unconsciously I did the activities assuming that children wouldn't be up to the level that adults were up to but what I found was that the children responded very well and very ably, and came out with some wonderful made up words. And I think that was the main thing I thought about really was that my assumption was that they wouldn't be somehow as good. (T3, Focus Group 2)

The rationale for increasing opportunities for creative writing in the classroom is seen here as increasing engagement for *all* learners. It may, however, have been expected that teachers would adjust the curriculum to make time for more creative writing during the Well Versed project, since they were actively engaged in developing their own creative writing during that time. It is significant therefore, that all of the teachers who took part in Stage 2 interviews, held 9 months after the course ended, identified that they had continued to increase the amount of time available for creative writing in the classroom. It is not possible to quantify the increased amount of time made available for creative writing in the curriculum, since schools do not audit this provision, and therefore no benchmark exists against which to measure the increase. However, their impressions of the amount to which they had increased opportunities for creative writing varied:

I'd definitely say there's more... sometimes in literacy, but actually using creative writing in other topic work too (T3, Interview 8)

Not to a massive degree because I've got to show the range of text types (T12, Interview 9)

A bit more (T1, Interview 7)

I think I'm doing it more definitely, I think quite a lot more...(T6, Interview 5)

Probably quite a bit more time actually (T11, Interview 6).

It is possible that some of the increase in opportunities made available for creative writing in the classroom may have happened regardless of participants' experience of Well Versed. As part of the National Curriculum review, the SATs writing test in 2012 was suspended, and teachers were asked to assess pupils' writing on the basis of the writing they developed over the course of the academic year. The writing test, which had consisted of a short (20 minute) writing task and a long (45 minutes) writing task, inevitably meant that teachers were likely to spend a proportion of curriculum time in test preparation. With this time 'freed up', there was more space available in the curriculum to develop creative writing. In addition, the prospect of teacher assessment meant that teachers were able to use a variety of pupils' writing on which to make assessments:

Obviously we still have to cover the same text types, but in the lead up to SATS it hasn't been a case of right, today we're going to do a balanced argument, today we're going to do an information text which it has been in the past. It has allowed a bit more freedom so even...just to have a break from the monotony we've been able to write a story, even a poem. Now I can actually use a poem as part of my teaching assessment whereas before when it was just based on one test on the day of SATs when they're never going to be asked to write a poem. (T11, Interview 6)

The suspension in testing arrangements opened up the opportunity to dedicate more time to creative writing firstly because it alleviated the pressure of test preparation, and secondly because the freedom to assess pupils' work over a period of time meant that a wider range of pupils' writing could be included in the process.

However, the need to provide evidence that the full range of 'text types' are still being addressed presents a barrier to developing increased opportunities for creative writing in

the classroom. The teachers interviewed at Stage 2 identified that they would prefer to dedicate more time to creative writing activities in the classroom, but that the requirement to cover a wide range of different text types limited the amount of time available for exploratory writing.

I think that if they can write more creatively generally then it will eventually have an impact, but it's just there's so much that we're expected to cover. We're supposed to be able to get them to do balanced arguments, newspapers, diaries, letters, general recounts, explanatory texts, non-chronological reports, fiction in various genres...and how are you supposed to teach all of that plus poetry, plus persuasive writing...In my eyes you'd be far better handing them up [to secondary school] less secure in how to set out each genre perfectly and send them up with creative ideas, good vocabulary, good punctuation, secure sentence structure...(T3, Interview 8)

The expectation that teachers will cover the range of text types and focus on technical accuracy is set out in the NLS, which works both as a set of learning objectives and as an accountability measure to judge teachers' performance. Teachers' performance is judged externally by Ofsted, who observe and talk to teachers during inspection visits, and who will expect to see a range of evidence that learning objectives are being tackled. Teachers also feel that 'at the end of the day as a teacher you're assessed on how many pupils got a level 4 at the end of Y6' (T6, Focus Group 1).

Although participants felt new approaches to providing creative writing experiences were both more enjoyable and 'proved successful in the classroom, giving every child the opportunity to be successful, which undoubtedly has an effect on their over-all performance in school' (T13, Essay), the way in which teachers and schools are judged was identified as a factor that limits pedagogy in most participants' minds, and curtails the amount of time available to develop creative writing opportunities in the classroom. Reaching attainment targets relies on teachers' ability to both ensure that curriculum

content is covered, and that the focus on technical and functional aspects of writing is central. While the teachers in this case study felt that more creative approaches to writing were likely to have a positive impact on pupils' overall progress, the weight of content coverage and the amount of time needed to ensure that all text types had been addressed was seen as a barrier to making space within the curriculum for creative writing practice.

The need for individual teachers to adhere to the NLS in order that their school can be judged successful was evidenced by one of the participants following her involvement in Well Versed. Her school was subject to an Ofsted inspection several months after the Well Versed project had ended. She had, during this time, continued to implement a range of new approaches to creative writing in the curriculum, which she felt were successful. Her opinion had been endorsed by her headteacher and local authority adviser, both of whom had observed lessons. In the lesson that was observed by Ofsted she used a visualisation exercise to stimulate writing. In receiving feedback from the inspector, she was criticised for not providing enough 'scaffold' for pupils:

She said to me what was missing was there was no scaffolding for the children, and she said she'd spoken to one of the pupils afterwards, a very able boy, and asked him about adjectival clauses, and that he hadn't seemed to know what she meant. And I explained, this session wasn't about adjectival clauses, and that I didn't do that kind of scaffolding in this session because this session was about ... releasing some of their creativity. So it wasn't that I didn't think to do that or didn't do it because I forgot or made a mistake. It wasn't about that, I didn't intend to do it. And it was actually, I think there was a lot of scaffold in the visualisation, it was a very detailed exercise, but it obviously wasn't the right kind of scaffold. So she said she would come to the session the next day...I prepared the next day's lesson in a half an hour and I thought to myself if she wants adjectival clauses and all of this I'll give her the bog standard, I'll do it. And so I taught a bog standard lesson and told them what to write and then they did it and then we checked it and it was oh, you know, and she thought it was wonderful. When they're there observing you just play the rules of the game because that's all we can do. (T6, Interview 5)

As seen earlier in this chapter, visualisation techniques provide pupils with a very different kind of 'scaffold' for writing from that advocated in the strategies, since they are

pedagogically orientated towards perceiving the learner as a thinker who can use their 'ingenious knowledge' to create text. The perceived need for teachers to adhere to 'the right kind' of scaffold, however, is likely to inhibit teachers' confidence to pursue increased opportunities for creative writing in the classroom.

### **7.5 Self-assessment, metacognition and dialogue in pupils' writing experiences**

The external assessments of pupils' writing are, self-evidently, out of the control of individual teachers in the classroom. However, the political pressure for schools to constantly raise attainment levels from one cohort to the next have had the effect of foregrounding assessment criteria within teachers' pedagogy.

Throughout my journey on this course for both me and my pupils to become creative writers, I have become very aware of the limitation and restraint that targets and success criteria have on the content of children's writing. They had become so fixated with including certain criteria within their writing to progress in their levels, that the imagination, enjoyment and originality of their work for me as the reader and them as the writer had dimmed. (T7, Essay)

I had clearly shaped writers who, though a great deal more than technicians, were restrained and subjected to the tedium of constant self-review. (T2, Essay)

The limiting effect of focussing explicit attention on only those elements of writing that relate to external assessment objectives is seen here as diminishing engagement and enjoyment in writing. It also ruptures the relationship between the writer and the writing, since it fails to take account of and respect the knowledge that the writer might bring to the writing. This might include the content schema that pupils draw on, relating to their individual lived experience, or the formal schema that relates to their personal knowledge of texts (Swales, 1990). In displacing this knowledge, the negotiation of task comes to depend on knowledge of assessment criteria alone, which works to 'make the act of

writing reproductive, reproducing the taught and expected features of the genre' (Myhill, 2005: p.295). The shift from writing as a generative act to writing as a reproductive act can thus be seen as a consequence of a limited framework of assessment in the classroom.

In seminars, the first step taken after initial writing activities such as freewriting and visualisation was frequently an act of reflection and self-assessment. Teachers were asked to read back through their writing and underline three or four lines, phrases or sentences that they liked, or that struck them as interesting in any way. They were then asked to choose one to read aloud to the group.

I thought it was interesting in the seminars when we were looking at feedback in those sessions and people were reading bits of their own work out, that kind of process that we went through of not trying to interpret meaning or do anything too grand but just to say is there anything that you like, is there any words or phrases that stick out. I thought that was a very interesting kind of way into assessing writing...I do that all the time now with the children. (T6, Interview 5)

During my attendance of writing seminars, one of the things that I learnt the most from was listening to each writer read aloud their favourite line. By limiting pupils to reading one line only, it became achievable for each child to contribute. In a class of thirty, this was perhaps the first time we had managed this without it becoming laborious. The pupils became very skilled in explaining why they felt their work was effective, what it was that they liked about other people's work and also how they might improve their work further. (T3, Essay)

Hearing your writing, and that's something that I keep saying I particularly enjoyed at the beginning of the course, hearing other people's writing impacts on my writing. (T4, Focus Group 2)

Like freewriting, the process of selecting a few lines and choosing one to read aloud appears to be a simple technique. However, this process infers a very different pedagogy than one which focusses on externally imposed assessment criteria alone. By asking pupils to identify *for themselves* a few lines that they like or are interested in, this process deepens the relationship between the writer and the writing, promoting an internal dialogue that engages critical reflection. The pedagogy implied by such a process sees

the learner as 'capable of thinking about her own thinking' (Bruner, 1996: p.56). The action of reading a line aloud, listening to the responses of others and offering responses in return implies a conception of the learner as able to develop their thinking and writing both on their own and through dialogue with others. The internal and external conversations can be seen as contributing to the development of personal knowledge about creative writing. The knowledge that learners construct through their writing is shared and becomes part of the classroom discourse about writing.

The focus on self-assessment and metacognition is present in the stage of writing development that typically followed from the selection of lines: pupils were asked to write the lines out again, and then start to 'shape' them into a new piece of writing. In the seminars, this process was directed towards shaping poems. In the classroom, teachers have used it to shape both poetry and prose.

As described in 7.3 above, T9 used this technique following a visualisation exercise which I observed with a Year 9 class. However, she was keen to create more space for reflection in the writing activity, as she had identified that this was particularly challenging within the restricted structure of lessons found in most secondary schools. On completion of the preliminary stage of the visualisation, pupils were asked to talk in pairs about their response to the exercise: not to read what they had written, but to discuss what they had found difficult, interesting or easy in the task, why this might be so, and how they had responded. This process of moving from internal conversation to mutual dialogue enabled another layer of reflection to emerge. Ideas discussed in pairs were then shared in the class, adding to the classroom discourse about writing, and supporting the metacognitive thinking in the writing process.

The next stage of the exercise involved pupils in the process of selecting 3 or 4 sentences from their writing which they then wrote out again, reviewing and making changes as they shaped a poem from the text they had generated. Pupils had worked in this way before, on freewriting and visualisation exercises that the teacher had introduced to the class as a result of developing her own practice. They were asked to 'think about detail' in both selecting lines, and in reviewing their writing. They were reminded that they were still at the stage of generating material, before sharing their writing in small groups and responding to each other's work. Here again the reflection moved from an internal conversation to mutual dialogue. The final task of the lesson asked pupils to reflect on what they had written, by thinking about where the details in their writing had come from. The teacher encouraged pupils to 'think about the physical, concrete things...Think about where those details in your writing have come from' (T9, Classroom Observation 4b). The metacognitive thinking encouraged here is a profound divergence for the rehearse-write-check process embedded in the NLS. The focus on reflection, self-assessment and metacognition throughout the session creates a sense of pupils both inhabiting their texts as they are generated, and stepping outside of them to consider what they are creating, and how. In doing so, they contemplate how other writers generate text, and are engaged in a 'mutualist and dialectical' mode of writing which is explicitly concerned with 'interpretation and understanding' (Bruner, 1996: p.57).

Teachers also identified that their own experience of being assessed as students of creative writing during the course informed their thinking about how they approached pupils' creative writing. It is perhaps to be expected that such an experience increased teachers' empathetic response to the assessment of pupils' writing.



It does make me think how do the children feel when I go up to them and say “well that could be more powerful” or “that could be better” or “I like this but I’m not sure about that”. (T3, Focus Group 2)

I was feeding back to a boy today who had dyslexia...he was doing a piece of writing on the computer and he uses spell check, which sometimes helps and sometimes doesn’t. But he’d written quite a good piece of work. He was really telling a story and I went through it with him and I showed him, modelled to him how to use the spell check and then how to correct words by himself and I was...I must have said two or three times ‘All I’m checking here is the spellings, your writing is good, look your sentences are good, look how that sounds, oh and I love that. All I’m doing is your spellings with you, that’s all I’m doing.’ So I think sometimes without thinking about it too much I am being more empathetic and without meaning to consciously. (T6, Interview 5)

However, teachers identified that their responses to assessment had changed in ways that extended beyond increased empathy:

The other thing that surprised me [about my poetry portfolio] is that I never thought...even now I still don’t think it was where I wanted it to be, which is another reason that you change, you think, actually is it ever at that stage? So I’m more likely to think, well where is this pupil in their writing development, what stage are they at? It’s not all about is this a first draft, or can you revise this bit? I’m more likely to think about the pupil’s writing in a more overall way, where are they at, what do they need. Not, ‘think about your connectives’, and that’s a big difference in me. (T11, Interview 6)

The change here reflects a concern with understanding more about the learner, about what she understands and how she has come to understand it: seeing the learner as a thinker. The teachers’ response to the learner changes from focussing on ‘telling’ the learner how to make a specific improvement, to ‘understanding what the child thinks and how she arrives at what she believes’ (Bruner, 1996: p.56). In this view of teaching creative writing, teachers have built self-assessment, metacognition and dialogue into the processes that support writing in the classroom. Personal experience of practice has enabled teachers to approach this with greater confidence. However, such awareness

brings with it new challenges, as identified by T9 in reflecting on her frequent practice of instructing pupils to redraft work with a sole focus on external assessment criteria:

Consequently, by not being a writer I was unaware that I was encouraging my students to disengage with their work as well as cutting them off from an understanding of the actual creative process that I was attempting to reveal. Unfortunately this process is one which it is particularly difficult to replicate within the hour long lessons found in most secondary schools, however, my writing experiences did reveal to me the importance of addressing this aspect of writing. (T9, Essay)

The pressures of time are equally felt in primary schools, but creating time and space for reflection so that pupils come to understand more about their own learning process in writing is considered valuable here too:

I think it has taught me that the time used, the time being reflective...on the course we were taught how to slow down in order to write and I think I have learned how to become even more reflective. And it's something that I try to create, it's not always easy in a busy classroom, but slowing things down, making it more reflective, I am trying to do that much more in the classroom, to make time for them to think about their writing, think about how they're doing things, about why they're doing them that way. (T6, Interview 5)

The greater focus on pupils' metacognition is also identified as important in developing pupils' resilience in writing, their ability to cope with and understand the struggles and difficulties involved in successful writing:

Space, and being reflective and independent...and able to resolve things, grounding it in their experiences as writers. I think...they need to actually grapple with their own learning, that's how they are going to develop as writers... and maybe you get to the end of the hour and sometimes you haven't got very far, because that's what it's like sometimes (T2, Meeting)

The teachers here present a sense of the need for writers to become deeply involved with the texts that they produce through a recursive set of actions that involve thinking, writing,

and engaging in dialogue. This is a more complex picture than the plan-draft-revise process described in the Strategies, which appears to conceptualise writing as a linear process. The focus on self-assessment, metacognition and dialogue also implies a pedagogical interest in helping pupils to understand the active interplay of their critical judgement in developing their creative writing. The plan-draft-revise model may be seen to sideline creative activity, while the focus on self-assessment, and metacognition accentuates the vital interplay between the critical and the creative, recognising that 'Evaluating which ideas do work and which do not requires judgement and criticism. In this way creative thinking always involves some critical thinking' (Robinson, 1999: p.105).

## **7.6 The creative-critical dynamic: literature and creative writing**

A number of participants teaching at secondary phase discussed how their pedagogy had evolved to consider the ways in which creative writing activities can be used to support the critical skills involved in studying literature and vice versa. T9 reflected on the fact that while GCSE syllabi do not describe any connection between creative writing practice and critical skills in analysing literature, her own experience had demonstrated that the two realms are in fact closely connected:

One of my own experiences of this that really stands out from the writing seminars was linked to a poem...which we read as part of an exercise to focus our attention as readers and writers on the importance of line breaks in poetry. This is a feature of poetic writing that I frequently encourage my students to identify when reading and responding to published poetry, however, until I became a writer and used this technique in my own work, I realise I was not really engaging with the effects it can have on meaning and tone. The impact this writing experience had on my ability to engage with previously overlooked aspects of familiar poetry is exactly the experience I wanted to recreate for my students. (T9, Essay)

The attempt to engage pupils in 'writerly criticism' raises the possibility that pupils are capable of seeing their own creative writing in the context of texts that have been

generated by others, and vice versa. The process aims to enable pupils to 'to criticise...the writing of others and by extension their own writing' (McLoughlin, 2007: p.89).

But how does such a process differ pedagogically from the process described in 6.2 above, where 'text types' are presented as models whose anatomy can be described and imitated by pupils? The most significant difference is in the focus presented here on pupils' ability to criticise self-generated texts and existing texts in order to develop understanding about their own thinking, reading and writing as interconnected spheres of learning that have a relationship with how texts are generated by themselves and others. As such, the exploration of the creative-critical domain reveals a pedagogical perspective of learners as 'knowledgable' and able to 'manage "objective" knowledge' (Bruner, 1996: p.60).

In the reflective and metacognitive approaches to writing considered above, it was noted that pupils were able to inhabit their own texts and step outside of them, moving back and forth as they engaged in individual and mutual actions of reflection. In this context, existing literary texts are not reduced to models to be imitated, but are sites of exploration, where pupils can develop habits of mind concerned with questioning, making connections, reflecting critically, and innovating: habits that are useful in both creative and critical practice. Here, the pedagogical approach perceives literature as a further site into which the writer can step, both in order to consider their own writing from a different perspective, and to look at existing texts from their perspective as a writer. Pedagogy is not simply a didactic 'telling' of what is to be found in texts and how it should be imitated, but a way in which learners can move between texts, connecting the knowledge that they construct

through their own creative writing practice with other kinds of 'objective' knowledge in existing texts.

The practice of creative writing is also seen as a way of developing relationships with literary texts that may otherwise remain obscure, or unconnected to the pupils' experience, so that texts 'remain alive and relevant' to pupils (T9, Essay). The connection between the pupil as writer and the existing literary text is felt in a more developed understanding of the acts and actions that produce creative writing:

When they come to studying literature, there is still quite a lot of resistance among pupils to the idea that writing was designed, and some students are very resistant to that and get quite cross at the idea that a writer chose anything or meant anything and they say well it just ended up like that...I think creative writing is a way of having that dialogue with students. They have to do a lot of that at GCSE literature, a lot of critical analysis, and I think what doing it yourself does, it if teaches you nothing else it, it teaches you that it doesn't just happen, there's got to be a purpose otherwise it won't appear. (T1, Interview 7)

It is important for teenagers to be able to see the choices that poets make are intentional and considered. Experiencing the process for themselves and feeling ownership of the work produced, provided a connection between my students and the poets they have to read. By making the creative process real to them, the poems of others started to become alive to them too. (T9, Essay)

As well as exploring form, creative writing was recognised as a way of helping pupils' to infer meaning and deepen understanding of ideas that are expressed in literature. In planning their joint sessions with a Year 8 group, T2 and P10 decided to write from the persona of characters in a Shakespeare play that pupils were studying because this would 'give them an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the play in quite a unique way' so that understanding of the play can be developed from the knowledge developed in their writing: 'so it builds into their independence, it comes really from them, from what they're thinking' (T6, Meeting 3). Such a perspective concurs with Bruner's exposition of the pedagogical view of learners as knowledgeable, where 'there is something special

about talking to authors, now dead but still alive in their texts – as long as the objective of the encounter is not worship but discourse and interpretation’ (Bruner, 1996: p.62). When teachers ask pupils to engage in creative writing activities that enable personal knowledge to illuminate ‘objective’ knowledge in texts, they are involved in a pedagogy that enables the pupil both to construct meaning in their own thinking and writing and to ‘reach beyond his own impressions to join a past world that would otherwise be remote and beyond him as a knower’ (Bruner, 1996: p.63).

## **7.7 Conclusion**

The influence of teachers’ creative writing practice on their pedagogy is expressed through the implementation of new approaches in the classroom which draw on both their participation in creative writing seminars and their subsequent individual creative writing practice. Participants’ engagement in creative writing practice enables a classroom discourse about writing to emerge which acknowledges difficulty and frustration as elements of successful creative writing practice. The focus on reflection and self-assessment as part of the practice of creative writing is emphasised, and the opportunity for learners to take part in low stakes, exploratory writing is developed as part of pupils’ experience of creative writing. Opportunities to shape and develop text that has been generated by pupils’ own writing emerge as a new way of developing ‘scaffold’ for pupils, reflecting a desire to engage students in writing activities that develop a relationship between the writer and the writing in ways that may not be possible through exercises that ask pupils to fill in blanks in pre-existing texts, or imitate structure and form. However, there is less evidence that participants were able to develop approaches that supported pupils in the latter stages of compositional shaping and control.

It is recognised that the participants in this case study did not necessarily see the new approaches to creative writing as the only way that they imagined that they would implement all aspects of writing pedagogy. T12 could 'still see a place for writing frames, particularly with less confident children' (T12, Essay), and T6 felt that 'some children I think like the other approach and some children who...have the more mathematical, scientific approach perhaps they benefit from "this is what you need to do and this is how you do it and this is where you need to put the words" approach' (T6, Interview 5). However, teachers' pedagogic methods have broadened to encompass approaches that build from their own experience of practice.

The changes in pedagogic practice described in this chapter reflect participants' understanding that 'to know how to teach is to create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged simply in a game of transferring knowledge' (Freire, 1998: p.49). Although the methods and techniques that teachers implement in developing their creative writing pedagogy are relatively simple and straightforward, they reveal a complex pedagogical shift that perceives the learner as a thinker, capable of learning through intersubjective exchange, and as an individual who is knowledgeable and is able to manage their own personal constructions of knowledge in the context of 'objective' knowledge (Bruner, 1996: pp.56-61). This informs a pedagogy that is more concerned with interpretation and understanding than with didactic exposure to 'facts, principles and rules of action which are to be learned, remembered and then applied' (Bruner, 1996: p.55).

Bruner acknowledges that in most classrooms the day to day experiences of teachers and learners may encompass a range of models of the learners' mind and corresponding

pedagogies. However, the pedagogy of the NLS influenced a pedagogical approach that accentuated a perception of learners' minds as passive, in which 'teaching is not a mutual dialogue, but a telling by one to the other' (Bruner, 1996). Through the development of their own creative writing practice, teachers have been able to develop alternative pedagogical approaches. Their conceptions of creative writing, evolved through practice, influence their conceptions of the learners' mind. The pedagogical consequences for creative writing are concerned with understanding how learners negotiate and make meaning through the acts involved in generating texts, and how teachers as enablers can share in this process.



## **8 Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In carrying out this research, my aim has been to extend knowledge about the influence of teachers' creative writing practice on their pedagogy. In concluding the thesis, I reflect on the original research questions, summarising the interpretation of findings against the original research aims, and drawing out the ways in which findings from this research contribute to existing knowledge in the field. I also consider the limitations of the study, and explore the potential for further research that builds on the findings from this research. I then move on to consider the policy and practice implications of findings, and propose recommendations for consideration.

### **8.2 Central research question**

**How is the pedagogy of creative writing in schools influenced by teachers' creative writing practice?**

In exploring this question, my research has centred on evidence collected from the case study, and drawn on existing literature in the field. Research into teachers' creative writing practice is somewhat limited, as outlined in Chapter Two. Three previous studies carried out in the United Kingdom exploring teachers' practice as writers developed findings that congregate around teachers' emotional responses to undertaking creative writing practice, including the anxiety and uncertainty that can be provoked by engagement in creative writing practice; the importance of creative writing practice in supporting the development of teachers' understanding of themselves as writers; and the role of creative writing practice in developing 'authentic' teacher modelling and engagement in creative practice (Grainger, 2005; Cremin, 2006; Cremin and Baker, 2010).

The research undertaken for this thesis corresponds with these important findings. In addition, this study has explored evidence of changes in teachers' classroom practice in relation to increased opportunities for creative writing in the curriculum; new approaches to modelling creative writing extemporaneously; the development of a classroom discourse about creative writing achieved through engaging in shared practice with learners; new approaches to generating and shaping text with learners that moved away from reliance on approaches promoted through the NLS; and a greater focus on the creative-critical dynamic in exploring literature and creative writing (all of which are examined in Chapter Seven). Furthermore, this research extends learning gained from previous studies in three ways, which are considered below.

***Previous studies explored the experience of primary school teachers only (Key Stages 1 and 2). This study explores teachers working in primary, middle and secondary schools (incorporating Key Stages 3, 4 and 5)***

As explored in Chapter Five, primary school teachers entered the creative writing seminars expecting that their own anxiety at the prospect of engaging in creative writing would not be mirrored by colleagues from secondary schools. This was reflected in comments such as 'I was surprised by the secondary teachers on the course reporting that they were 'nervous' about the group writing sessions' (T3, Essay), revealing primary teachers' perceptions that as secondary teachers were English specialists, they would have greater confidence in approaching creative writing. English secondary teachers, however, reported that their 'usual confidence with English faded' (T9, Essay) when confronted with the prospect of creative writing, which they felt to be outside of their usual area of expertise. The research found that secondary teachers' pedagogy was influenced in similar ways to primary teachers in relation to emerging teacher-writer identity; re-conceptualising creative writing; and implementing changes to classroom practice. This

finding in relation to secondary teachers' creative writing practice is significant in addressing concerns that students in secondary education may not be encouraged to take up opportunities to engage in creative writing because teachers lack creative writing experience, and their 'sense of uncertainty and personal discomfort in teaching creative writing' inhibits effective pedagogy (Green, 2009: p.188). This is particularly significant in the light of the recent announcement of the introduction of Creative Writing at A level<sup>13</sup>.

In addition, this research reveals evidence of how middle and secondary school teachers' creative writing practice influenced greater focus on the inter-relationship between literature and creative writing (7.6 above). Participants developed pedagogical approaches that extended exploration of literary texts through creative writing, enabling pupils to develop habits of mind concerned with questioning, making connections, reflecting critically, and innovating: habits that are useful in both creative and critical practice.

***This study examines the influence of writers working with teachers; previous studies did not involve writers working with teachers.***

The influence of writers on teachers' pedagogy formed a central aspect of participants' experience of creative writing in this study. Writers' work with teachers in seminars and in their schools revealed their pedagogical approaches to and conceptions of creative writing. Findings relating to writers' influence on teachers' pedagogy are explored in relation to research sub question 4 (see 8.5 below).

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<sup>13</sup> Creative Writing at A level has been accredited by AQA for teaching in schools from September 2013 <http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/english/creative-writing.php>

***Previous studies tended to focus on participants' experience of writing prose, whereas this study explored teachers' poetry writing.***

Participants explored their engagement with poetry as a 'special case', intimately involved with ideas of 'the self' (6.3.1 above). This influence was felt both in the development of participants' own writing (their acceptance or rejection of poetry as lyrical self-expression) and in their pedagogical approaches to poetry as needing to be 'treated differently from other forms' (T11, Essay). Participants identified that their sense of poetry as intimately linked with 'the self' created tensions in assessing pupils' poetry writing, since 'with poetry I always feel like it's so personal even if it isn't about a personal thing' (T1, Focus Group 2). The experience of writing their own poetry, and their engagement in processes of self-assessment and sharing creative writing practice, influenced participants' pedagogic approaches to developing a discourse about creative writing in the classroom that focussed on the acts and actions of creative writing practice. In addition, engagement in writing poetry provoked reflections on the value of poetry in the curriculum, and deepened understanding of the potential of writing poetry to develop experimentation and exploration that extends learning beyond the formal processes advocated in the NLS.

The central research question's concern with the influence of creative writing practice on teachers has been analysed thematically in this research, and further findings are summarised in response to the research sub questions below.

### **8.3 Research sub question 1**

#### **How has creative writing been conceptualised in educational policy, and how do these conceptions influence pedagogy in schools?**

As explored in Chapter Two, creative writing is conceptualised in educational policy largely as a vehicle for teaching learners about technical and functional accuracy in written language. Within this conception, literary texts are reduced to models of form that can be imitated in order to demonstrate knowledge about genre and conventions. While knowledge of form and genre is desirable in order to enable learners to 'master the written discourses which represent access to power' (Myhill 2005, p.295) and to innovate and experiment with form, conceptualisation within educational policy has influenced the development of a pedagogy that 'tends to make the act of writing reproductive, reproducing the taught and expected features of the genre, rather than productive, including creating meaning through unconventional use of genre features' (Myhill 2005, p.295). The high stakes testing and assessment regime which forms part of the policy landscape for the teaching of writing reinforces this tendency, since mark schemes 'do not acknowledge sufficiently the variety of ways in which a particular task demand can be fulfilled and reduce the act of writing to conventional form-following, subordinating the act of writing to little more than meeting the demands of the norms of genre' (Myhill 2005, p.295). Educational policy articulated through the NLS and the testing regime influences pedagogy by attempting to reduce creative writing to a set of instructions, rules and facts that can be demonstrated by the teacher and applied by the pupil, conceiving of the learner as imitative and learning from didactic exposure.

The influence of educational policy on pedagogy can be seen in the implementation of a mechanistic approach to teaching writing which has come to dominate creative writing pedagogy in schools. Such an influence can be felt in the proliferation of exercises that

replace the acts and actions of creative writing with tasks that focus on filling in blanks, imitating form, and completing sentences. Thus educational policy influences a pedagogical approach that dislocates creative writing from its literary, artistic context, and rejects the concept that the acts and actions of creative writing encompass 'individual human intentions, with feelings, reasons and meanings' (Harper 2010, p.115).

In the case study, participants identified that educational policy had influenced their pedagogy by promoting 'an over reliance on literary forms' (T11, Essay), which orientated classroom practice towards 'giving children a poem with a clear structure, and asking them to either change words or imitate the whole poem' (T12, Essay). Participants reflected that their 'assumptions about how children learn to write poetry were based on narrow guidance from the Literacy Strategy and an assumption that children behave as imitative learners, finding it difficult to generate ideas and original thought without structured didactic teaching' (T12, Essay). The emphasis on an imitative and didactic pedagogy, reinforced a tendency to use demonstration modelling in the classroom, where 'thought processes were scripted and did not include the hesitancy and sufficient periods of thought and reflection which are usually present in the composition of any piece of writing' (T6, Essay).

Participants also recognised that assessment criteria not only restrained the potential for creative writing to occupy a pedagogic domain concerned with developing thinking and the expression of ideas, but limited their pupils' conceptions of creative writing as they became 'fixated with including certain criteria within their writing to progress in their levels' reducing their engagement and enjoyment in the acts and actions of creative writing (T7, Essay). The punitive use of testing to judge not only learners' attainment but also the

performance of teachers and schools was identified as a driver for participants' implementation of the restrictive and limiting pedagogy advocated in the NLS.

#### **8.4 Research sub question 2**

##### **Does engaging in creative writing practice influence teachers' conceptualisations of creative writing, and, if so, what is the impact on pedagogy?**

The exploration of participants' individual conceptualisations of creative writing revealed more complex and multifaceted understandings of creative writing practice than are expressed in educational policy. Prior to their engagement in the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom, participants expressed understandings of creative writing as exploratory, 'where maybe you don't always know the outcome' (T1, Focus Group 1); unpredictable, where 'the writing takes you down a path you didn't expect' (T5, Focus Group 1); and connected to artistic meaning making as well as communication (see 6.3 above).

Through engagement in creative writing practice, participants' conceptualisations evolved and changed. Their experience deepened participants' understanding of creative writing as a practical subject in the curriculum; that is to say 'relating to, concerned with, well adapted to, or inclining to look to, actual practice, actual conditions' (The Chambers Dictionary, 2008). Concern with the 'actual conditions' of practice expanded conceptions of creative writing to encompass ideas not only about imaginative exploration, but about the need to tolerate risk and uncertainty in constructing and conveying meaning through texts (see 6.7 above). Participants' experience of difficulty, frustration, vulnerability and ambiguity as well as satisfaction, pride and enjoyment formed part of their own creative

writing practice, and influenced their development of a pedagogy that accepts these experiences as part of practice, and strengthens learners' capacity to cope with them:

Space, and being reflective and independent...and able to resolve things, grounding it in their experiences as writers. I think...they need to actually grapple with their own learning, that's how they are going to develop as writers... and maybe you get to the end of the hour and sometimes you haven't got very far, because that's what it's like sometimes (T2, Meeting)

Such conceptions refuted the perception that 'a clear specification of just what is to be learned' in creative writing practice can be handed from teacher to learner (Bruner, 1996: p.55). Rather, pedagogy was re-orientated towards an understanding of the learner as a thinker, emphasises the teacher's role in deepening understanding through intersubjective exchange (Bruner, 1996: pp.56-57). In this pedagogic approach, reflection and sharing of creative writing were seen by participants as integral to deepening the relationship between the writer and the acts and actions of creative writing, fostering understanding and knowledge through a combination of creative writing practice and the development of a dialogue about creative writing in the classroom.

### **8.5 Research sub question 3**

**Does engaging in creative writing practice influence teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers, and, if so, what is the impact on pedagogy?**

As explored in Chapter Five (see 5.5.2 above), participants' emerging teacher-writer identities were articulated in their descriptions of themselves as writers subsequent to taking part in the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom. Such descriptions - 'through my experience as a writer' (T9, Essay), 'my new found position as developing teacher-writer' (T2, Essay) 'I have started to consider myself as a writer' (T3, Essay) 'what is important to me as a writer' (T7, Poetry Portfolio) - contrasted sharply with



the rejection of a writer identity and self-deprecating references to participation in creative writing that were noted as a trait of participants' initial engagement in creative writing.

The development of participants' identities as teacher-writers involved them in the negotiation of both personal and professional vulnerabilities. Engagement in creative writing practice revealed participants' anxieties about their personal capacities ('that feeling that this is something that I can't connect with because maybe I don't have that creative side in me, that doubt' - T2, Interview 3); their concerns that engagement in writing poetry may involve uncomfortable levels of self-revelation; and fears that engagement in practice would reveal their (perceived) lack of expertise, mastery and knowledge of creative writing. Such anxieties created a level of professional tension for some participants, since teachers are positioned by others as 'experts' in writing, yet in reality felt anxious and insecure about their own knowledge and ability. Through creative writing practice, and influenced by their multiple histories and experiences as teachers and writers, participants negotiated a series of complex interactions between the self as teacher and the self as writer, in which the individual's relationship with the acts and processes of creative writing were deepened.

The emergence of teacher-writer identity was significant for participants because it changed how they represented themselves as teachers of writing in the classroom. Through creative writing practice, participants developed a pedagogic approach that located the acts and actions of creative writing in their classroom practice, so that their own creative writing practice became a pedagogic approach. The expression of teacher-writer identity was evident in participants' implementation of extemporaneous modelling, and in their engagement of creative writing alongside learners. The decision to

'demonstrate difficulty' articulated more complex conceptions of creative writing in the acts and actions undertaken by teachers, reflecting a pedagogical propensity towards 'the importance of social exchange in constructing knowledge' about creative writing (Bruner, 1996: p.60).

## **8.6 Research sub question 4**

### **Does the experience of working with writers influence teachers' pedagogic approach in the classroom, and if so, how?**

Participants in the case study worked with writers in two contexts: as tutors on the course, and as poet-mentors in their schools (see Chapter Four). The tutors and poet-mentors were central to participants' experience of creative writing in this study; this makes distinct and absolute separation of the influence of *writers* on pedagogy from the influence of *creative writing practice* on pedagogy a difficult task. The writers in this case study, through their active involvement in seminars, in classroom practice, and in giving feedback on the poetry portfolios, were integral to participants' experience of creative writing practice.

It is therefore the case that working with writers contributed to the emergence of participants' teacher-writer identities; had a substantial bearing on participants' re-conceptualisations of creative writing; and encouraged, motivated and to some extent inspired the changes that participants made to their classroom practice, as explored in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Here, I attempt to consolidate some of those findings, reviewing how participants identified the influence of the writers on their pedagogical approaches.

The influence of writers was evident in participants' classroom implementation of techniques that had been introduced in seminars, and in the shaping and development of participants' pedagogical approaches to teaching creative writing. The creative writing exercises that were introduced in seminars (see 4.2 above) were widely adopted by participants. There is evidence from the case study that participants experimented with exercises from all of the seminars, including sound play (seminar 1); visualisation (seminars 2 and 4); freewriting (seminars 3 and 5); developing metaphorical writing through kennings (seminar 6); exploring line breaks (seminar 4); developing vantage point (seminar 5); and exercises that engaged the senses and memory to stimulate writing (seminars 3 and 5). In implementing these exercises in the classroom, participants brought to bear their experimentation with such techniques outside of the seminar, grounding their implementation in a fuller, more developed understanding:

Experimenting on my own with sound play, visualisation, using the senses, line breaks, question prompts and other skills has helped to improve my own writing. This...puts me in a better position to teach the pupils to use these techniques as they have become more familiar to me. It makes sense to consolidate, revise and improve the skills involved in writing in order to pass on the skills. (T3, Essay)

Evidence such as this reveals the interplay between the influence of writers (who introduced and guided the participant through her initial engagement in these creative writing activities) and the influence of creative writing practice (through the participant's independent experimentation before taking these approaches into the classroom).

Taken alone, the implementation of exercises encountered in seminars and developed through personal practice demonstrates the way in which participants gathered writerly approaches to generate and stimulate creative writing in the classroom. However, in implementing these techniques, participants also reflected on the pedagogical implications

and consequences of such classroom activity. Participants considered the way in which the writers they worked with focussed attention on the acts and actions of creative writing practice rather than prioritising content, and reflected that 'from them I have discovered that sometimes my emphasis on creativity is centred in content and not activity. This is area I am developing within the classroom, using strategies shared in the seminars and investigating fresh approaches' (T2, Essay).

One way in which poet-tutors expressed this focus on the actions of creative writing was through their explicit engagement in creative writing activities during the seminars, an approach which became a significant feature of participants' changing pedagogic approach to creative writing in the classroom (5.6 and 7.2 above). Participants reflected on how this action shifted their understanding of their own role in teaching creative writing: 'since I started this course I have used the same model as our tutors, writing alongside the children then sharing my work when they shared theirs; acting as a facilitator rather than a traditional teacher' (T13, Essay). The influence of writers in developing a facilitative approach enabled participants to express a 'mutualist and dialectical' pedagogy which 'attempts to build an exchange of understanding between the teacher and the child' (Bruner, 1996: p.57):

I think that the classroom became more about working together. I wasn't imposing myself as the ultimate authority but as someone who could assist them. (T3, Essay)

Attention on the acts and actions of creative writing was similarly expressed through the model of feedback presented by writers in seminars (5.5.2, above). This approach, where participants chose specific phrases which were shared with and discussed in the group,

influenced the way in which participants approached the development of mutual exchange and reflective response within the classroom:

During my attendance of writing seminars, one of the things that I learnt the most from was listening to each writer (professional poets or teachers alike) read aloud their favourite line. By limiting pupils to reading one line only, it became achievable for each child to contribute. In a class of thirty, this was perhaps the first time we had managed this without it becoming laborious. The pupils became very skilled in explaining why they felt their work was effective, what it was that they liked about other people's work and also how they might improve their work further. At times, there would be spontaneous applause. This was really heart-warming for me. The children weren't just writing and responding... they were *enjoying it*. They were enjoying what I had enjoyed about my writing sessions. (T3, Essay)

It is evident that participants' changed approaches to pedagogy were brought about through their experience of creative writing practice, which was stimulated, guided and encouraged by the writers with whom they worked. Writers' influence on participants is embodied, then, in participants' experience of creative writing practice and their subsequent reflections on and changed pedagogical approaches to the teaching of writing. This enabled participants to develop new approaches rather than simply implement novel techniques:

It's not about 'I learnt this on the course now you're going to learn it'. It's about me opening doors and saying, let's explore. It's taking a way of *thinking* about writing into the classroom' (T2, Interview 3)

The influence of writers on participants thus extended beyond the application of tips, tricks and toolkits in developing their own writing and classroom teaching; rather, the writers' concepts, ideas, habits and tendencies informed participants' deepened understanding of and reflection on their experience of practice, and their pedagogical approaches to teaching creative writing.

## **8.7 Limitations of the research and the potential for further research**

In reflecting on what has been learned through this research, I am also drawn to reflect on those questions and ideas that could not be addressed fully in this study.

It has not been possible to assess the extent to which the changes in pedagogy evidenced in this study became embedded features of teachers' pedagogical approaches to teaching creative writing. I have attempted to secure some understanding of this by revisiting participants 9 months after their involvement in the project for Stage 2 interviews. While this proved useful, evidencing that participants continued to develop the pedagogical approaches that they had explored through the project and to explore their own creative writing practice, longer term analysis over a two or three year period would provide new insights, and would help to inform knowledge about the capacity of teachers to sustain their engagement in creative writing practice and continue to implement new pedagogical approaches.

As explored in 7.3 above, there is limited evidence from this case study about participants' ability to implement approaches that moved beyond initial generation and early shaping of writing in order to address the difficulties of guiding learners through more disciplined compositional control. This is of central concern in considering how learners make progress in creative writing. It is therefore suggested that it would be useful for further research to investigate how teachers develop pedagogical approaches that focus on the ability of learners to master more developed approaches to composition.

The teaching of writing has been under intense political scrutiny for many years because successive governments have identified 'raising standards' in writing as a national target.

Teachers in this study felt that their focus on creative writing in the classroom not only increased learners' enjoyment and engagement but had a positive impact on attainment. However, it was beyond the scope of this study to evaluate the impact of participants' changing pedagogical approaches on outcomes for learners. Further research focussing on these impacts would be useful in exploring the connection between pedagogical approaches to creative writing and learners' attainment, and gathering young people's views on the wider impact of creative writing on their learning. Such research could also explore opportunities to gather evidence about how the social practice of writing contributes to learners' language skills and their personal development.

Within current assessment regimes, as explored in Chapter Two, technical and functional accuracy are privileged above compositional features of writing. This has had the effect of narrowing both pedagogy and conceptions of creative writing. It is proposed that investigation into the development of assessment methodologies that enable full recognition and validation of learners' ability in the compositional features of constructing text would support developing pedagogies, and expand conceptions of creative writing in the classroom.

## **8.8 Policy and practice implications and recommendations**

In this research it has been demonstrated that creative writing practice has the capacity to influence teachers' understanding of themselves as teacher-writers; their conceptions of creative writing and the place of practice in the classroom; and their ability to implement new pedagogical approaches that engage learners in the acts and actions of creative writing. It is suggested that such practice strengthens teachers' capacity to transform the creative writing experiences of young people by developing pedagogical approaches that

move beyond imitative and didactic models of practice, towards a collaborative and dialectical paradigm that conceives of the learner as a thinker (Bruner, 1996: pp.53-56).

It is recognised elsewhere in this thesis that the new pedagogical approaches to creative writing developed by participants were not perceived as the single route to implementing all aspects of writing pedagogy (7.7 above). Discrete writing exercises, demonstration modelling and didactic approaches are likely to be effective strategies in achieving particular educational goals. In considering the policy and practice implications of this research, I have attempted to maintain an awareness of how such implications connect to 'real schooling', and have found the following reflection useful:

Real schooling, of course, is never confined to one model of the learner or model of teaching. Most day-to-day education in schools is designed to cultivate skills and abilities, to impart knowledge of facts and theories, and to cultivate understanding of the beliefs and intentions of those nearby and far away. Any choice of pedagogical practice implies a conception of the learner and may, in time, be adopted by him or her as the appropriate way of thinking about the learning process. For a choice of pedagogy inevitably communicates a conception of the learning process and the learner. Pedagogy is never innocent. It is a medium that carries its own message.(Bruner, 1996: p.63)

When considering the above in the light of the impact of the NLS, it can be seen that the choice of a didactic and imitative pedagogy has been adopted as 'the appropriate way of thinking about the learning process' in creative writing. This research proposes that these pedagogic methods have failed to address the cultivation of knowledge and abilities in the acts and actions of creative writing, and that pedagogy built from creative writing practice communicates a broader conception of both creative writing and the learner's mind.

In considering policy and practice implications, I have also been aware that the participants in this case study developed their practice and pedagogy over a relatively



extended period: the Well Versed project lasted for 8 months. It is suggested that the influences on pedagogy achieved through engagement in practice are better secured and maintained through teachers' on-going participation in creative writing. This acknowledges that 'if the creative writer cannot act in order to pursue the writing of something, then they cease to be creative writers. They may have been creative writers; they may even have an existence 'in memory' as creative writers; but they are no longer such' (Harper, 2010: p.xvi).

With these points in mind, I have proposed three recommendations that seek to support the development of teachers' creative writing practice and so influence pedagogical approaches to creative writing in the classroom.

**Recommendation 1: The National Teaching Schools network should develop professional development opportunities focussing on practice and pedagogy in creative writing, available to teachers at initial teacher training and through continuing professional development.**

The network of National Teaching Schools was announced in 2011<sup>14</sup>. Designated Teaching Schools play a lead role in the training and continuing professional development of teachers, working in collaboration with cohorts of partner schools. There are currently 181 designated Teaching Schools in England, with responsibility for developing and nurturing professional learning cultures across their cluster groups. They are expected to provide opportunities for training and sharing expertise, and to develop a forum for networking between teachers.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/index/support-for-schools/teachingschools.htm>

It is recommended that Teaching Schools seek to improve the training and professional development of teachers by ensuring that teachers at all stages of their careers have opportunities to engage in creative writing practice, and to reflect on how practice influences and shapes their pedagogy. Where Training Schools work in alliance with Higher Education Institutions, it is recommended that partnerships between HEIs and Training schools are investigated in order to consider the contribution that can be made to this process by creative writing teachers in Higher Education.

**Recommendation 2: Arts Council England should investigate the development of opportunities for teachers to work alongside skilled professional writers who will support their creative writing practice and the development of their pedagogy.**

Arts Council England's mission is to champion, develop and invest in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. Their 10 year goals include ensuring that more people experience and inspired by the arts; and building an arts workforce who value sharing their knowledge of skills for the benefit of the arts and civil society (Arts Council England, 2011). In responding to these goals, it is recommended that Arts Council England work with cultural sector and other partners (for example the network of Arts Council England funded regional writing development agencies, and HEIs) to develop two strands of delivery:

- An accredited training programme for professional writers who are interested in developing the skills required to support teachers in their creative writing practice and pedagogy, developed in partnership with HEI partners.
- A network of Creative Writing for Teachers learning partnerships, developed in partnership with the regional writing development agencies and led by professional

writers, which will offer teachers opportunities to participate in informal creative writing practice on a regular basis, and to share their learning.

**Recommendation 3: Higher Education Institutions should develop opportunities for teachers to study creative writing practice and pedagogy at Masters Level.**

The Creative Writing in the Classroom Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing developed by Northumbria University provides a model which other HEIs can develop, innovate from and implement. Such a development would provide a nationally accessible network of opportunities for teachers to develop their practice and pedagogy at Masters Level. The context of academic support and rigour offered through such opportunities would support teachers throughout all phases of education, and is particularly relevant in light of the recent announcement of the introduction of Creative Writing at A level.

## **8.9 Closing observations**

The educational landscape and policy framework has continued to change rapidly over during the period in which I have carried out this research. The number of academy schools has risen from just over 200 in 2010 to over 600 in 2012, and the number of free schools now stands at 55. Reviews of the National Curriculum are currently underway, and the testing and assessment frameworks at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 (GCSE) are being revised. English, as a core subject on the curriculum, continues to receive close political attention, and the teaching and assessment of writing is likely to be subject to continuing scrutiny. The recently published draft National Curriculum for English at Key Stages 1 and 2 has given rise to concern that it maintains a narrow focus on technical and functional accuracy; persists in an approach that displaces creative writing from its literary, artistic context; and expresses a narrative in which ‘at every turn pleasure, love,

and meaning appear to be secondary to the mechanics of phonics, spelling and grammar' (Wyse, 2012).

However, it has been argued that 'what implementers do, rather than what policy "says" in its explicit language, constitutes the "truth" of policy' (Yanow, 2000: p.9). Policy is implemented through a process of human interpretation and meaning-making. In the context of education policy, participants in this case study have demonstrated that creative writing practice can reveal new possibilities in interpreting policy, initiating a fundamental shift in pedagogic approaches to teaching creative writing.

The participants in this case study undertook a process of committing to the development of their own creative writing practice, reflecting on the pedagogical implications of their experience, and interpreting those reflections in their classroom practice. They worked with writers who were positioned as facilitators and collaborators; their expertise guided participants through the process of discovering their own creative writing practice, and supported them in finding the synthesis between their creative writing practice and their pedagogy. Participants negotiated their own anxieties and fears about creative writing, and through their practice developed knowledge about the acts and actions of creative writing that were not available to them through policy frameworks. Indeed, they developed knowledge about creative writing that is, it seems, only accessible through practice.

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## Appendix 1: Sample seminar transcript

R=Researcher

P= Poet

T=Teacher

Transcript of Seminar 3 held on 01/03/11, led by P4. Two poet mentors also attended the seminar (P11 and P12). All of the teachers attended except T13. T2 arrived late. The seminar ran for 2.5 hours.

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P4: We're going to start with some freewriting, or automatic writing, it gets called both. Just to explain what it is, I'm going to give you a line and I'd just like you to write on from there whatever comes into your head, if you take anything away from this class, it's just such a brilliant technique. Poets use it to empty their minds, get something out on the page, for those days when you think I've got nothing to say, this is how to make a start. So I'm going to give you a line and give you five minutes, then just write and write and write and at the end of five minutes that's it. There are just three rules, the first rule is you don't stop writing, so if you can't think of anything to write just write rhubarb rhubarb, I hate this exercise, what day is it, doesn't matter. The second rule is not to rhyme, rhyming is a constraint so if you try and rhyme that's going to slow you up, and the third rule is don't worry about it, nobody else is going to see this, it's just for you.

Now your opening line is 'I opened the fridge'.

(Pause 0:57 – 6:29)

P4: Okay that's five minutes, and just take a minute to go back and underline any interesting bits, there might be no interesting bits which is fine, there might be a little gem that you didn't know was in your head, anything that strikes you as unusual that you didn't know was there.

(Pause 6:43 -6:57)

P4: Anything that might be the opening for a poem perhaps.

(Pause 6:59 – 7:37)



P4: You might be surprised by how much you've written. I'm just going to go round and you might like to read a word, or a few words. If you've found something that's great if not don't worry.

T10: I haven't found anything yet.

P4: Okay that's fine.

T14: I'm not sure what I'm looking for (laughter). But I'll give you something. Everything went back in its place.

T12: Bravery.

T7: My mind is drawn to the notion of smoked salmon.

T8: The trifle watches me greedily.

T3: I think I cried while clutching my small flute case.

T11: It tasted my neck.

P4: Your?

T11: My neck.

T4: As I gazed lower, the treats were apparent.

T1: I seem to have spent the whole thing personifying a chocolate fudge cake.

P4: You've got to write that poem, then...

T1: For example I've got, pieces of flake appear to be eyes beckoning me, pleading with me to rescue it from the cold.

P4: Brilliant, sounds like you might have the start of the poem there

T6: And yet here was a bundle of something intruding, oh go on open the door and take it out, I did.

P4: Great, especially when it's something that surprises you. That's when this technique really works. You wouldn't have written that if you hadn't done this.

T5: I disappeared earlier after a freak accident involving two large pieces of celery and a forgotten bottle of white wine vinegar.

T13: And I don't want to be a vegetable.

T9: Struck with scurvy anytime soon. We're redoing the kitchen.

P11: The pattern in his mane resembles Greenland.

R: Salad crisper drawer

P4: Leftovers, whose moment has passed.

I can't stress enough how useful that technique is, so it's a really good exercise. Okay, I'm going to hand round a poem and I'd just like you to read it to yourself please.

(Participants are given copies of 'Refrigerator, 1957' by Thomas Lux)<sup>i</sup>

P4: Just read it through in your head then I've got a CD of it.

Pause 11:34 – 13:03

P4: Has everyone had a chance to read it through?

(Listen to recording of 'Refrigerator, 1957')

P4: Okay what did people think of that? Is there a difference between reading the poem and hearing him read it?

T6: I liked it a lot. I liked the bit about strippers at a church social. And so out of place, and the re-use of the word maraschino, it's such an exotic word.

P4: Yes and it's the way he rolls it around his tongue like the word is as exciting to him as the cherry.

T11: Was it written in 1957 or is that the title? Because he would only be 11 wouldn't he.

P4: I think he must be looking back.

T3: I thought it was really humorous. I really like the idea of them being a family heirloom as well. It's funny that he doesn't want to eat it, everyone has something like that in their kitchen, like the rice vinegar I think it was.

P4: As he said once you eat it it's gone, like desire, once you have what you desire it's gone and the desire is more exciting.

T5: Mugged is a great word.

P4: Mugged yes.

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<sup>i</sup>Lux T. (1997) *New and selected poems, 1975-1995*, Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co.

- T5: And the repetition of the word middle, to the right of the middle of the middle shelf. Reading it in my head, what surprised me, my tempo is different to his, like bits where he slowed down, I sped up and likewise.
- P4: It is one of those poems you read and it takes you by surprise how he reads it. What about the ending what do people think about the ending?
- T11: I thought it was strange, rips your heart with joy. Because rips is usually a bad thing.
- T5: But we all know that feeling, tears streaming with joy, it is joyous but it's heartrending.
- T3: It's almost like an unrequited love.
- T4: Almost like he daren't touch the cherries, as well, he's and too frightened to ask for one, it's about being that age as well, desire at that age.
- P4: Yes I think so, given his age as well, and he's standing at this fridge on the cusp of adolescence and all this stuff about sexual red and passion. Okay, this leads into my first exercise, he uses colour but he uses the senses as well. Now I'm going to hand you all a sweet, don't do anything with it just take it and pass the bag around. Just stare at your sweet when you get it. They're slightly old fashioned, the sort of sweets you might have had as a kid, and there's a reason for that. You can only get these sorts of sweets in two places anymore in Newcastle, they might not be to your taste.

Pause 20:20 – 21:09

- P4: So this first exercise is on the senses. Okay, what I'd like to do, I'm going to ask you a few questions about this sweet, and I'd like you to write a line in response. Then at the end I'm going to give you 20 minutes just to keep writing. Okay? So what I'd like you to do first is look at your sweet and just describe it in a line, in a sentence.

Pause 21:50 – 22:50

- P4: Okay take off the wrapper, listen to the wrapper, and what does it sound like, not like a sweet wrapper but maybe like leaves, like annoying noises in the cinema. Using your senses.

Pause 23:10 – 24:01

P4: Okay when you're ready just take another look at your sweet now, now that it's without it's wrapper. What does it look like now? Exciting? Disappointing? A bit nude? Just a line to describe it.

Pause 24:20 – 25:20

P4: Okay, could you smell it please, it might not smell of much, might smell a bit synthetic. Whatever you think.

Pause 25:40 – 26:30

P4: Okay, now could I ask you to taste it. Put it in your mouth, the first taste, and the aftertaste. Whatever it might remind you of, sweets on the bus when you were a kid, first date, might taste lovely, might taste awful. Granny giving you sweets maybe? Might just take you somewhere.

Pause 27:00 – 27:30

P4: Okay, you should have five sentences now, what I want you to do is just write on from there, you might want to just write a piece very literally describing unwrapping a sweet. It might be that the sweet has reminded you of being a child, or you might lose the sweet altogether and just write about a memory.

P: Like a poem or like prose?

P4: I always say words, but if it's a poem that's great, whatever comes to you. Just writing something. Does anyone want another sweet?

Pause 28:32 – 42:50

P4: Just a few minutes left, if you've finished you might want to think about giving it a title, maybe look at your beginning and end and decide whether they're really necessary, if there's a few bits you can knock out that's always a good idea. Edit.  
(T2 arrives)

Pause 43:03 – 46:07

P4: Okay, how are people doing, do you want another minute or so? Okay, we'll go round, don't feel you have to, you can read a couple of sentences, don't feel you have to read anything. Will anyone volunteer?

T6: I wasn't too happy with it, I think there is a lot here that I'd want to go back to, so I'll just read the first bit. I've called it, If you're good.

A luscious lemon wrapped in shiny cellophane, crackling thin ice between my toes, smooth and mellow buttercup sherbet, stirring lemon curd in my mother's kitchen, it talks to my tongue and my tongue responds.

P4: Okay, lovely, what do people think? I love stirring lemon curd, the way you just go to that, you can sort of hear it, it's onomatopoeia isn't it.

T6: That was just what the smell reminds me of.

P4: And so, after that, you went, you weren't happy with.

P: I wrote a list of old fashioned sweets that I could remember, with a bit about it in brackets about each one. So it kind of...

P4: A bit of a list poem.

P: Yeah, but I didn't think it was very eloquent.

P4: Okay, maybe keep looking at it, but I thought that piece at the beginning was lovely, very evocative. Can we go this way round please.

T12: I struggled a little bit for direction, and I thought about at the end of a long day when your tummy is just groaning and rumbling, I don't think I've put it in quite a way that I want to read out totally.

P4: To be honest, you've all had a very long day, and most times in workshops, well sometimes people come out with these amazing lines, but most times you make a start, you maybe come out with a couple of sentences, don't worry about that, you get that.

T12: I've just gone for that kind of stomach groaning and rumbling and hunger pangs, and then you put your hand down in your pocket and discover the sweet.

P4: Fantastic, that's nice.

T12: and then all of a sudden your stomach leaps for joy, and I went on to describe the senses we talked about at the beginning, awakening...

T2: I love that idea of your hand going in your pocket, that's all it takes, all your senses awakening.

P4: Brilliant, do you think you'll work with it?

T12: I could do but it's not there.

P4: Sure.

T7: When I had my orange sweet it reminded me of going on holiday to Wales with my parents when I was a child, and it was a long drive, and I didn't travel very well. So I had this travel sweet, so this is what I wrote.

The orange pearly jewel glistens beneath its transparent film wrapper, its sticky sugary coating emanates mouth-watering-ness, just as I imagined as it rests on my tongue, the warm familiar soothing trickles down my throat, comforting me in a way that a drink of water never could, as my stomach responds to the endless weaving of our relentless road trip to Wales, as dusk approaches the radiant beams of iridescent sky seem to encourage my desire to succumb to temptation and devour another, I reach for their rigid golden case, gentle crackling like small nuggets of candy popping by the fire, as I remove the waxy cover, and swiftly slip the precious jewel in, feeling relaxed and now at ease, I gently drift off in thought, and admire the beautiful landscapes which frame and provide the obstacles for this endless yet eagerly anticipated adventure.

P4: Good stuff. What do people think?

T8: It's like the start of something, and I like the idea that something so small as a sweet can take you somewhere else as well. It makes you forget where you are.

P4: I suppose that's what this exercise is about, you get an object and it opens up a memory or whatever, what was your line about relentless, relentless road trip to Wales?

T7: I don't know where I am, yes, endless weaving of our relentless road trip to Wales.

P: I loved that because as a kid road trips do feel relentless.

T7: Are we there yet, are we there yet, where's the sweets?

P4: Exactly. Did you give it a title?

T7: No I couldn't think of a title, I didn't know if I wanted to go with something sweet or something Wales.

P4: Okay.

T11: Yeah, I'll just read the start bit out.

P4: Yeah.

T11: I could think of some memories but nothing particularly vivid so I ended up just writing about the sweet.

The sweet is gone, what promised so much in its tangled mirror leaves only a tang on the gums and bits between the teeth.

P4: Will you read it again?

T11: The sweet is gone, what promised so much in its tangled mirror leaves only a tang on the gums and bits between the teeth.

P4: That's complete. What do people think?

T5: I like the tang bit.

T11: Yeah I was trying to think, well after a while there is no taste it's just the sensation on your gums.

T3: And the disappointment.

T11: Yeah that took the whole focus.

T2: It reads perfectly doesn't it, I think that's great, it could be about a sweet but it could be about anything that comes and goes.

T11: I suppose the rest of it could be interpreted as something else.

P4: Well, I don't want to be, I would think just that. Great.

T8: Well, I wrote about the first sweet which was lime, but then I wrote about black bullets, we've always had black bullets in our house, it's a big childhood memory, my granddad always had them and now my mum always has them, so I wrote it from the point of view of me as a child.

An old fashioned tin like a tiny barrel, black and white like our dog, a lid that refused to be lifted by small fingers, and the metallic clatter as you shook the treasure inside, adult hands prise the lid open, and a faint gust of mint meets the air, you peer inside like an explorer, and immediately see the waiting sweets, jet black and polished, sometimes they stick together and you end up with two, but nobody minds, everybody laughs and says oh she's got two again the little thief, lucky fingers roll the sugar marbles back and forth, waiting for just the right time to flick it up to your mouth, teeth fixed like a shark. Shall I stop there because it waffles on a bit?

P4: Good stuff, what do people think?

- T4: Sugar marbles, I love that.
- T7: I liked the peering inside the tin part, as if you're an explorer, very much is you know when you've got those closed tins.
- T8: Yeah, we could never get the lid off, in fact I still struggle with those lids
- P4: I can see the tin, anyone who's had a black bullet, did you say black and white like our dog?
- T8: Yeah.
- P4: Straight away you know it's a child, there's something about the way you say that. It really positions you, you know.
- T9: Okay.

An amber bubble encased in crackling plastic, a twist of excitement, firecracker snapping, interior bubbles prick through marbled surface, the candied scent of sugar, syrup, orange in the distance, as the barley sugar slips round my tongue the memory of examinations floods my mind. Summer, the sports hall, 16 again, amidst the pre-exam huddle I dole out these amulets to the waiting crowd, the noble benefactor of sugar and mother's advice, a new bag required for nearly every sitting, lozenges. My generosity though has a cynical side, happily I distribute, as long as my services bring me in contact with the love of my life, if only for a moment, just for that barley sugar transaction, even the most offhand thanks is enough to bring heat to my cheeks, and flutter to my chest, amidst the anxieties of pre-exam huddle, a twist of excitement, firecracker snapping, at the sports hall, summer, 16 again.

(Lots of laughter)

- P: Honestly my mum used to give me a bag, and then I'd just give them to everybody before an exam, and then I'd be like, oh I need another bag of barley sugar. But I always used to try and give them out so I got to talk to the boy I fancied. Obviously really focused on my exams!
- P4: Brilliant, what do people think?
- T8: I liked the word transaction, as if it's like a deal.
- T11: I liked, what was the phrase, golden amulets.
- T1: Yes, to the waiting crowd, it's like protecting them against the exams or something.



- T9: Yes, but completely selfish.
- T7: I like how it went back and sort of repeated the very beginning. Off in this little world and then you've kind of got to get back to reality, and back to your exam.
- P4: Yeah, you talked us into this thing and then you kind of ended it. It was a lovely echo.
- T5: I loved that transition from memory into now kind of, oh yeah. That was a wonderful transition into memories from real life.
- P4: I think that's why all the pieces that we've heard work, because it takes you, you know, you go back don't you, and you're like oh yes I remember being in the sports hall during an exam. I loved the bit about the most offhand thank you or something, it was just lovely because it's all that hype, when you're 16.
- T9: Unrequited love.
- P4: Okay.
- T10: Right, mine's called orange pleasure.
- Always my favourite, sunshine burst, almost transparent, with tiny bubbles shot through, I can wait no longer, removing the wrapper, rustling, sticky shiny surface, screaming to be sucked, smells familiar, rush of saliva, no floods, I can almost taste it, my brain remembers, tantalised taste buds, ahh, juicy heaven, should I savour and suck or bite, and crack? Well I can always have another.
- P4: I liked, is it screaming to be sucked?
- T10: Yeah.
- P4: What do people think?
- T9: I liked the bite and crack bit.
- P4: Yeah, it takes you to exactly what's happened.
- T10: I was taking the idea that I don't think I've ever been able to not bite a sweet, once it goes in that's it.
- T8: And you really focused in on the small details, each action is described in such detail.
- P4: Did you give it a title?
- T10: Orange pleasure.

- T13: I liked the humour of the dilemma that you didn't know whether or not you were going to bite it but then you did.
- P4: Okay.
- T14: I wish you'd never said edit, I couldn't stop. But here we go. This one came from my sentence when you asked us to taste it. And it's called, The Number 123 which was my bus route when I was a kid.
- Friday night, 1976, with painful toothache, waiting for the bus outside the ABC, sitting downstairs, can't go upstairs with nana and Doris, I started to cry.
- And that's it really, the rest, is just...
- P4: Lovely opening.
- T2: Nana and Doris...
- P4: I think the title is really good, I love numbers in titles anyway, it's really intriguing.
- T8: I love the short sentences, and you say, I can't sit upstairs with nana and Doris. I wanted to know why.
- T3: I really like the way you read it, I don't know whether that's because you were picking out sentences. It sounded great.
- P4: I think editing is just, it's definitely you want to know what happens next. I think editing is one of the most important things, being able to take things out. It's a really good thing to be able to do.
- T12: I took images from each of the lines, when you asked us to think about the sweet but it's not really a memory it's kind of turned into something else. I called it Omelette.
- P4: Omelette.
- P12: Jack suggests eggs, so I shake the ones left in the box, the date says last month, when we were kids we thought you could take one from the fridge and bury it in towels in the airing cupboard, and after an evening of heating it would hatch. But I never nurture, I drop grapes when I wash grapes under the cold tap, and berries bleed on my fingers, and the juice gets watered down like squashes, like drinks in restaurants, and if I was to open you like a cellophane wrapper on a CD, a DVD, a box of maltesers from poundland, I'm worried you'd be like over soaked lettuce, over rinsed salad, like the lip balm I had when I was seven, that was meant to be

strawberry but tasted synthetic, like just washed laundry, like penny sweets at the shop in 1989.

P4: What do we think?

T13: Wonderful.

P: I think it's just all the flavours that I focused in on.

P4: I like the way that you don't settle on one description, it's moving along really nicely. And the idea of the eggs hatching.

T5: I like the idea of nothing being nurtured, dropped the grapes, berries bleed. You could take that further and further, couldn't you, the idea of food dying...of you killing it..[all laugh]

T9: It has that bit in the middle that's a bit like a love poem, the fear of the next step, or something fragile being ruined which is in the middle of lots of things which don't appear to link but sort of do.

P4: Absolutely so the reader has to do a bit of work, so we know what's going on, without it explicitly being shown to us. Yeah. Lovely, okay.

P4: I'll read mine just quickly, I just did the beginning. It reminded me of a market that used to go on, at a sort of holiday home we had that we used to go to when I was a kid, it had loads of pick and mix. So, I called it 27 Wood End.

The house was older than home, it was where dad felt at home, its cupboards were full of puzzles with pieces missing, it was forever for six weeks one summer, when dad played mum and mum visited at weekends, the weekday market was hung with rabbits, until mum came on a Saturday when it sold sweets, and records.

It's just the beginning of something.

T2: It's that feeling of your mum not being around and your entire world falls apart.

R: It's called Taste of 72.

Not daffodil, not sunflower, not sunshine, this colour is a warning, here be chemicals. The sweet sharp tang cuts my tongue, furs my teeth, which are no match for its hardness, the sweet sticky sap fills my mouth, and then sudden shock of sherbet fizzing through.

P4: Nice ending. What do people think?

- T8: I liked fuzzes my teeth.
- T4: I like the bit about chemicals, here be chemicals.
- P4: I love the title, it's great. An evocative title makes me want to read on. Will you write on a bit?
- R: I might do. It was, when I tasted it you do sort of get that shock with sherbet, but it happens every time you eat one...it's interesting that your senses do that to you, trick your brain into being shocked every time
- P4: It is yeah. That would be interesting. Okay.
- P11: I also went with a childhood memory and for some reason I remember getting in trouble, and I was never allowed hardy candy, it was only when I was at someone else's house or someone took pity on me. Mine's called Hard Candy.
- And your mouth will spin with it, dull and neon, the grooves scraping the roof of your gums, every deep disappointment throbbing on your sugared lips. Have a sweet, you'll feel better. You can feel the ache of your knee, and where your skirt's hem drags and tingles, torn. They're calling your mother, you'll have to wait for her to arrive, in the meantime the sugar melts, coats your teeth, as you try to determine if she'll acknowledge you when she arrives, stare at you, usher you into the back seat and say let's go. The knee, the tongue, the hem. There's only a delicate flat stone of sweet left, the edges ticking away, rattling around your mouth. You do feel better. She'll probably fold her arms around you. She'll smell like what she was making for dinner. And you'll ride home through the city.
- P4: Lovely, what do people think?
- T2: Very powerful.
- T8: I liked the small pebble bit, in her mouth, was it?
- T3: Flat stone, that's it. You can really picture that.
- T5: There was like a pause sort of two thirds of the way through, which was great. Thinking takes over again.
- P4: The tone of it, I love the way it begins on an and, the tone of it is very assured, formal, totally unsentimental which is hard when you're writing about childhood, the sweet was accessing the disappointment.
- T3: Mine's called White Paper Bag.

Half penny mix ups, synthetic pink piggy faces, what's within? The anticipation mounts as the bag is passed round, boiled sweets, like those my brother almost choked on, manslaughter by a kind great aunt. The wrapper speaks of times gone by, hairdryers that swallow your head, hairnets, the curse of swirls and old net curtains, I pull at the ends as the paper clings on for survival, a relic to be preserved. I persist. The tacky pearlised surface is revealed, the pastel pink of a polyester top, it's been turfed from its sheath, its modesty revealed, an ageing beauty that didn't expect to be consumed with such enthusiasm.

P4: Lovely, what do people think?

T4: I like the bit about hairdryers swallowing your head.

T3: When I first looked at it, it reminded me of the hair salon near my grandma's house, where old ladies go, you know. It's still there.

P4: You can see it, the idea of it swallowing your head, you get the alarm of a child. I love that it goes, casually, the ones my brother nearly choked on. Unsentimental, you know.

T8: The manslaughter line was funny, I laughed.

T4: Mine's called Popping, just to give a bit of background, I've always had problems with my ears, so I was always given sweets to suck on planes to make my ears pop.

It was the sweet of choice for plane journeys of my youth, the best sugary boiled pain relief I knew. I'd smile at the tin, as it was pulled as if in slow motion, from the hidden depths of my mother's bag, the lid would squeak open, and the sweets would stare at me, shiny, glossy, demanding attention, orange indicators signalling. I taste one now, sickly sweet clinging, I can feel the glucose clawing at my teeth, eating away at the enamel. I need to brush.

P4: It's nice, I like the idea of the sweet eating you.

T9: I like the indicator bit, signalling, orange.

T4: When I looked at it, it was like attracting you, like an indicator, but actually when I tasted it, it has the opposite effect, looking at it takes you back to the delight. I didn't quite know how to end it, the fact that the memory isn't quite what it used to be, it's kind of false.

P4: Again the title, Popping, great title.

T5: Icebreaker. This is about the sweet itself.

Dull sea glass red, wrapped clumsily in its old fashioned paper, it lies invitingly between my fingers, I pulled and the Christmas cracker snap is followed with the slow sounds of breaking ice, as I unpeel the wrapper, now naked, red, its edges glistening with pulled threads, absorbing slowly at my fingertips, I breathe its black forest perfume, place it on my tongue, lick the sticky remnants from my fingertips, this first sweetness lingers, as I roll it around, half biting, feeling its fragile shell resist, then give.

That's as far as I got with it, I couldn't get the ending as I wanted it.

P4: Good, what do people think?

T6: I loved the phrase sea glass red.

P4: I loved the attention, the thing about observing, you slowed down and obviously just the way you observe and take your time, it's really interesting and that's what a poet does. Spend time observing and really just enjoy that.

T9: I like the way you use sound, and there was some sense of rhyme, it's nice when it's not all the time but it kind of brings this sonic strength to the whole thing.

P4: Great, okay, we'll have to crack on. We'll have quick break. Just 5 minutes.

Break 1:16:04 – 1:21:29

P4: Okay, we'll do our second exercise. I just want you to close your eyes and think of an early memory, might be a sad memory, might be a happy memory, maybe first day at school, a brother or sister being born. Anything, just take yourself back.

Just give yourself a couple of minutes to get back into your skin. See how you looked then.

What time of day is it?

Who is with you?

What does your hair look like? We've just been talking about senses, smell it.

Okay. You might want to jot down a couple of words about it.

What I would like you do is get into pairs please. So you might just want to be with the person next to you. Just get into pairs. Okay everyone got a memory and in a pair? Right I would like one of you to be 1 and one of you be 2, and number 1 tell

the memory to number 2, and just listen and take notes about the other person's memory.

(1:23:20 – 1:25:10)

And when you're ready swap, so you've each heard your partner's memory.

(1:25:19 – 1:29:09)

P4: Okay, what I would like you to do is write up the other person's memory but the crucial thing about this, what you have to do is change one detail, it might be a huge change like it might have been a sad story and you think I'm going to give that a happy ending, or it might be a little change like the colour of a dress or the age of a person. As writers we can go in and change the details. Are you going to be a child, an adult looking back, just write up the other person's memory but change a detail. Any questions?

T2: From our point of view?

P4: Or as if you've heard it, up to you. 10, 15 minutes. Take liberties with this person's memory.

(Writing 1:30:15 – 1:44:52)

P4: Okay, what I would like you to do is just share your piece with the other person.

(Share writing 1:45:04 – 1:48:00)

P4: Can we just go round, I'm interested to know what you changed, whether you found it hard, difficult, what you changed.

T1: In her story the teacher won at the end and got her into trouble and humiliated her and made her wee, so I decided she should win and come out triumphant.

P4: A big change then, excellent. Okay.

T2: I put myself in the younger sister's, the baby's position so I wrote it as a child, I didn't get to finish it but it wasn't a dramatic change, it was just interesting to see it as a baby.

P4: Very challenging.

T2: Quite an odd experience, quite thought provoking.

- P14: I changed a small detail, in his story someone lifted him up and he didn't know who it was so when I wrote it I made him climb up on his own. A tiny detail.
- T14: I asked if it was alright to change it because it was quite a personal story and might she be offended, because we've never met before and you don't know how far you can go. It was just a little thing, she got a little gift from her dad and it was a hideous cheap plastic beauty set and I changed it to a little Tonka toy.
- P4: I think, did other people find it difficult appropriating someone else's memory if you like? [Some agreement]. I think it's really hard. There's a point to this that often people say oh well it happened that way, and the point is you can change it, it doesn't always have to happen that way, with a poem you can change it. I think it can be really hard to do with someone else's work. It becomes a different thing so it's quite nice to hear your memory in a different way.
- T10: I didn't change a lot, just padded out some of the details, like I didn't really know why you were going to the festival so I made it for perseverance and hard work.
- T9: Oh yes I worked very hard. I didn't finish, I think I would have changed something quite little, I think I kind of changed the tone of it, it feels quite dark when I read it back and I really didn't mean it to be.
- P4: That's very interesting, I suppose you're writing it up and you just change it automatically because you see it in a different way.
- T8: I changed who's perspective it was from, from you to your mum and they were going downhill on an icy slope so I changed it to going uphill in mine, which is kind of worse in a way, with a big pram.
- P4: Okay, a big change. Good.
- T11: It was about going on a school trip to a lake, so I changed the lake to a farm.
- P4: Still quite significant.
- T11: Yeah, but none of the personal details, I didn't feel that was my place.
- T7: The story was about this really horrible teacher and being saved sort of halfway through the year by going to this really lovely teacher, so I wrote the whole thing as he described it and at the end I was really mean and said that the other teacher was off ill so he had to go back to the nasty teacher.
- P4: A really audacious change.



- T12: I kind of changed the context a bit, and the main memory was seeing the headline that president Kennedy had died on the TV, but it was a very warm atmosphere, mum cooking in the kitchen and so on, so I changed it because I thought Kennedy dying should be kept and so I had the headline being discovered in the middle of a 5<sup>th</sup> birthday party instead.
- P4: I think you were right to keep the headline, that's a nice bit of memory and it rings true.
- T12: We talked about the contrast between both of us had the memory of lots of nice things but there was a sharp contrast between them.
- P4: Parallels. Okay.
- T6: I changed the memory of the first day of school being a happy memory but at the end a boy started shouting and screaming and she couldn't understand why he was being like this so I changed it so that the boy snatched away her paintbrushes.
- T5: The memory is about a little girl coming back from the doctors and sobbing waiting for her dad to come and get her and she is left unconsolated and at the end of mine her mum comes over to console her. So I changed that.
- P4: Okay, big change.
- T4: The memory was that her dad was in the RAF so they moved around a lot but I made it so they moved to the foot of a volcano in South America. I got through the whole thing and we hadn't found anything.
- T3: This memory was about her favourite book which was a lullaby, so I wrote it in the first person instead of the third person so I could describe it a bit more. I made it so that her mother was playing the lullaby and she was sort of transfixed by the notes.
- P4: That's a good point about the third person.
- P11: I guess I changed a decent amount but the memory was about going to the first feis, which is Irish dancing, and I just loved the word feis, and it just kind of came out of that. All of the details you gave me were just great, all of the girls getting on the bus in fancy dresses, covered in plastic macs. I put it in the first person, it resonated with my old memories of doing ballet recitals, the excitement before and costumes and so on.
- P4: Yes, the memory becomes your own so you have to identify with it somewhere.

- R: I changed it to third person, partly because, you know when something is described in such detail, you can see something so clearly it becomes like a film, it felt very specific and I felt like an observer. And the other thing was that I changed the temperature so it happened in a hot climate but I made it cold.
- P4: Brilliant, thank you for that, you've led in really nicely to this discussion that we're going to have. Just till the end until half past, we're going to talk about the Cremin and the Hughes piece that you've read<sup>ii</sup>. Has everyone read them? Fantastic. This module is assessed by a reflective essay as well as a portfolio, so this is just really a chance to have a bit of a discussion about how you responded, how you think maybe what you've read chimes with your own experience at all.
- T2: A lot of it was reassuring in terms of the nervousness I felt writing and sharing that, it's quite a judgemental process or you expect it to be, and it's not, but when you put the children into that, to be able to share their work and not consider that. From a practitioner's point of view it's a really interesting approach, I find it reassuring because a lot of things we talked about in there, giving children choices, writing with them, sharing materials, not because I'm this practitioner but because I'm a bad planner. I do threshold planning, asking the kids what we did last lesson, I call that threshold planning! [Laughter]. So that ties in for me in terms of risk taking, that's the kind of person I am, it fits in with my teaching style because if someone gave me a list of things and says you have to do this, this and this, well that wouldn't fit in with who I am, I have to get in there and allow it to take direction. I need to tighten up my focus about where I want to do things better, to try and feed that into the department. I had made strides in my department of moving away from the two or three unit blocks of doing this text type, then that text type. But how am I going to get that journey for my staff, get them to that point of feeling able to take the risk is a big challenge for me, so I'm looking forward to working that into my next few meetings. I am going to ask them to do some creative writing exercises and use the departmental meeting for more of an exploration of themselves as writers, to get them thinking about themselves as writers rather than just disseminating the usual information about this that and the other.
- P4: You're a head of department, so you're teaching? I see.

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<sup>ii</sup> Participants had been asked to read the Introduction and final chapter from *Poetry in the Making* by Ted Hughes, and a journal article by Teresa Cremin. Hughes T. (1967) *Poetry in the Making*, London: Faber and Faber. Cremin T. (2006). Creativity, uncertainty and discomfort: teachers as writers. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 36: 415-433

- P: Yes. And it needs to feed into, and yes, and I'm very conscious that I'm doing this for my own practice but I think it's important and I think that if you believe in something, believe that it's important, if you've got that philosophy and you've got the position to be able to make some changes, then I want to try to get people to see things from another point of view. I know that can make them uncomfortable, and you have to factor that in because I can see three or four going 'oh give it to me and that's brilliant' but others will shrink away from it, and obviously I don't want to alienate anyone in the department, I've got to be sensitive to that. And I'm not known for my sensitivity [laughter]. I say it as it is I'm afraid, so that's a challenge for me.
- P4: As far as that threshold planning goes, slightly by the seat of your pants, is that the word?
- T2: Well yes, I mean it's not that there's nothing, it's in here [indicates head] and in here [indicates heart]...
- T4: Yeah, but is that a positive thing for your teaching, has your teaching got a more creative edge to it because of that?
- T2: Yeah, I'd like to think so, but I often find that I go back and think should I have done it this way, if I'd thought about it a little bit more. Which is good because again it's about reflecting...
- T8: Which is good because it means you learn something from it.
- T2: Yeah but I could tighten it up a bit more, I feel that sometimes the kids think oh god she's thinking, this is dangerous! It's quite nice though sometimes because today we were doing Billy Elliot and the bell went, and nobody moved because they wanted to hear the end and then tomorrow we're going to use photos. So it leads on to something else and we tend to go on tangents which is nice, but people come to me and say 'so what's the next unit' and I say 'well, what do you fancy?'. But it can be very prescriptive and I'm trying to move them away from that .
- T3: I'm really envious, of you, as a teacher. I was pleased to see it acknowledged [in the Cremin article] the constraints that are put on primary teachers, but I was almost slightly offended by the way it gave the idea that primary teachers are a jack of all trades and master of none. Maybe it's because English is my thing, maybe if it was about PE I would think, yeah, my PE lessons are pretty ropey, because my idea of a dance lesson is here's the music, go for it. Someone dance

trained would be horrified but to me that's what dance is. And I think, with the new primary framework and they've loosened it up, in theory, but we just had a teacher training day on writing which I think you'd be horrified by. The success criteria and this and that and the formulated writing, throw in some adjectives; give yourself some VCOP and some wow words.

P4: What's VCOP?

T3: Vocabulary, connectors, openers and punctuation. And when I was looking into it, the success criteria...and formulated writing, throw in some adjectives, give yourself some VCOP and some wow words...it is very much chuck in a bit of this, sling in a bit of this, get a level 4 and get Ofsted off our back, if you're level 3 and you're year 5, you need to be level 5 so for god's sake sling in a simile or a metaphor whether you need it or not. And get that level 5 because before you know it we're in special measures and then we're in the crap [laughter]. You're laughing, and it's funny, but it's true.

*General agreement.*

P4: Is there any way of combining the two? A way of, you know we're talking about this risk taking.

T3: I used to do that and I got away with it, because my old Head never took in any planning, and some of my best lessons, I'm that sort of person as well where I'd rather just, if the kids are interested in something I'm confident enough to say alright let's do it. The problem with having these pre-prepared texts, this came up in a meeting with my teaching partner, who is a PE specialist, he was saying that he freaks out, he likes having always pre-prepared texts. And I think most primary teachers, we've been de-skilled by the fact that they've tried to give us so much skill, if you like. And we're trying to cover so much in primary that we're sending kids off to secondary without the basics, we're teaching kids of seven what alliteration is, what it's called, and they don't need to know that. They need to know how to punctuate sentences, yes, but how to write with meaning, that's why, how to write things that matter to them.

P4: I suppose, as a writer it's engendering a love, alliteration will come naturally. With alliteration kids do it naturally without having to label it.

T3: I'm sorry but I do feel really passionately about it. All the knowledge of language, the graphemes and so on I mean for god's sake why do they need to know what a

split diagraph is. It's a magic E, you go from bit to bite, but do they need to know it's a split diagraph? You teach so much that does not actually matter.

P4: I remember the magic E thing.

T3: Do you see what I mean though? A lot of it you pick up organically. We're teaching them knowledge about language, it's not the same thing, at the minute it's way too prescriptive.

T1: The really annoying thing is I teach secondary, and when you do GCSE literature and you don't use the word alliteration but you said the poet put all the T's in to make it sound like the pebbles are all falling down the hill, you would get all the points, you don't need to call it alliteration. In fact what you mustn't do at GCSE is put all the terms in and not write about the effects. You've got to write about the effects, which is obviously the much more important thing, and it's very difficult to get them to do it, it's much more difficult than just calling it alliteration.

T3: It's the same with my kids, I've just finished marking year 5 SATs, and they all said the authors used powerful verbs but they didn't get the marks because what they needed to say is what that communicates. And I could kick myself because I can hear myself saying that to them, use powerful verbs.

R: I'd be interested to know, this piece [Cremin] is between framework developments in 2006, but the Hughes piece is pre any of this, 1967, and I'd be interested to know after reading those two pieces, what it said to you about the way we've developed the teaching of English in schools, especially creative writing?

T3: I don't want to see a return to the days of when I was at school because it was literally write about what you did last night and draw a picture, here's a box of crayons. That was my primary school literacy education for a number of years and looking back that's pretty horrific. But I don't think that to be able to write they need to know the difference between all the different text types and genres in primary, because covering it so thinly, by the time they get to secondary their teachers will be thinking what the hell have you been doing in primary? When actually we've been running around like demented chickens spending hours on weekends planning, formally, and it's not for me, because my best lessons are when I say, oh there's an election going on, do you know about it? Let's have a campaign. And the writing's brilliant, bobs your uncle. But we're panicked by Ofsted as well, because if you're not seen to be differentiating the kids need to be getting level 5s,

and you're not getting the results, and if you're not doing that, then you'll be crucified.

T2: I've convinced my year 6 teachers that they don't need to do any revision for year 6 and I wake up in the middle of the night thinking, shit, I've got happy staff but...

T4: You've probably got happier kids.

T2: I have got happier kids, I am quite nervous about it, when you're saying you'll be crucified and they'll be saying there's the woman who abandoned revision.

P4: What about the idea of in dwelling, I thought that was interesting in this Cremin piece, the idea of not writing, it's a hard thing to do in a writing class, tell people not to write. The idea of hatching, the idea of sitting and letting something sit with you, and in the case study there's that woman who couldn't do anything and then she started gardening. How do you teach that?

T6: That resonated with me because we do write every week and I've got one boy in particular, and I say come on, you've got to get writing, you've only got ten minutes left and he's thinking, he *is* thinking. But to me, we've done all the thinking and talking and then from 10 till half past, and I'm guilty I think of trying to put things in boxes and yet when I come to write it doesn't work like that for me. And also the way she [Cremin] talks about teaching children technical ways of writing but it's not a technical thing, it's a creative thing and it doesn't always happen between 11.00 clock and 11:45 just because that's when the slot is. It doesn't work for me like that so why should it work for the children like that.

P4: Exactly, yeah, of course not, I think you said something about it, I don't know whether it's in the excerpt but all poetry workshops are a bit artificial, like today you've got to sit there, and you think well I'm not necessarily going to come up with something. Hughes I think says something about when you're under pressure, your brain will just all forces go and come up with something and you'll get something down, and it's a really good process but it's not how anybody writes. But it's a really hard thing, I don't know the answer to that..

T7: In our school we've had the literacy consultants in trying to increase parent participation, and the parents came in and learned how the children do their writing with the VCOP and so on, and we have this little purple book that the children take home and write in maybe every 3 or 4 weeks, and it can be anything, what they did in their holidays, it's very open ended and they choose from about 6 or 8 things

what their topic will be and after 4 weeks that's the deadline to have it back in. And some of their best writing is in these purple books, quite a lot of them take their time on it and they say to me 'oh I did a little bit more last night'. But it's very much the case that they come and we get our level descriptors out and we level how they're doing, and it's a shame because these children are writing all this amazing stuff and the imagery is great but they haven't quite ticked all the boxes so they can't get that great level. But we don't really care we just brush over that and say well if you want to tick this box you can put this in, but the image is great.

- T3: Our problem is that we have the SATs and you have 45 minutes in year 6 to pull something out of your backside that's going to get you a level 4 or 5, and unfortunately you don't know what you're going to get as a topic and that is what you're judged on, and it's criminal but that's the way it is.
- T4: And I think what's happened is we...people grasp at something, like you say, like that's the solution, do it this way. When actually, doing what you're talking about, allowing creativity, and stopping trying to just think of writing as the technical stuff.
- T2: I feel quite hypocritical to be honest because last week I was still writing level 6 papers for the single level test, I've been doing a bit of test development work, mainly because I'm nosey, and that was really quite frustrating. I was quite vocal in the meeting, expressing head of English dismay at the task they were going with, all these boxes they had to tick on the mark scheme, and what it does is stop the traffic, as a level 6 writing task. I just thought, I said, they've got these ideas, it's there and it's untapped.
- T6: There's a kind of logic to it isn't there, like that idea of writing through the senses that we've done today, actually wherever they're at, kids can start with their senses then they've got a starting point.
- T5: It's hearing that voice and being able to hear that voice.
- P4: That's great, that's all we've got time for today, I think that's been so useful.
- T1: Can I just say something that's completely different, all I wanted to say was that when I read the Cremin thing, I thought I've never felt like that. And I think my experience was completely different at school. I've realised that when I was at school during O levels having to write something every week, I should have just charged £2 to write everybody else's, because to me sitting down for 45 minutes to write something is my dream, write about fog, write about traffic, whatever. I was

really pleased when I read this because it gave me an insight, I thought that when my pupils didn't want to share their writing they were just being a bit mimsy. I'm not saying my writing's any good but I've never not had anything to not write about. That's all I did at school, in maths, in chemistry, wrote poems under the desk and novels in my rough book and pretend letters from kings and queens to each other. It never occurred to me that some people don't like doing this. There will be a little weirdo like me, probably one in every class, this is going back to being 6 or 7, I would imagine there's one little freak like me in every class, who is just longing, I can remember writing at home before I ever wrote at school. Like my purple book, I would have finished that the next day, and brought it in and been like okay I've written that, what do I do now? I've done dogs, tell me another thing.

P4: Well I'm just glad you're all having responses and reactions to the pieces, that's the plan really. To make sure that there is material around for you to draw on. So I just want to say thank you very much, really interesting hearing your writing as well. I'll be back with you in a couple of sessions.

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End of transcript



## Appendix 2: Sample Focus Group transcript

R=Researcher

T=Teacher

Transcript of a focus group held with teachers on 08/02/11. The focus group took place one week after the first seminar. It was attended by 8 participants.

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R: I wanted to start off by just asking people to cast their minds back to being in school as a pupil yourself, and I wanted to think about any memories, it might be a very specific one or it might be more general impression of what your own learning experience was like in relation to creative writing when you were a pupil.

T4: I remember that, in one of my books that I still have from primary school there was a story that was about six pages long, in this small book and I did that in the last year of primary school, and I remember, comparing that to now, it seemed that I'd written loads and loads. And yet today the expectation is so different, but as a child that seemed like the biggest piece of work that I'd ever done. And I remember being amazed that it was so long.

R: Can you remember what it was about?

T4: I don't know, can't remember, I think it was a story.

R: Anyone else, any memories?

T6: I can remember our English teacher, I must have been about 13 or 14 but he gave us each a different photograph from a magazine of a person, and asked us to imagine, not just how that person looked which we could see but imagine what that person's interests might be, and I remember thinking this is wonderful, this is really exciting and I just wonder if we hadn't been given too many tasks like that before if I can remember thinking this is really interesting.

T1: I had a teacher like that who gave us things like that, pictures, and tiny little bits of poetry, one came back to me the other day, I don't know if it was from being here on the course, but a tiny bit came back, about the world turning outside the window, and we just had that chance to write. I don't think the other teachers at school...I think it was very much to do with her and she was very creative, and

when she marked our work it was in the days when you got 'good' or 'not good' or 'excellent' and even when it was excellent you didn't know why it was excellent, but she would write quite detailed things like suggest a different word but not just say 'that was good'. So that you were actually getting a bit of critique and that was completely unusual, nothing like that ever happened at my school. I'd been writing since I was quite little, and when I was 8 I remember trying to write a detective novel but I think it was a bit over-ambitious, but it was lovely to have her as a teacher for me because it built up a real proper relationship with writing, but she was very, very unusual to be like that.

T5: I don't remember any creative writing teaching at all, most of our writing in primary school even up to early secondary school or year 9 as it is now, was almost all recounts, you know the diary type stuff and actually in English classes we did loads and loads of reading and very little writing indeed... and actually thinking back the only bit of writing I can remember doing was my early secondary school days, which was when I was in my Dennis Wheatley mode, and me and my friend were both really into it and the head teacher asked us to do this composition, and we wrote for ages, this weekly pastiche and handed in this melodramatic nonsense but your writing was, it was more reading and learning. Very little at all on the actual creative writing, lots of grammar work, loads of old fashioned grammar work.

R: Anybody else?

T7: I think mine was quite a similar experience. Actually I find it quite hard to think about creative writing and how that happened at school, I was very passionate about maths so I remember all my maths lessons vividly but clearly my English lessons didn't engage me in the same way. I remember having Letts books and everything being very prescriptive and from a workbook. and following through, and even when I got to secondary school doing Shakespeare and all the things you had to do for your GCSEs, but that was in Y10 and 11, and I find it very hard to remember doing creative writing for a purpose or that had some sort of thing that would engage me rather than it being what you had to do. My most memorable thing was I remember being in Y8 and looking up words in the dictionary and my teacher was totally fathomed that I knew how to use a dictionary straight away, and so it was quite a bizarre thing and I found that quite unusual that children hadn't necessarily learned to use a dictionary, that was the first time

we'd had the dictionaries off the shelf to use them looking for better words, and we used a thesaurus in the same way for the first time, and I thought that was quite bizarre. But I don't really remember much creative writing happening in school.

T9: I remember writing a poem about the rain, probably because it was raining, and the teacher on the way to the classroom had thought, oh, poem about the rain. But I can't remember anything else from secondary at all, English was all reading, I can't think of a single thing in secondary school that was writing – can't think of a single thing.

R: Similar?

T10: Similar yeah a little bit, when you say about the poem about the rain and I remember writing a poem about a crow, because I saw a crow and then I wrote a poem, and then I read the Ted Hughes piece about writing about a crow!<sup>iii</sup> I thought, oh yeah, I remember writing a poem about a crow. I don't remember anything about it, I know it was a haiku but that's all, don't know how good it was.

R: I think part of it is to do with the terminology, this course is called Creative Writing for the Classroom. Creative Writing isn't a term that's used that much in school, it might be imaginative writing or it might be writing creatively, so maybe you call it different things. Having started with the soft question, would anyone like to tell me what they think creative writing is, what it means to you?

T7: I'd say creative writing is when you're writing for a person or when you're trying to write something in an imaginative manner, so it might be something where you're using your imagination to write some fancy story or some sort of imaginative tale, or engaging the children doing it so they're writing creatively to interest themselves in what they're writing about so you'll hopefully get some really good language from it because they're interested themselves in what they're writing.

T6: I think of it maybe as being exploring. Where maybe you don't always know the outcome.

R: Can that be a bit of a problem when you put it in an education context?

T6: Yeah, I mean I tend to think of things like word games and activities rather than just....

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<sup>iii</sup> Participants had been asked to read from *Poetry in the Making* by Ted Hughes in preparation for a discussion in Seminar 3. Hughes T. (1967) *Poetry in the making*, London: Faber and Faber

- T5: Yeah I think you're right, the writing isn't actually just to communicate, but the writing is itself is a tool for them to explore, so you don't know what you're going to write, the writing takes you down a path you didn't expect.
- T6: You write to discover what you're going to write. I was having a discussion with my mother in law who's 76 at the weekend, she's been on a creative writing course in Darlington and the first one she went on, she said she'd felt misled because it was all about writing short stories and fiction, and she said to me well that's not creative writing, so she had a different...and then she started talking about what she thought it was, and she felt misled because it was just about writing short stories and fiction.
- T4: The word imagination, that was the first thing that popped into my head when you said.
- T9: I'm just trying to think, it is hard because I'm trying to think in a secondary context, once you get past key stage 3, it's not really a focus, creative writing.
- T1: At GCSE in recent years it's been called original writing, original writing or writing to describe, in an exam. I quite like that term original writing, it comes out of you, it wasn't there to start with and now it is, if that makes sense. Yeah, whereas some kinds of writing in another subject you're really rehashing what was already there, putting it in a different order, but...it's for the enjoyment of the reader it doesn't have to have any other purpose.
- T5: Because you're letting words capture the reader's emotions, the words, it's not, it's almost the raw material you're working with, like an artist creating something so it's not just the message that matters because the way you say the message is paramount too, you could tell the same story in so many different ways but the way you have chosen to do it is what matters for you at that time.
- R: Is there a critical sense to that as well as the creative sense?
- T5: Yes you're working not just as a communicator but as an artist, you know, manufacturing something.
- T1: That's what's enjoyable about things you read, not what they're about, not because it's about that thing, not just because it's got the right number of metaphors. But when people ask what the book is about, I feel that's not really going to help you know if you want to read it or not.

- T9: I think people sometimes do read things for the story. I think there are certain books that are just a story. So you have to find that distinction between something that is read because the method of telling the story is good, in fact the story itself comes through the method, where another type of book might be one that isn't written as well but might be quite popular. With teenagers especially, they always want to have a story, trying to get them to write description is so hard and actually it's a skill at GCSE, if they just write a story at GCSE they will probably not do very well in their exam. But asking them to describe...there's this anxiety about what happens at the beginning and who are the characters and where do they go. So, that's something as well that I think you have to meet, the story and the writing.
- T1: When I was first teaching it was all Sweet Valley High<sup>iv</sup>, that's all anybody wanted to read, Sweet Valley High, and they made me read one, so I read it out loud and they were all quite embarrassed, so I said well it's your own fault. But I could still see what the charm was for them, it was certain keywords, you know, words like babysitting, semester, boyfriend, they saw those keywords and they felt like teenagers, they were 11, and they felt like Americans, they were like magic words. I could understand that.
- R: So it maybe spans quite a wide area. I wonder if there are particular attitudes or approaches that are important in creative writing that you're aware of in your teaching?
- T6: I think it's allowing the barriers to be removed a little bit so you're not writing with a certain genre in mind so you don't know where the writing is going to go.
- T10: In some ways it's about giving them the knowledge about structure in their writing, but then taking all that structure away and saying, right, off you go,...
- T5: Sometimes it's the opposite, really tightening the structure down so you're not allowed to go beyond this, all your writing has to be on describing... and you're standing there and really pulling it down so they can go off on tangents and start to get deeper into it, I know what you mean about structure, sometimes actually, there are restrictions that are useful.

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<sup>iv</sup> A series of novels by Francine Pascal.

- T1: Sometimes it's finding what you can do inside the structure, and altering the structure very slightly and it seems like you've done something really naughty with it, instead of... and you think you've done something really amazing with it.
- T7: I think there's an element of imagery as well that you need to try and get the children, looking at pictures or trying to create images in their mind, that kind of thing that gets them, trying to create an image in their minds so they can visualise it totally and then that helps them with their creative flow and where they want to go in that theme or wherever it might be. Whether you're describing... or doing a plot, whatever it might be, I think they have to have that abstract thinking in their minds.
- T1: Yeah we're kind of doing that with Year 8 at the moment with poetry, trying to get them to have the confidence to write metaphorically, for some it's just a leap too far, and for others they can just jump into it and come out with these amazing things.
- R: What do you think is the difference between a kid who can jump in and a kid who's terrified of that?
- T1: I think some of them are, feel confident and know they can do it, I think someone was saying before about taking risks, whether you feel like you are free to do that or it's going to go horribly wrong and everyone's going to be critical.
- T7: Some children learn really well by rote, or if you give them a plan and tell them how it's got to be done, and they can get everything done, other children find it very hard to go off plan or have to show that sort of imaginative side or think outside the box.
- R: Or maybe it's to enter into what you've mentioned twice now, the idea of not knowing where you're going, and I wonder if there's a difficulty there...
- T4: It's experience as well, because if you have experience of not knowing where you're going, and it's turned out ok... But also, I think if children read, if that have read widely and they have some idea about the way writers can take you somewhere and you don't know where that's going...
- T5: As teachers we spend all day really laying down rules, what you must do what you mustn't do, and there's so many things from a child's point of view that they must do that they become afraid of not doing what they're supposed to.

- T4: That's the same for us as teachers, and sometimes I do share that with the children, I will say, this is not how I would choose to do this, this is not what I want to do, but we have to do it this way...
- T6: Like as well with learning objectives, 'this is the learning we are going to come out of the lesson with' when actually, sometimes, well I haven't got a clue what learning we'll come out with today but let's see where it goes
- T1: I think as well, some people perhaps just naturally whether you're a child or an adult just see connections between things that aren't actually there, that's what a metaphor is. I remember when I was really small thinking a woodlouse was related to an armadillo, and I remember working out how they came to England, because they looked a little bit like armadillo and then I saw a trilobite, I saw one in a museum and thought no, that's a woodlouse, my whole childhood was spent thinking things were the same. But I think some people just never ever do see that or they don't remember it when they're older, I mean I can still remember that so I can see it, but other people just aren't like that you know they don't see things that aren't there, and how to encourage them to do that is really difficult, it's like another language in a way.
- T5: Sometimes you have to slow things down in the classroom, and you say there's no rush and you're just exploring it so the children become more aware and it's not what do we have to do next, you say no take your time, I'll take my time.
- T1: I mean, we're here because we're already interested in this but a lot of people maybe aren't interested in this. I just wonder how much of that sense of the unknown is at the root of that difference of that child who can jump into metaphorical language and a child who can't. For some children, it's either this or it's that.
- T6: I have a child in my class, she's 7 years old and she still has trouble putting full stops in the right place but some of the things she puts down on paper are beautiful and it's just interesting for me because.. I don't want to read them sometimes because the writing's bad but with her I always want to read to see what she's come up with, I don't know why she's like that, because she's not a particularly good reader and I don't think she's read particularly widely.

- T1: Wide reading can really really help but it can be...it can give sort of an idea of that's how writing is, sometimes you get very over-elaborate or over flowery writing because they're trying to write in the imagery style.
- R: Okay, whether it's called creative writing or something else, is it right that it's got a profile in all your schools to a greater or lesser extent?
- T4: Yes, but at my school everything at the moment feels very prescriptive, we have to show evidence of writing in every lesson, all the text types, the scope for creativity is therefore reduced.
- T5: Is that connected to the literacy strategy?
- T4: Very, and there is a lot of that ofsted framework, you know, you must have evidence of everything you've done. It makes it very difficult to be creative because you don't have the time..
- T1: Does the writing have to be sort of transactional, does it have to have some very specific purpose, or does it have to be, if you've read this poem does the writing have to be about the poem or write a poem like this one?
- T4: Either that or very focussed on the word and sentence level so we might do a quick burst of adjectives and then write about the adjectives.
- T1: But you're not free to..
- T4: It's got to be done, and I know, I feel that that's not their best writing, but I have to do what I'm told you can cheat a little bit but only to a certain extent. It's really heartbreaking, I feel that It's wrong, but just talking about to a lesser or greater extent, about creativity, I find it hard to fit that in, even though I know it's important
- R: The sort of follow on question then would have to be why is it important? And if we put that in the context of writing being an issue nationally, it's the most stubborn area of all of the government targets, and I wonder within that context and also within your own personal pedagogy, what then is creative writing for?
- T6: It doesn't really meet any targets but there's a lot of personal pleasure to be got from reading and writing and I want to give that to the children.
- T7: I think it's also about giving them an open ended opportunity to just, hopefully engage themselves in their writing because often when you do literacy work, sticking with my reluctant male writers in my class, because if you ask them to write a report, a newspaper article on something or whatever the text type might



be, you'll get a generally good piece of writing, but you can tell they've just done it because that's what they've been asked to do, they've ticked all the boxes and they'll do it, but the enjoyment isn't in it, whereas if you do a creative writing task, you can see them tapping into their own experiences or stories they've read or their own ideas and interests and you end up with some really good pieces of writing which they can hopefully use in other things.

R: When you say you end up with good pieces of writing, what do you mean?

T7: I think if I'm labelling it as being narrative writing then I often get some lovely work where they've pulled in similes and metaphors and imagery, and all sorts of things they've been talking about, they seem to be able to do the best when they're given an open ended piece of writing because it's something that interests them, or a topic that interests them and something they can engage with, when it's something like.. They get themselves a bit stuck on the logistics of it all, usually don't manage....

T4: Creative writing is for...are we allowed to do it because it's enjoyable? I think we should be able to.

T6: I think creative writing as opposed to writing for a purpose surely, surely, would have to have that element of enjoyment...

T1: It's a way of being happy by yourself as well. Many things that you do have to involve so many other people, school involves a huge number of other people all the time, and all sorts of modern things are all about working in teams, and partnerships, which is fine, but a lot of people don't want to do that, and they're not catered for by the modern world, people who want to be on their own, those who don't want to put everything on facebook and tell everyone everything and join in with everything. It's a way of being comfortable on your own. Because you can write collaboratively obviously, but a lot of writing just has to be you, there has to come a point where I say shh, you have to now just write, you can't talk to everybody else, and write, just get it on the page. It's almost unique at school, to have that time.

T4: It's also a way of understanding yourself in the world and making sense of things, when you're free to write anything.

T5: Sometimes you write to see what it is you think

- T4: Sometimes it's a surprise to the writer.
- T8: That's why I'm quite enjoying running my creative writing club because it's not a lesson and I do try to make the entry on it quite free and quite open, like last year I had a girl who didn't always want to participate she just wanted to come and write her novel that she was in the middle of, so that was absolutely fine, we'd be sat doing crazy things and she was just sitting in the corner working on that, I don't know how good it was but that was her space where she felt like she could do that. I have to say my creative writing group is, it's a different space, none of those limitations of the lesson, there's freedom there.
- T1: Who do you get going to it?
- T8: I get a funny mix. I've got a couple of boys who aren't really that good at creative writing and I know they come along because they were in my form class last year and we get on really well.
- R: That strand to do with freedom, does that exist for you in the classroom?
- T6: Our school is not that prescriptive but just for myself I like to make sure I do my plans properly, so what I've started to do is I do my plans properly but then if I want to veer away from it and do something different then I can do, and I've got the freedom. But like you've said a lot of what I feel end up being better lessons are ones where we've abandoned the rules and outcomes and have gone with the flow, it can be scary because you don't know where it's going but you can see the enjoyment and the engagement with the kids, but most of the time it's more tightened down
- T4: But if you've got that enjoyment and you're engaged as well with the kids then that's better for you as well.
- T5: It gets away from, well many children see that the teacher knows what he's going to teach today and then we'll be told what to do, and then we'll do it, and then at the end we'll be told how well we did it, and you can see the change, the way they sit up, when you go off on a tangent you see them sitting up and saying well let's see where this is going, and it's interesting because we've got ideas, we've got ideas as well. You can almost see the light going on, suddenly we're exploring something, this isn't a right or wrong answer, we don't know and they [the teachers] do.

- T1: Like free swim. When we were at school we used to have swimming lessons and occasionally for no apparent reason it wasn't even at half term, the teacher would just say right we're having a free swim today and that meant you just went in the water and splashed around and it was so much fun it was actually worth, I had this little diary and it only had this much space, and I can remember writing in your diary 'free swim' – it was actually worth writing in your diary.
- T5: It's that kind of feeling isn't it...
- R: Some of these words about exploring something and spontaneity and freedom and people to be happy to be by themselves is making me wonder whether there's a connection in the purpose of creative writing to developing independence. I wonder if that's me reading too much into it or something you recognise?
- T10: No I think that's true, when you say you want children to have that enjoyment that you gain out of reading and writing, I think if you can enjoy reading and writing you'll never be lonely, you're now self-sufficient. You can have people around you as much as you want but if you're stuck somewhere by yourself for three hours then you've got something to do. I think that's, I like that idea. If your plane doesn't arrive and you're stuck in an airport for ten hours you're fine.
- T4: It's a survival skill, not just an educational goal it's more about a well-rounded child able to cope with life.
- T5: One of the things the creative process has to teach children is, to use the swimming metaphor, how to jump in, how to immerse yourself, how to let the book take hold. So with reading...actually what I have to do quite often is read a couple of chapters with them and really dramatise them and then you get students who want to read it to the end. But creative writing is just teaching them how to dive into this space where all you're doing is exploring your own thoughts and words.
- R: So, you're talking about creative writing as maybe a way of developing thinking and developing a way of thinking, and developing a relationship between thinking and language?
- T6: It's just kind of making sense of things, not just what the strategies focus on, more when we're reading or writing yourself you're discovering new truths about yourself and things around you.
- R: But can you see the National Literacy Strategy as a way of helping with that?

- T5: Does the literacy strategy develop literacy in the first place?
- R: Well does it?
- T4: Children shouldn't tick boxes, just so you can read their writing and say yes it's got commas it's got the spaces, I don't think it's there, the creative writing.
- T5: The initial paperwork, ground work for the strategy, okay, but then it got into the hands of the literacy advisors, and suddenly what they were coming up with it became, there was too many things going on. One, how are we going to teach literacy and two, we don't trust teachers to do it so how are we going to tell them what to do. So that side took over, the more prescriptive one, which teachers felt they had to take it on board, people were coming out and that's what they'd been told to do prescriptively, almost to the stop watch second. But the philosophy of the other people behind it was what do you want to do with education at the time, that was what led it in that direction
- R: Did it have an impact on creative writing do you think?
- T5: Well it wasn't there effectively, it was all about writing in different genres, which was a good thing in some ways, many schools hadn't been there before, in some schools all you did was write your story or whatever, all the different styles, that was good but the whole link was lost in what actually it is to be a writer. There was the odd good thing came out of it but it was...most of it should have been put back in the dustbin.
- T6: I think the assessment as well, has a lot to do with it, because you can do a lot of creative writing but at the end of the day as a teacher you're assessed on how many kids got a level 4 at the end of Y6.
- T4: I think on a similar note, time, time management and the workload, it's harder to plan creatively if your time is restricted, that's because they're writing every day and I'm marking every day so the time impacts but if we had a week where we were going to do creative stuff then I could put effort into making that creative lesson which would impact on their creative writing but if you're constantly ticking boxes and filling forms in then you don't have the time to put into teaching creatively which then impacts on them learning creatively.
- T10: It must make a difference to your own views about creativity...creativity is like a muscle isn't it and if you're not using it...

- T6: I think that it must have a big impact because you're up till 9pm marking and getting everything ready for early the next day.
- T4: I decided the problem was, it's not the workload it's that the work isn't purposeful, if I spent a lot of time getting ready for engaging lessons that would be fine.
- T9: I'm in an English department [in a secondary school] at the moment where everybody absolutely loves their subject and it's very positive and it's genuine, and I think one thing that I would say just from this discussion is when I'm doing reading and writing, when I'm teaching writing it's always on the back of reading, text. That maybe helps with the feeling that any of the writing isn't for a purpose and linked, it's always linked in some way to the text, but again I begin to wonder now is that really doing the job? What you were saying about what it is, being a writer?
- R: I'm interested to know whether you think within the contexts that you're all describing, does poetry pose any particular opportunities or challenges?
- T9: It can be more accessible especially at Key Stage 3 because it's shorter. You know, extracts obviously you tend to use if you're doing a novel, but with poetry you can do a whole lesson on a poem.
- T5: But the strategies have damaged creative writing.. You have to prepare for the SATs at the end of it, but you can almost reduce it to a formula...yep, good, semi-colon. When you're doing the peer marking the children focus on it too, oh yeah, wow, you got those connectives in....
- T4: I don't know if you do it the way we do but you get your mark scheme and ever since I first did it 12 years ago you can't reduce a child's piece of writing down to those criteria. You just can't, it's individual, it's creative. But actually you can't read that writing because their spelling's really bad but actually there's a fantastic sentence that should put them up here.
- T7: You will get the odd child who does some amazing pieces of writing, I had one child in my class last year who's now moved to middle school, and I wrote on her leaving report I was certain that she will eventually be published, because her writing's amazing. And actually she ended up leaving with level 3s [below the target] and she seemed quite despondent because she thought oh surely I should have got this amazing level but she hasn't got all of the things for level 4 but how she writes it is just, creative.

- R: So, the assessment doesn't reflect all of the things we've been talking about in creative writing?
- T1: Being good at creative writing and English aren't necessarily the same thing.
- T7: And it's similar to what you were saying about ticking the boxes, I went to a moderation meeting and we all decided that we'd get our children to do a piece of creative writing and we would compare, and we all suggested we should do poetry and the middle school said oh no because that will never come up on the SATs. But surely that is the most creative style of writing out there. It sent me absolutely doolally and I refused to go to the next meeting.
- T1: There's lots of things that you won't have to do in a test that are still...you do things in hockey practice that aren't playing hockey. So in all areas you do things that you aren't going to do in an exam, you don't just keep repeating things you've already done. Even being told write something you didn't know you were going to write until you sat down, because that's what exams are.
- R: Okay, we're nearly out of time, is there anything else that you wanted to talk about or come back to?
- T5: Part of me says why should we be so hung up on assessment? Why should this be on a points scale? Yeah, you're right that's exactly a 78.6 on the points scale. I have many years of experience of remarking things. Sometimes you think what planet is that marker on, ok, remark it. They go up from 3a to 4b or whatever. We were given instructions not to change the levels last year. Even these objective scales weren't as objective, it really was a marker bored to tears of reading the same... originally we had 4 different genres and then we got that down to just one otherwise it's not fair. One year only I was a marker and it was just reading the same thing over and over, and the year 6 children had been taught that whole use your connectives, checklist stuff, it was so boring to actually mark...
- T9: It also makes me think of something that at the moment is in secondary I don't know about primary, but the idea of functional writing [primary teachers agree] that idea of having something that has to be, any real creativity taken away from it just by the nature of it, so you supposedly can just see if they can write, not write creatively, it's that idea of measuring something but you know it's hideous.
- T1: And actually it isn't how functional language is used in the real world, we have things like Innocent smoothies that tell you the ingredients in a really humorous

way. I really laughed the first time I saw on a box 'I'm upside down please turn me over', and I loved the idea it wasn't just 'this way up', that this box was personified, saying, 'I'm a box, help'. And actually functional language is often really creative and lively, and it isn't just that boring stuff, it's written to engage. It's in a world that's so full of messages that if they don't write something interesting it won't be seen.

R: Well, we'll leave it there for today because we're out of time. I hope you've enjoyed it. There will be another focus group in July to catch different things as they progress. Thank you all for your time, it's been very useful and interesting for me.

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End of transcript

### **Appendix 3: Sample interview transcript**

Stage 2 interview with T12, 22/05/12. T12 teaches in a primary school. The interview took place nine months after all aspects of Well Versed had been completed.

R=Researcher

T=Teacher

R: So I've got some questions but we can be flexible with them, and probably will veer towards things that you're particularly wanting to talk about that would be useful. So to start with I just wanted to ask really, it's a while since the course finished, do you feel that your approach to creative writing in the classroom has continued to change at this stage as a result of your own practice, your experience that you had on the course of developing your own practice in creative writing.

T12: Are we talking creative writing generally or poetry specifically?

R: Creative writing generally, I think, but whatever seems most relevant.

T12: Right. I've almost, I think, become less rigid about expectations of structure and exactly how, do you know what I mean, I've kind of given the children a little bit more freedom and I've actually increased the drafting process as well which I wasn't doing so much because we're confined with this, particularly in Year 6 we've always been confined to this they've got forty five minutes, they've got twenty minutes and that's it.

R: For the writing SATS, you mean, for the long and short tasks?

T12: And because this year we've still done it but the teacher assessment is what counts. Because of the way I've personally wrote and worked on the course with all the scribbling and the redrafting and the changing I've increased that and the difference has been massive. My children are kind of give them a piece of paper and tell them to write and it's like 'oh I can't do anything' and 'I can't it's the pencil Miss,' because it was just, in the strategy it's just I think we got to a point where the kids were just, you did a draft, but it wasn't really drafting, not like I did with my writing. It was just do it, then do it again neatly with a full stop or whatever. And that's stopped because I give them a piece of paper and I tell them they can scribble, they can cross out, they can do it and that's how we work, that's how we shift things around, and it's just a start, it's just for them. And they just seem to be able to connect with



that, it gets them started. And I demonstrate that more on the board when I'm doing it, when I'm modelling a paragraph. I'm 'Oh no, I'll change that, that's better there and this is what you're...' and I'm talking to them more about the process about it being a process and it not being just a final product.

R: So much more emphasis on process for you is a big thing, sharing that with them? And when you say you do that on the board with them are you writing alongside them in the classroom or..?

T12: I've done both but what I've been...because I've got to develop that independence with them this year it's a case of I'll perhaps model a paragraph with their ideas, we'll write a paragraph together and demonstrate that process but then I take that straight off and it's gone, it's not something that they then put into that, it's to develop that independence.

R: There is that moving from modelling through scaffold to independent writing there in the strategies, isn't there, as an aim, but it seems maybe this is you're describing a different approach? Why do you want to do it differently?

T12: Yeah. There's different...it's kind of, one of the things in the strategy is recommended that you actually model and show them how you would write it, but that's not showing the process. It's showing 'this is a polished piece of writing that I did earlier that probably you can't match at this stage'.

R: And so it covers up what you want to show? Is that it?

T12: Yeah. So it's been very much that focus on that and them saying...and me saying to them it's fine...Of course, there's that standard as well that they've got to meet but there's a time for that and it's not always when they're first getting their thoughts on to paper so it's actually freed up a lot of the children that have this 'can't do it, can't do it' feeling and will spend half an hour writing two words because they just don't know what to write, it takes that pressure off them.

R: So is that 'can't do it, can't do it', is that about confidence in writing or is it about feeling that they haven't got ideas to write about, where do you think for the children that...

T12: They have ideas, they don't know how to put them on paper and they don't know, they haven't known and they don't...well obviously they're not there yet but it's that they haven't known that you can work with what you've got even if you're not happy with what you first put down. It's that idea that just because it's written down doesn't mean it's set in stone.

- R: When you say you give them a piece of paper now and it feels much freer and it feels that they've got more to go on are there particular sort of techniques or strategies either that you've taken from the course or that you've developed and innovated yourself since then to start that writing process off with them?
- T12: With the poetry that we've done I've definitely done more poetry.
- R: Have you?
- T12: And sort of...yeah. Not massively because I've still got to show different types of writing obviously, but we looked at World War 2 so we wrote poems of the Blitz and just before half term we wrote poems about sea creatures developing around a metaphor which I don't think I'd have really wanted to tackle before the poetry course and they've just, I'm finding...the automatic writing, the freewriting that's definitely helped...
- R: Right so you've kept that going.
- T12: .... because that's just what they needed, for that particular class that's what they needed to do to get over this fear of writing and just do it and just do it regardless. So they're not frightened of it. If I say I'm going to write a poem what I used to get was "oh no" and I think some of that came from me that kind of fear of "oh no" but it doesn't now at all and they actually, even my lower ability have some really good work and they're really proud of their finished piece.
- R: And when you say that came from you as well?
- T12: I think I had a fear of writing poetry. Not of reading it and understanding it and getting to grips with it and enjoying it because of what...I've got that enjoyment of poetry but I've never written it until that course, ever, and in fact I can't even remember writing poetry at school so it was always very literacy strategy there's the structure, fill in the words...
- R: So the knowledge about poetry writing for you previous to the course was coming directly from what was handed down to you from strategy, but the knowledge now is coming from your experience of writing poetry and the techniques that you used? Is that it?
- T12: Of actually writing and playing with ideas then changing them around and yeah. So that's changed. So I'm much happier about doing that. And some of the staff have tried the automatic writing as well because I've had staff coming through 'oh I need to write this poem and I don't know where to start' and they've loved it and they've just...I haven't done as much staff training as I would have liked to because we've had a bit of a busy year, we've had a new building..

- R: But is that something that you could see that working across the staff?
- T12: Yeah. Not this staff because I'm leaving in July.
- R: Oh are you?
- T12: I've got a Headship
- R: Oh congratulations, how exciting.
- T12: Thanks you, yes it's very exciting! So with the next staff, yes. It's something that they could look at.
- R: And you said that you're spending more time on poetry or doing more poetry. Have you got a feeling, it's quite a difficult question I suppose but I wondered if you've got a sense of whether it feels to you now as though you're spending more time on creative writing than you used to do?
- T12: I have done, I'd say so yes. Not to a massive degree because I've got to show the range of text types...Because having the emphasis off the external test writing has been good in so much as we haven't done lots of timed practice so I haven't put that pressure on them although they've still had to do the test. Because it's more based on teacher assessment and not the test I haven't got hung up on it. But what it has done is put pressure on teachers to make sure that you have evidence in all of the different genres. You've got to have evidence across a range of different types of writing.
- R: How does that effect things?
- T12: Yes because you need a report, you need a persuasive; you need all of that evidence within there so it's still a balancing act.
- R: So it still means that you've got to do that coverage, yes. Another area that I was interested in following up on was whether the experience of giving feedback on each other's work and the assessing of work in creative writing that you experienced as students on the course might have impacted on what you are doing in the classroom?
- T12: I think I'm more accepting of children's ideas because I think I used to have more of a set idea of what I wanted them to come up with so I've kind of widened that and actually my work with the poet in school helped to do that because some of the things, the ideas that we were putting down, as I watched him being really receptive to their ideas...I remember thinking I would have said 'change that idea' and then I was thinking 'why would I have said change that idea?' so that made me question how I was feeding back to them
- R: That's interesting..

- T12: It's their ideas and it's working with where they are so that's changed and I think they feel a bit more free to just...I've always had a class that talk about their writing. I've always done that. I've always seen that it's important but I perhaps guided it more to where I wanted it to go than I do now. Depends on the type of writing because sometimes I need to, because I need something particularly from them particularly with non-fiction, that's very 'this is what I need from you'.
- R: Do you think that maybe links back to what you were saying about being more process orientated than product orientated?
- T12: Yeah. But it's a starting point, and not to discount their starting points because actually that's what they were struggling with, so having that, valuing that. Personally I found the process of sharing and giving my own writing hard. Really hard.
- R: What were the difficulties within that? Can you expand on that a bit?
- T12: For me actually doing that?
- R: Yeah.
- T12: I think at first it was I felt inferior to other people so there was that because I'd never actually written, and I felt that some people, very kind of literary people, and although English has always been a passion, not having written so I felt very – I don't know. It was I just found it difficult and I didn't feel that I would have anything to offer really, or any original ideas.
- R: It sounds as though you perhaps felt like some of the pupils that you were talking about...
- T12: Yeah I did. And I still felt when you heard everybody else's ideas and you always still think that everybody else's ideas are better. I don't know whether that's just me or that's...but so then you think oh mine's a bit...so then I was actually quite surprised to get positive feedback which made me think actually I could share this again.
- R: Positive feedback from the group?
- T12: From the group. So that helped to do it again.
- R: I'm pleased it didn't put you off.
- T12: Yeah, I am too!
- R: That issue of feeling that everybody's work was probably better than yours and other people were probably more experienced than you, I think lots of people felt that.
- T12: You see that surprises me because some seemed really confident. I just think as well for writing...and because of this I understand the emotional difficulties with

some of my children because I've been through that, it's just how personal your writing is. Creative writing, not the...non-fiction I can just spiel out and it's...but creative writing no matter what it is it's very personal.

R: When you say 'no matter what' it is do you mean even if the content isn't personal?

T12: It becomes personal though...especially poetry. But with poetry as well it's that...it's the sense that you've just got to...you've got to be so concise in lots of ways to get to the point. To get to the real...trying to condense your ideas and your feelings into that is quite demanding really.

R: In your own writing you mean? Is that something you're continuing to...are you writing since the course ended?

T12: Yes, but like I say, I am because I want still to explore that, I have to...because I've actually gone through that process I think that when I...and interestingly when I first signed up for the course I didn't know it was poetry. If I'd known it was poetry I would never have done it and that's...what does that say? Once I was doing it I just because I'd just seen the creative writing and I just assumed I'd be writing stories which I thought I would probably be...and then when it was poetry and the fear when I realised it had to actually be submitted as well I really didn't think I'd actually pass to be honest because I just thought I've never written poetry in my life.

R: So how did the assessment process effect how you felt?

T12: Yes, it was useful in allaying some of those fears and...the feedback meeting [formative assessment] was really useful, and I tweaked it and changed it but the other thing that surprised me as well is that I never thought, even now I don't think it was where I wanted it to be. Which is another way you change, you think that actually is it ever at that stage? So I'm more likely to think, well where is this pupil in their writing development, what stage are they at? It's not all about is this a first draft, or can you revise this bit? I'm more likely to think about the pupil's writing in a more overall way, where are they at, what do they need. Not, 'think about your connectives', and that's a big difference in me...

R: So there's a, more focus on development?

T12: It would be interesting actually because I haven't looked at my own poetry portfolio since last year. It would be interesting to look and see what I think of it now.

R: I suppose it might be that achieving that balance... that where you've got children who might still be struggling with some of the technical functional basics, that spending time on developing creative writing, spending an increasing amounts of time on poetry for instance, there could be a view that it might work to the detriment

of those children? I wonder how you square that circle for yourself as a teacher working with your pupils, and where you see the value of creative writing for the pupils?

T12: What I found with doing the poetry and focussing more on the poetry is that actually the children's creative writing has improved because they really focus on the image they want to create, and they are transferring those skills into their other kinds of creative writing. And yes they do need that kind of...the grammar, and some children do find it difficult but they also need the ideas, they need the language, they need to learn to play with language, to put that into a sentence with a capital letter and full stop or whatever, a complex sentence, whatever, and that's what poetry has done, given them the chance to play with language a bit more and I've been amazed at what they've come out with.

R: Right...can you expand on that a bit?

T12: I have a class with sixteen special needs and five statemented children. I don't have a high flying class. But by focusing on creative writing and poetry it supports them. Because otherwise we go back to the grammar exercises with your capital letter and your full stop, your missing words. I'm still really driving that because they find it difficult and I'm still constantly going around where's your capital letter, where's your full stop. But during the writing process that's not, if they're drafting a piece of writing that's not the focus when they first start writing. That's something that right now I'll share it with a partner, go back, look, check your punctuation, have you got that in, that's not their first thought. So the creative writing becomes a context for them to then start thinking about why that stuff matters anyway. Why the punctuation and the...it's getting those ideas down on the paper but they still have to have that understanding of word order and to have that playful language to be able to write complex sentences and they can't do that unless they've gone through the process of writing sentences in different ways and things.

R: So developing that skill of playing with language is that also about enjoyment and engaging with the writing?

T12: Yes because they do enjoy it and they enjoy the ideas that they have and I'll often, you know what it's like, you're writing something and I'll often go blank when I'm writing with them now and I'll say...'oh I don't like that, give me a...that's horrible I've said that before...' and they're quite happy to shout out and they're like 'oh yes' and then there's that sort of shared enjoyment and challenge of it so that they can see

that challenge. And I think what I've reminded them and reassured them more this year is that actually it's not easy.

R: No, it certainly isn't...

T12: Yeah. But that doesn't mean that we can't enjoy it and we can't produce something we're really proud of. And I've been really lucky I've got a teaching assistant who we kind of work together in the class and work ideas through and when I'm modelling if I get stuck we talk, so the children see us having this dialogue that whole 'oh no, I think that sounds better' so we have this dialogue going on as well. If I'm doing something on the board and if my mind goes blank and I think they see that actually it's okay, to have that dialogue.

R: And that's a completely different sort of modelling isn't it?

T12: Yeah and the head scratching and all of that. Yeah the writing, it doesn't just come out. I try to show them that.

R: Do you do more of that do you think since the course then?

T12: I think I demonstrate difficulty more. I think I demonstrate the changing of ideas more. Not difficulty as in I can't do it but 'oh let's get to grips with this', that kind of difficulty...and I'm constantly saying to them because you know it doesn't matter if you write something down you don't like it you can change it, it's not set in stone. I do more of that, I do kind of show them a bit more freedom with that. So yes, that bit rather than the write this and then they copy it. There's no sort of well we'll just write down what you've put.

R: So there's more variety of responses to the modelling?

T12: Yeah. They take ideas and they think about how to start. There's still lots of the literacy stuff, the VCOP, the vocabulary, connectors, openers, I still bring some of that in sometimes. It's not that it's...and the other thing that I've done is included perhaps the poetry or more the creative writing in my topic work where there is place for that so the children are more exposed to it, get more used to it.

R: Right so it's not just in literacy lessons?

T12: Certainly in the autumn term when I was working through that and now it's not just literacy and the children don't, they just think they're doing the topic work, they don't see it is as just that. They can take it into their other work.

R: Is that...they enjoy that?

T12: Yes. Yeah and they are quite proud of their writing and that...I still have one or two that want it spoon fed and what shall I write next and what shall I but it's just a case of you write it and I'll come and have a look at it and we do lots of that because I

have two teaching assistants because the high number of statemented children. So while they're drafting we're just constantly the three of us we're sitting with individuals reading what they've got, and they'll say 'oh do you think that would be better' and because there's three of us we've had a lot of focussed discussion about how that can then be improved and what the next steps will be.

R: And that's interesting , that's...I suppose you're thinking about how they move forward in their writing?

T12: But they seem to, there's lots of positives as well. It's kind of 'I really like the way that you've done that' and I did have one or two children that any criticism with their writing that will be it, 'I'm not doing it, it's rubbish, I'm not doing it' and I don't get that at all now because they can see that by helping work with it and improve it they're really proud of what they've got in the end.

R: And does that mean that they start to be able to identify the steps they need to take?

T12: That's just started to happen more and I'm looking and they're doing lots of this themselves and there's a little star here and there's a little star there [shows some examples of pupils writing where the pupil has added a star to indicate that they want to go back to the writing to develop it]. And they're adding bits, 'oh miss I want to put this bit in there but how do I?' and I'm just 'put a star on, it's for you, this draft is for you as long as you understand where it's going, the star's there for you, we can work with it'.

R: So have you done that process with the maybe freewriting where they write and then find four things and underline them?

T12: I did. I found that that worked for me because I've never really known where to start with poetry but I can write so that worked for me.

R: And does it work for the children? So they've found that they're able to identify what they like.

T12: It's really worked for them, and actually what they don't realise as well is that some of them that don't write anything that really has a lot of ideas and they underline them but then when we look at it we look at the words they've underlined and we look at up-leveiling the vocabulary and changing that but they actually end up with something different to what they had in the freewriting anyway, by the time we've worked through that process.

R: So it can move a long way...?



- T12: It shows them they can always keep moving in their writing, so it doesn't matter what they write down. But they don't know that it's different because they've worked through that process, it's still their own work.
- R: But it starts with them finding the things they like...
- T12: Yeah it starts with them just having something on the page, and finding the positives, that's massively important for my kids. Something on the page and then finding something that they like to work from. Yeah and for some it's loads and for some it's a word or two and that's fine. So that worked for me because I can just start with anything and then hopefully pick something up, but it has worked for them because just getting them to write and not think too hard about it, just that physical act, just write about anything. So that's worked for them, you know.
- R: That's really interesting. I think I've covered everything I wanted to ask in terms of formal questions but I wondered if there's anything else either things that you maybe haven't had chance to talk about that you'd like to bring up?
- T12: Just really that I still don't think there's time for enough of it, enough creative writing going on in school.
- R: So you would still want to do more if you could?
- T12: Yeah. And actually what I see is...the insistence on these different types of non-fiction writing, I'd just would get rid of it! Because they're not all relevant. Explanations are just so dry ...I don't see the point. Not for at this stage. There are just too many text types. And why does it have to fit in a box? Because even in a piece that they say is a report genre or is a persuasive genre they don't fit in a box. They can have elements of all kinds of different writing. I'd much rather focus on the purpose of what the writing is rather than get stuck in the neat little boxes, relate it to what it is that you're trying to achieve and not tick however many features of that particular text. In fact I've actually done less of that I have to say since the course.
- R: And what would children gain, what have they gained?
- T12: I've actually just picked tasks for writing that I think will engage them and I haven't been hung up 'cause I suppose that's something else I've changed this year. I haven't been as hung up on ticking the features of that even in non-fiction. It's been about what do we want to achieve in this piece of writing. Because at other times when I've taught Year 6 I've had those check lists up in the classroom, papered the walls with them, and I haven't even brought them out this time. We're depending on what it is that we want and the purpose of the writing and who we're writing for, we've created our own checklists of what we need to have in that but it may not be

exactly what's on the official checklists so we've still had that criteria that we need to hit but in a different way.

R: So maybe finding different ways through it?

T12: Yeah which makes more sense to them than have you got this, this, this, this on a sheet they've never seen before.

R: And what about for you?

T12: Yeah, so I've been more, I'll choose some writing that I think will inspire them to write...and setting our own criteria rather than thinking 'I've got to get a report into their books, it's a while since they've done one of those'. It's not like there won't be a range because I don't want to do them, it's just there's enough, and there's different ways of doing it. And it's not as regimented.

R: Great. Thank you so much for this, for your time, it's been really interesting for me, and very useful.

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End of transcript

## Appendix 4: Sample poet-mentor/teacher meeting transcript

Transcript of a meeting between T2 and her poet-mentor, P10, held on 30/06/11.

T2 teaches in a middle school.

### Context

T2 invited P10 to observe her using freewriting (automatic writing) with a class of 27 Year 8 pupils (Key Stage 3) prior to the meeting. She has asked P10 to give her some feedback on the lesson. The main purpose of the meeting is to discuss how they will collaborate during the mentorship. This meeting follows on from a brief meeting when T2 established that her main priority was to developing pupils' writing in ways that move away from the formulaic approaches that she feels have dominated the classroom.

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P10 The last time I used automatic writing was with a much smaller group, maybe 6. But I think it really worked really well, you know, how you got them to underline everything, and when you went back to help the ones who were not really picking anything out, and when they then went and shared it as well. I was not sure if you definitely need to always do that sharing of the longer piece, because people had already picked things out, I was not sure if you always need to do that.

T2 Right

P10 But then again there were a couple of instances today where I think the girls at the back had picked something really interesting that had been missed, and the lad that was sitting there, I can't remember what it was now, but it ended really strongly, it was really quite powerful. I think his themes had been about Vietnam and war...it was the [checks her notebook] 'torn about by machine guns' and things like that which he hadn't underlined or anything which was to me really quite striking. So, I think it depends, if you're pushed for time I don't think you need to do that if people have picked things out themselves. You can always go back to the writing as well, that's the thing, especially if they start to do this sort of thing in their notebooks, go back, you know, as I do, and as you do with your own work, go back and have a look at things, you might be working on something different, and

something that was rubbish for the poem you were working on before, might trigger something when you look at it again...

T2 Right – so the pairing, once they become more secure, they should be able to manage...

P10 Yeah, I think so, I mean it will probably vary, but if you're pushed for time, you probably don't need to do it. I guess it's a good way to get them to share things in a smaller way so that then it might make them feel more comfortable about sharing things later on I guess. The thing that I wanted to do was the randomly generated similes and metaphors, in terms of your objective of wanting to push things further, develop their writing further. This is the first part of a four part workshop I did with another writer. His writing, the way he uses imagery, it's so unexpected, and really beautiful...and I got an insight into that when I did this workshop. He got us to take a piece of paper and divide it into four – draw a cross. In the top corner we were asked to write a concrete noun...now I don't know about terms like concrete noun, abstract noun...do they?

T2 Yep, at Year 8 level, definitely...

P10 Okay, so in the top left corner concrete noun, so something you can actually touch. And in the bottom left, an abstract noun – so a feeling like loneliness, or a concept like war. And it's best to do this in groups, and you don't want similar objects – you don't want similar concrete nouns, you don't really want 'table' and then 'chair'...

T2 Okay, so in small groups, but sometimes with a group like this, they need to see what's happening, so maybe we could do it as a shared thing...so show it up on the board, give them a bit of confidence...

P10 Yeah, so we could do it up on the board, they can see you doing it, then all think of their own...and then they can see each other's, and if they are too similar, say perhaps select a different one. So you've got your abstract, and you write 'is like' and they say what it's like, preferably a short phrase. So now's the tricky part – and if you've got time you can go round and listen, and this is when you can maybe pick up that some of the similes are maybe a bit clichéd or whatever, and you don't need to like...point it out at that stage, but it's interesting to hear. So you do that for both – for the concrete and the abstracts. And then you get to tear that piece of paper into pieces, into four along the grid. And you place it back in front of you as it was. And this is the part where they get into small groups. Six to eight will

work best. You pass the top left piece two places to your left. Physically hand it on. And the bottom right goes two places to the right. And that way everyone should come up with something different. And what you come up with is a load of randomly generated metaphors and similes, some of which will be amazing and startling and beautiful, and some of which will just be rubbish – but that's the thing. The important thing is that it shows what happens when you get something unexpected...

T2 And discussing that...what I like is when they can say why they like it...and build that into it...because that's where they fall down, not being able to say why...I want to be able to build up that conversation about writing...

P10 Yeah, so because you then share it, you can take something else and write a small poem from it, the simile doesn't necessarily belong to anyone.

T2 So what will that lead to?

P10 Well in our workshop that led directly into writing a six line poem, that was an adult writing group, and I don't know if that's something you think we could try with them...that we could go straight into it...But I wondered if we could do this before we go into automatic writing, it might help them to get thinking in terms of imagery a bit more in that writing, it might trigger something else off in that free writing process, you know try to move that on a bit, like you say, develop them further...

T2 I don't know whether to think about trying the same activity and tying it into the themes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* [which the class have been studying], the relationships, and they might be clued in a bit more then. So maybe the abstract and concrete nouns could be coming from the text, from the piece of writing that they've been looking at...do you think that's too...?

P10 No, I think that's absolutely fine, it can work that way, they're still choosing the words...

T2 For me, that works well, because there is so much for them to get their heads round in the relationships in the play, and we do concept maps and all sorts to help them with that, but what I don't focus on which I think it would be really nice to do through poetry is that Demetrius is still under the love potion at the end of the play. It's a false situation. I wonder if that might be a – we could draw out something about relationships, and falsehood in relationships – that could be something that we try to look at through the poetry.

- P10 Maybe are you thinking through persona poems?
- T2 That could be an option to go down that route...it might be a nice way of identifying with the character. So the concrete noun, that could maybe work as one of the character's names?
- P10 Yeah...that would work....
- T2 Cos what I'd like is a thread you know something constantly working through...so they can keep going back to it, keep looking at it, where did you go to with that. Because they need to be able to own this, they need to be able to take it out of the classroom, into the high school, carry this way of working with them...because otherwise that exploration isn't here, it's very very formulaic in how they go through it, analyse this bit...and that persona writing it – when we did the miner's strike – the number of boys who wrote from a woman's point of view, and really got in touch with that feminine side, which I can only applaud at this age. And that's something that they need to be able to explore, so I think persona poetry would be absolutely fantastic...it would give them the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the play in quite a unique way...
- P10 And in terms of the writing it's maybe a way into that exercise because it gives them something they know and can hold onto...
- T2 And then it builds into their independence, it comes really from them, from what they're thinking...I like that a lot.
- P10 Everything I write tends to start as freewriting...
- T2 I feel quite uncomfortable with it...
- P10 Have you tried it for yourself, I mean away from teaching it?
- T2 I missed the session on it...
- P10 I think the thing is that's quite helpful is for everyone to have the same starting sentence, so today it could have been 'The last time I had a dream...' then that gets them into it more easily I guess... and you can reduce the amount of time. Five to ten minutes is about right most of the time, you might extend that as people get more comfortable with it, or you might have a stimulus, some music or a visual stimulus or whatever. The only thing that matters is to remember that it doesn't matter if what comes out is utter, utter drivel. It really doesn't matter, just keep going, and eventually you'll have something there, something will come out, what

matters is that when you come to review it something will come out of it. It doesn't matter if when you come to review it there might be one thing you can work on.

T2 Right I'm going to try that myself for me...

P10 Yes, do. A good way is just to pick a book, open it anywhere, go to line 27 or whatever, and use the opening phrase in that sentence, and free write from there. But always, always go back and review it, and always pick out something. And if you feel like you were almost getting somewhere with something, but it kind of tails off again, maybe make a note in the margin or something, this is what I was trying to get at there, so that when you do go back over your notes you're not thinking what was I on about there? You've got a clue there to help you. Some people do it every day...

T2 To me it felt like freeing everything up...loosening up. I was thinking about doing it as part of the writing assessment, but it's a bit risky, knowing that that work goes up to the high school. I'll see how it goes...because it is an interesting thing to explore.

P10 I think that's one of the things with automatic writing, that they should feel that it's for them, it's not going to be seen by everybody. Like for me, I wouldn't show anyone my first passage of free writing, because you sometimes come up with things that you just write, but you don't necessarily want to explore with other people. Then it is completely free, if you want to share it fine, but it's when you go on from there that you're going to be doing the work, so it's probably about 2 stages removed from the free writing that you perhaps want them to show people...

T2 So where do you want to come into this, because of course I'll be exploring the Shakespeare themes through this. And I want to review how we move things forward, how we take things forward with their writing, and editing, redrafting. I sometimes don't feel equipped to be able to say 'hm, that's not quite right, can you..' I mean in prose I'm fine, but in poetry, I sometimes feel like I'm trampling a bit on something...

P10 Right, well I guess...it will be really different because you've got a classroom full of approaches. I guess with poetry what you really need to focus in on is things that just don't need to be there. To really look, is the poem specific, for the reader to get into the world of the poem, I think someone once said to me 'you've got the

trappings of prose in there' using things that are perfect when you're writing a story or a longer narrative, but that you don't need 'but' and 'then' and 'I remember' when you're writing a poem. So I guess it's like going in on a basic level and focus on what the poem is trying to say, and you can start getting the writer to have a look at it, to shape it...to try and find that for themselves. That's one of the things I've been thinking, how do we do it. Going back to the randomly generated metaphors, the writer I worked with, he'll do seemingly odd things, he'll get you to write something that's overloaded with metaphors and then pare it down, get it back to the essence of what you are writing about. Does that make sense?

T2 Yeah, I just think that as an adult writer, as a pupil they are still on that emergent way, they'd find that hard to make it all too much...

P10 Okay, so another thing that we might do is look at how many changes something might go through, for me that might be a bit of free writing. I could maybe look at how many changes my piece of writing might go through, and me and you could look at that, and think about how we could bring that into the classroom, and get them to see that... so that when they do go to edit their own writing

T2 That would be better for me to see you do...for you to share the process with them

P10 How long's the session?

T2 An hour, but I could collapse the timetable so that you could have them for longer

P10 I think an hour's fine, but I think we would need two sessions, because I think it's really important for them to have space, so that there's time to go away, leave things alone, come back at a later stage, and come back to the editing process. A lot of it is thinking time, you kind of do the nuts and bolts of it, you have something that kind of looks like a poem on the page – but you need to come back to it, to think about anything that's not working, that's a bit prose-y. And one of the things that might help is assessing someone else's poem, giving them feedback. One of the most important things about a poem is it should be an experience. One of the things when you read a good poem, it's not that the writer is telling you something, it's that you're experiencing it at the same time, it's unfolding for you, that's something you're aiming for...does that make sense?

T2 Yes, it does, I'm just thinking, how would you feel, for me I think making things real for the kids is really really important, and they've really enjoyed my discomfort at going off to the university...the say 'have fun' as I walk out the door, nasty lot



[laughing]...Erm, so what would be nice, and please do say no, would be if I experiment with this free writing, and get my 'nub' as it were, these 3 or 4 lines, and sent them to you, and then you demonstrate to the kids using my work, how you would chop them down...how would you feel about that?

P10 I think I'd prefer to do it with my work. I think at that stage of the editing you take control then, and that...

T2 That's the important element, yeah...I see that.

P10 It's not someone else at that stage telling you how to shape it because you still need to be in control of the poem. It needs to be a bit more established. Because you might have intended to take it in a completely different direction, and someone coming in at that point will take it to some ground that you perhaps don't want to explore. And that's fine if you find when you're editing it yourself it goes in a different direction than you'd thought it would...

T2 So if I do it with the kids then, as a student in the classroom, and they see me doing the same process, with my own work, that will have the same impact. I think I will learn so much about the process in that, about helping them to help themselves, because that's what it is really isn't it? So when I've got x saying to me 'I don't know what to do next' and – I'm not feeling able to help her in it, because I don't want to say 'you could do this, put that there' because that's me then, it's not her.

P10 And you don't want it to become formulaic, do you, here are the top 10 ways of editing the perfect poem.

T2 Because what you're describing in a way is the opposite of the kind of modelling that's in the strategies, that isn't modelling, it's performing... You're talking about actually going through that struggle with them, and maybe you get to the end of the hour and sometimes you haven't got very far, because that's what it's like sometimes.

P10 It's what it's like all the time for me. I think sometimes it gets to a certain point in the process where you think, yes it's coming now...

T2 And that brings us back to space, and being reflective and independent...and able to resolve things, grounding it in their experiences as writers. For me, for the learning I have to be part of it, I have to be really in there and doing it to really

understand it, and I think they're much the same, they need to actually grapple with their own learning, that's how they are going to develop as writers, by actually...and maybe you get to the end of the hour and sometimes you haven't got very far, because that's what it's like sometimes...

- P10 And the other thing that really works for editing, they really need to be reading the work out loud, listening to the work, hearing what works and what doesn't...anything that's tripping them up, or just doesn't sound like it belongs. So you don't have to read the freewriting out loud, because it would be awful for most people...but I think once you get to the initial first draft to even just quietly to themselves to read it out loud, but that could be tricky in the classroom?
- T2 They are used to when we do writing, there's a quiet room they can use...they're used to there being a quiet room and a discussion room.
- P10 And we need to think about how you hope to develop your work too...you're trying to work up your own poetry...
- T2 Yes, and I'd really like to discuss this in the commentary, how this intensive work leads into other work...because I don't want it to be right the seminars are over. Because this has really kept me buzzing this year, it's been great...because it can get, I never want to get in that rut, I think you've always got to be pushing. And the kids see you finding different ways of looking at things, exploring...
- P10 They maybe pick up on your sense of excitement...
- T2 Yeah, that we're all learning, and I'm learning too, I'm still learning..
- P10 And that's the thing about writing, when I first got back into writing...I used to write poetry as a teenager and then easily maybe 20 years of not doing anything, very occasionally scrawling in a notebook, but I think I first applied for the Northern Writers' Awards in 2007, and it was just a rubbish application, and looking back on it now I think, oh my god, they're not even poems...[laughs]
- T2 [joining in laughter] Don't say that, that absolutely freaks me out, I've got to hand my poems in and you're saying that...
- P10 But that's what everyone thinks...that's what I'm saying, I hadn't taken the time to shape it, like you are, and I hadn't had that group and those seminars that you've had already so you already understand so much about your poetry, whereas I was thinking it's just enough to put my thoughts down really, and it's not. And so from

that point I was like 1) I don't read enough 2) I've got no idea what I'm doing and 3) I just need to write something every day, I need to write every day, and I'm learning learning learning. Now I'm doing an MA and after that I will still continue to learn because...well, you just can't stop... in terms of creative writing it's never ending. It's really important for them to know that, it's an on-going process, you can't learn enough, you can't read enough.

T2 Someone was saying the other day, writing doesn't happen in workshops, it starts in workshops but the writing happens outside the workshops. And for me, sometimes, talking myself into going into the seminars – 'what are you doing here? You're not a writer...go back to the car and get on with it' and literally having that battle with myself at every workshop. And I probably come across as quite confident, but it terrifies the life out of me, it really does. And that in itself is a hurdle to overcome...but it's been a great journey, and that is the real benefit of exploring things you're not comfortable with, that you can get more comfortable, and then think, okay I'm going to push myself out of that comfort zone, and keep pushing, which is something that I want to do as a teacher.

P10 Writing as self-harm [they laugh]. Okay, so maybe we can have a session where we just look at your writing, we'll put that in the diary. And the sessions with year 8...I'll do some freewriting in each of those sessions, but that will be limbering up, it will be more about how we take it forward from there, picking up on what we've talked about, linking it into Dream and persona poems, but going through that process of getting them to see how they can develop their writing from those starting points, paring down...

T2 And you think it's a good idea to have gaps between sessions?

P10 Absolutely, that's important to realise that it doesn't all have to happen straight away, that part of resolving poems is the time you spend thinking about them, and when you come back to them things are more likely to fall into place...

T2 And I think the randomly generated similes would be great...

P10 And you can get them talking about why something works...the thing about that exercise as well that I find is they reach for the really obvious similes and metaphors, and if it's about helping them to develop their poetic voice it's about getting them to move beyond what anyone else can say to find the things that only they can say.

T2 But it works for their reading too, when they're looking at why the writer has said this, if they've done it themselves...they might be able to be more critical. It's about having that discussion and making that more apparent to themselves. I think the staff will really come on board with that, we could maybe look at that for the staff training session, and of course they'll adapt it, they'll move it on for their kids. If that starts to get shared, they'll experiment, free themselves up and move away from the strategies especially in KS2, where they need to get away from those 2 week blocks of text types. This is going to make a big difference, the way that poetry is taught is going to be very very different – their exposure to poetry, the different types of poetry, where they go with it, how they approach writing, and hopefully that feeds into all of their writing, not just a separate 'Poetry' unit. Poetry's been so isolated, so over there, separate, detached and instead it could be about thinking about language, language choice, how they use language, the choices they make, exploring language. I was thinking this morning I'm going to do a bit of Chaucer actually, and derivation of language, and translation, and bring them through a variety of different writers into language. It's exciting – it's a challenge to think about Year 8 tackling Chaucer and understanding that, and moving away from those isolated blocks.

[Final confirmation of dates, end of meeting]

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End of transcript

## **Appendix 5: Sample field notes of a Classroom Observation**

### Classroom Observation 4a, T9 and P11

#### Context

These field notes relate to the observation of a lesson carried out on 6/7/11 in a secondary school. T9 and P11 delivered the lesson, which they had planned collaboratively. There were 27 Year 9 pupils in the lesson.

The purpose of the observation was to describe and interpret the teaching of creative writing that took place during the lesson, and to gain insight into the teacher's approaches to creative writing in the classroom, deepening understanding gained through interview, seminars and written documentation.

At the beginning of the lesson, I was introduced to the pupils as a researcher who was interested in creative writing. I had been told that the class were used to visitors in the classroom, and that my presence would not concern them too much. The pupils seemed more or less oblivious to my presence during the lesson. I carried out detached observation, and sat at the side of the classroom where I had the opportunity to observe the teacher and poet as well as the pupils. I chose not to take part in the creative writing activities during the lesson, concentrating instead on how pupils appeared to engage with the tasks, and how the teacher and poet approached the teaching of creative writing during the lesson.

I took detailed notes during the lesson, logging timings of activities and recording dialogue as accurately as possible. I reviewed the field notes immediately after the lesson, enabling me to reflect on what I had observed.

The field notes present a description of the lesson, including timings and dialogue, in the left column and reflections that I made during and immediately after the lesson in the column on the right.

Observed action and dialogue	Reflections and interpretation
<p>13.30</p> <p>At the beginning of the lesson, T9 explained that P11 would be working with them again (she had been introduced to the class in a lesson that had taken place the previous week). T9 explained that the class would continue to look at the theme of conflict, which they had started to explore in previous lessons. P11 said that she had read some of the poems that the class had written in response to a grandfather visualisation exercise that T9 had led them through earlier in the term, and that she'd enjoyed them very much – <i>'you have already written some wonderful poems.'</i></p> <p>T9 explains that today <i>'we want to get you thinking about the theme of conflict a bit more deeply'</i> by writing about it. She checks that everyone has got paper and pens. P11 introduces the writing activity: <i>'We're going to do a writing exercise, automatic writing. There's no right or wrong way to do this, the only thing that matters here is having a go, it's just a way of clearing your head of all the ideas that you have about a conflict.'</i></p> <p>T9 asks the pupils to imagine a conflict they have had or might have with someone. She gives some suggestions – it could be a conflict with a sibling or a friend, it could be a serious matter or something really trivial. <i>'To start with, I want you to spend a few minutes just getting that down, maybe 5 or 6 sentences, describe the conflict from your point of view.'</i> She also says <i>'don't worry about it, this is just the starting point for your writing...the main thing is to keep writing. Ok, I'll give you 5 or 6 minutes, off you go.'</i></p>	<p><i>It's interesting that the poet tells the class that she's read their poems; they look pleased but slightly embarrassed by this. I imagine that they are used to having their work read only as part of the schools' assessment procedures.</i></p> <p><i>The writing exercise is introduced to the class without any explanation of where it will lead, or of the learning objectives. This is unusual: teaching of writing in the strategies and frameworks is underpinned by explicit exposition of learning objectives before writing begins. Instead, there is a sense at the beginning of the lesson that the objective is expressed in the creative writing actions, so that getting down to writing happens quickly. All of the pupils have started to write by 13.34, four minutes into the lesson.</i></p>
<p><b>13.34</b></p> <p>The pupils start to write. Most of them start writing quickly, though two ask additional questions – <i>'can it be a conflict with your mum?'</i> <i>'can it be made up?'</i> T9 explains that they can write about any conflict, real or imaginary, the important thing is to <i>'get the thing in your head'</i>. P11 says <i>'sometimes I know that feeling of 'I haven't got anything to write about', but don't worry, we have time in the lesson, this is just first steps'</i>.</p>	<p><i>Although the pupils' questions focus on the parameters of the exercise, P11 offers reassurance intimating that she can see the task from their point of view, that she empathises with those pupils who may feel they have nothing to write about, and that there's going to be more support as the lesson progresses.</i></p>

<p>The pupils start to write about a conflict.</p>	<p><i>During this time, T9 and P11 also sit down and write. T9 has told me that this is something she has started to do since she began the course, so by now it is not unusual practice in this classroom, and the pupils don't seem to notice.</i></p>
<p>13.40</p> <p>P11 asks the pupils to stop writing. T9 asks pupils to share with the person sitting next to them what they decided to write about – not to read it out because 'it's just the raw material of the writing at the moment', but to describe what they decided to write about. T9 explains that she wrote about going home to find that her flatmate had not cleaned the kitchen after herself, and that she was furious. The pupils talk to each other for a minute or so.</p>	<p><i>The pupils seem very eager to talk about what they've written about – they are noisy and expansive in their gestures as they talk to each other. It's a sharp contrast with the silent intensity of the writing activity. I think that this opportunity to discuss the work operates at two levels: they are able to 'let off steam' after the silent writing; and it's a chance to briefly reflect on what they have written through informal discussion.</i></p>
<p>13.43</p> <p>P11 now says 'I'm going to guide you through a series of questions, and you're just going to write down your response each time, this is going to give you lots of material to work with.'</p>	<p><i>Again, I'm struck by the fact that there is no discussion of the learning objectives or the final aim. Rather, the focus remains on the writing acts and actions that are to be undertaken. However, there is an implication here that there's more to come: the pupils will have 'lots of material to work with'.</i></p>
<p>The first task is for pupils to 'imagine yourself as a fly on the wall' and describe the conflict. The class are told they can start writing from any point in the conflict they choose, and not to worry about telling the whole story. Instead they are asked to 'focus on the little details of what's happening.'</p>	<p><i>During the rest of the lesson, both T9 and P11 continue to write alongside the pupils.</i></p> <p><i>The pupils seem to be absorbed during this part of the lesson, they are actively writing more or less all the time (13.43-13.57).</i></p>

<p>13.45</p> <p>Next, the pupils are asked to write about the other person as though he/she were an animal, comparing them to that animal.</p> <p>13.47</p> <p>The pupils are asked to compare the person in the conflict to a plant, fruit, or vegetable...</p> <p>13.49</p> <p>Now the pupils are asked to imagine the conflict as though they cannot see it, and can only hear it, concentrating 'all the sounds, not just what's said'</p> <p>13.51</p> <p>The pupils are asked to think about the tone of voice that is used by the other person in the conflict, 'the way they are speaking' and to describe it. 'Is it like something else? It might be a mechanical tone, like a machine, or maybe it's musical'</p> <p>13.53</p> <p>Pupils are then asked to 'step into the shoes of the other person, and describe yourself from their point of view'. They are asked to use all of the senses in this description.</p> <p>13.55</p> <p>For the next task, pupils are asked to choose 5 words that describe themselves during the conflict. They are asked to choose 3 words that are alliterative if possible.</p> <p>13.56</p> <p>The final task is to choose 5 words that describe how the writer feels now about the other person in the conflict.</p> <p>13.57</p> <p>T9 now asks the pupils to take a minute to finish off what they're doing.</p>	<p><i>The first two tasks clearly ask pupils to start thinking and writing metaphorically.</i></p> <p><i>The tasks focus pupils' writing to move into new areas – here, and in the next task, exploring sound in their writing.</i></p> <p><i>As tasks develop, there is a sense pupils are encouraged to think about how they are able to layer detail into their writing by considering it from different perspectives.</i></p> <p><i>This is the only part of the exercise where a specific literary limitation is suggested – the use of alliteration. See post script to this field note.</i></p>
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P11 asks the pupils what they thought the hardest part of the task was. A number of pupils agree that being asked to describe themselves from the other person's point of view was difficult: 'it's hard to think of other peoples' feelings.' Some pupils agree that choosing alliterative words was difficult and T9 tells them 'if you couldn't do it that's fine, it can always come later'. She also asks them which tasks they found easiest: pupils talk about being a fly on the wall, and comparing the person to an animal/plant. P11 asks what plants people chose. One pupil says she chose a cactus, and P11 follows up by asking what animal she had chosen to describe the person: a deer. Another pupil said that she had compared the person to a tulip; again P11 asks what animal she had chosen, which in this case was a lion.

P11 picks up on the contrast in both of the animal/plant comparisons: 'You have really different contrasting images going on there, that can really work for you in your writing, it can kind of surprise you, look out for that the rest of you, where the contrasts and surprises are..'

14.02

P11: 'Now we're going to start shaping the writing that you've made into poems.' She explains that it's a chance to 'work things up that you like, that you're interested in.' T9 says 'you've all got loads of writing now, which is great, the blank page can be the most daunting thing, like we said at the beginning, when you feel you've got nothing to write about.'

P11 asks the pupils to start by looking back over their writing, and to pick out and underline 4 or 5 phrases or sentences 'that you like, or that you think are interesting, that stand out to you'. She says that it might be 'how they sound, or a specific detail that you feel you've captured, anything that grabs you.'

The class is then asked to write the sentences or phrases out separately, 'just as they are', each on a new line.

*Here, the pupils are asked to reflect on what they found most difficult/easiest about the task, offering a point for reflection and dialogue.*

*Pupils start to share their use of imagery. The focus here is on how they approached the writing tasks, and how they felt about them.*

*Pupils' responses are developed by P11 into a dialogue about writing, as she explores the idea of using 'contrast' in imagery, and creating 'surprise'. She is also intimating that pupils may have intuitive knowledge, since the class were not asked to consider contrast in the task.*

*It's now half way through the lesson. In 30 minutes the pupils have generated a good deal of material. This is the first time an outcome is mentioned. Perhaps because the pupils have material to work with, they do not seem worried about starting to shape the poems. The focus is still on carrying out creative writing actions as pupils are taken through the steps of identifying lines to work with.*

14.06

T9 asks the class if anyone would like to read out a line or phrase that they have underlined. Several pupils volunteer; in each case, before the pupil reads aloud, T9 identifies another pupil and asks them to listen carefully and comment on the line. For example, one pupil reads 'she closes her petals in, shielding herself'; another pupil responds 'it made me think of daisies, like she might be delicate, easily kind of tramped on.' T9 also reads a line from her own work.

*This technique of sharing small amounts of work and stimulating a focussed response from a peer is directly drawn from the seminars.*

14.10

T9 says that what they have in front of them is the start of a poem. The next stage is to start to 'play around with the lines, get them to work for you, for what you want to say, in the way only you can say it.' There are a number of questions at this point – 'can I change bits?' 'can I add something new?' 'does it have to stay 5 lines?'. P11 says that all of this is 'allowed', but advises pupils to 'stay close to what you liked about it'. T9 explains that 'it doesn't have to make full literal sense, we don't have to read it and know that it's about two girls having a fight about x. We might read it and think, that's intriguing, that's interesting, I wonder about that'.

*There is a balance going on throughout the lesson between the pupils' ownership of and engagement with their own writing ('the way only you can say it') and the limitations and guidance that are given in exploring/developing the writing. Their attention has been directed towards particular ideas - sound, vantage point, imagery. P11 seems keen to reinforce the idea that the pupils may already know what is working well in the writing, in her suggestion that they should 'stay close' to what they like about the lines. T9's assertion that it doesn't have to make 'full literal sense' perhaps indicates a concern that the drive to produce coherent narrative may interrupt the development of the writing at the next stage.*

Pupils start to work on their poems.

14.20

P11 starts to work her way round the room, looking at people's work, sometimes stopping and talking to them quietly. At one point she speaks to the whole class: 'Someone just said to me 'that last line doesn't make sense so I have to go back and fix it' but you know actually I thought the last line did work for me, it kind of intrigued me, I didn't need to know the full meaning, that ambiguity can be good'.

*P11 here picks up on the idea of ambiguity that has been referenced earlier in the lesson. I wonder how confident the pupils feel about this; it is perhaps a difficult concept to explore, and there doesn't seem to be time to follow it through.*

<p>14.23</p> <p>T9 again asks if anyone would like to read out their work, and follows the same pattern as before of asking a pupil to respond. Three pupils read out their work. T9 asks the pupils if they think they would be able to take their work home and continue to shape their writing, and that they will continue the work in their next lesson.</p> <p>T9 and P11 end the lesson by congratulating the class on their work.</p>	<p><i>As the lesson draws to a close, I am aware of the restrictions that exist in the secondary school timetable, and how they may impede creative writing practice. It feels as though the pupils are involved and engaged, and that another 20 minutes or so would give a welcome opportunity to start to explore and share some of the difficulties of moving the writing through the complex actions of continuing to shape the poem. I wonder how many of them will feel able/motivated to continue to shape their poems at home without support and guidance.</i></p>
<p><b>Post script</b></p> <p>The suggestion to use alliteration relates to a discussion about sound in poetry that took place during the poet-mentor's meeting with the teacher. T9 and P11 wanted pupils to explore how choices about sound can influence meaning in poetry. They agreed that they would work elements of sound including alliteration into the exercise <i>'so you can get that sonic thing without it being necessarily a purely sonic exercise, but still drawing their attention to the fact that sound matters in poetry...so they can see how when you have that kind of repetition of a sound in a poem it lends music, it's not nothing, it does something.'</i> (P11, Poet-Teacher Meeting 2)</p>	

## Appendix 6: Sample Participant Essay and Poetry Portfolio

### Context

This appendix contains the essay and poetry portfolio submitted by T6 in fulfilment of the requirements of the Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing in the Classroom, Northumbria University in September 2011. Participants were required to submit a 2500 word essay (see below), 90 lines of poetry and a 1000 word reflective commentary. The essay, poetry and commentary are reproduced here verbatim, including references and bibliography.

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### ESSAY

*'If teachers engage as writers, taking part in the creative process of composing, they arguably will be in a stronger position to develop the creative voice of the child.'* (Cremin (2006). 'Creativity, uncertainty and discomfort: teachers as writers.' *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36(3): 415-433.)

*Reflecting on your own experience of both practising and teaching creative writing and drawing on the literature that you have read for this module, discuss the theory that taking part in the creative process strengthens teachers' practice in the teaching of creative writing.*

In discussing this theory, I have considered my personal experiences of writing, both before and after attending the creative writing course. I have also explored the concept of the 'creative voice of the child' and how this can be interpreted by practitioners and by those setting guidelines for assessment.

I have enjoyed writing for pleasure since I was a small child. Throughout my adult life I have continued to write poetry and short stories for personal enjoyment. I enjoy the process of writing, because of the opportunity for reflection, but I have not, until recently, considered myself as 'a writer'. Now, I reflect more deeply, to consider the ways in which writing, reading and listening to the thoughts of other writers, could shape any personal writing which I might do in the future and how this may affect my role as a primary school teacher.

Before embarking on the course, my approach to lessons in Literacy was enthusiastic. I frequently read, usually humorous poetry, to the children and they responded in the way that I had hoped, by listening intently, laughing and by obviously enjoying the words. To some extent, I believed that my passion for this subject would be infectious and that this in itself would influence the children to write creatively. I found that this sometimes happened with the 'more able' writers, but that children who struggled with writing had great difficulty in forming ideas of their own. I did have strategies and ideas of my own, but I tended to rely on published units of work.

My teaching of writing often included a session where I would 'model' writing to the class, but my thought processes that I shared with the children, were scripted and did not include the hesitancy and sufficient periods of thought and reflection which are usually present in the composition of any piece of writing. This process of 'scripted modelling' was demonstrated to me during my one year PGCE course and was deemed wholly acceptable by my tutors.

In Teresa Cremin's article '*Creativity, uncertainty and discomfort: teachers as writers*', she states that,

A recent survey of teachers and student teachers reveals that real modelling, encompassing spontaneity and risk, is often avoided in class demonstrations. Instead, the piece of writing for modelling, such as an exemplar opening paragraph, a rich character description or a verse of poetry is planned and written in advance, usually at home. [...] In summary, the writing pedagogy implied by the NLS is both teacher-directed and highly instructional; it is likely to have limited teachers' and children's experience of ambiguity, their artistic involvement and their understanding of the writing process.<sup>v</sup>

My teaching would often coincide with e.g. the need to improve handwriting skills or alliteration. The Ofsted report, *A survey of practice, 2006/07*, states that,

In schools visited, poetry work was often planned around the need to improve skills in writing and this approach limited the variety and quality of poems studied. Many pupils wrote well in response to poems they studied, but a focus in imitation,

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<sup>v</sup> T. Cremin, 'Creativity, uncertainty and discomfort: teachers as writers.' *Cambridge Journal of Education*, **36** (3) (2006) : 415-433 (p.417)

reduced pupils' opportunities to write independently and about subjects that mattered to them.<sup>vi</sup>

These findings resonated with me and my own practice in the classroom. I have usually concentrated on achieving a 'learning outcome' e.g. the composition of rhyming couplets around a theme of winter, based on a published poem. Thus, the technicalities of writing were being addressed, but the scope for inspiration was somewhat limited. I did take the children outside during the heavy snowfalls of last Winter and we wrote poems using this as a stimulus, but this sort of activity was not carried out frequently.

Ted Hughes, writing in *Poetry in the Making*<sup>vii</sup> advises,

....imagine what you are writing about. See it and live it. Do not think it up laboriously, as if you were working out mental arithmetic. Just look at it, touch it, smell it, listen to it, turn yourself into it. When you do this the words look after themselves, like magic. If you do this you do not have to bother about commas or full- stops or that sort of thing.<sup>vii</sup>

I would hesitate to agree that the words always 'look after themselves like magic'. Even so, this advice inspired me and reminded me of some of the very best teaching which I had sometimes received as a child at school. However, it also highlighted a conflict, in that, as a teacher, I *do* have to bother about commas, full stops and 'that sort of thing'! The children I teach are assessed on their ability to use these skills appropriately and I am assessed on facilitating this.

During recent months, I have had the opportunity to develop my writing skills and even to start to consider myself 'as a writer'. From the start of the creative writing course, I shared my plans and my fears, with the children aged 7 to 9 years old in my class. Many children expressed surprise that I was learning at all. The experience also prompted a discussion with other teachers and I found that many practitioners who were directly teaching children how to write had never felt inclined to write anything creative themselves, not

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<sup>vi</sup> OFSTED (2007) *Poetry in Schools* [http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/English/Poetry-in-schools/\(language\)/eng-GB](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/English/Poetry-in-schools/(language)/eng-GB) London [accessed 5 May 2011] ( p.3 )

<sup>vii</sup> Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the Making* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2008) p. 18

even to 'jot' down thoughts and feelings or try for example, to write a poem. I had presumed that they would have tried to write for pleasure, as I had. This prompted further reflection here and when I found that I could develop and improve my own writing by using techniques taught to me, it motivated me to explore ways in which I could enliven lessons with my pupils and to support them in improving their work.

In the course of my lessons, at the end of an activity, I frequently ask the children to read aloud their writing. During seminars at the university, as a student, I was asked to do precisely the same thing and it surprised me to understand the pressure which results from having to produce a piece of writing within a limited amount of time, no matter what kind of mood I was in! Now, I often write with the children and share my own writing with them and hope that this demonstrates a feeling of empathy. My own tutors provided very positive verbal feedback for all students and that, even with a piece of writing which might be considered to be fairly bland, they would look for one interesting phrase or even a word. This approach did highlight and contrast with comments that I sometimes make in class, such as, 'Good opening paragraph, but try to use more adjectives!'

Such comments, although valid, are not particularly helpful in encouraging a child to think imaginatively. The advice is attempting to change technicalities, but it does not seek to encourage the creative aspect of their writing.

Seminars at the university have provided me with ideas for encouraging creativity in the classroom. I took part in a visualisation exercise and the resultant piece of writing awoke in me an inner voice of which I was unaware. I had found a way to convey emotion and feeling, other than simply using appropriate words and phrases. I suppose that I had immersed myself in the mood of the subject of the piece of writing, in the way that Ted Hughes, above, had suggested. Similarly, an exercise in observation, where we were asked to write down everything that we saw, felt or heard and develop this into a poem, produced a piece of writing that was personal, detailed and evocative of feeling. In truth, I have always understood and acknowledged that spending time on reflection is of prime importance, but time constraints in school and the pressure on practitioners to teach a wide variety of writing objectives, have perhaps tended to curtail activities which would enrich and inspire the children's imagination.

During the spring and summer terms I tried various ideas and techniques with children in my class. They responded particularly well to the visualisation technique. I did not expect them to listen so intently, while they sat, eyes closed, and imagined their feelings and responses from my prompts. Indeed, it seemed on occasions, as though they were in a trance. I could 'see' their thought processes taking place, as their eyes moved beneath closed eyelids and emotions were expressed through body language. The children settled down to write afterwards and they did this in a quiet and controlled manner - unusual for the lively children in my class. I wrote with them, sitting at a desk, thinking about and pondering my own writing. I feel that this subtle change was as useful in modelling writing as any of the scripted writing that I had carried out earlier. However, I will be interested to see whether the children continue to respond so positively over a period of time or whether the restricted writing time is effective because it is a novelty.

One nine year old boy in my class, an extremely reluctant writer who suffers from dyslexia, continued writing after the allotted eight minutes writing time and I had to ask him twice to stop working. I found that the imposition of a time limit seemed to encourage a sense of urgency. Cliff Yates, writing in *'Writing like writers in the classroom: free writing and formal constraint'* suggests that,

The time limit is important; between five and ten minutes is most effective. Ten minutes of writing sounds a long time to some students, whereas five sounds more achievable. A longer time can be seen as more intimidating; after all no one can write a poem in only five minutes. In fact, it is surprising how students actually *do* write a first draft in five minutes.<sup>viii</sup>

Certainly, during seminars I attended, I would have felt that more would have been required of me if we had been given a longer time in which to write and that this could have stilted my thinking. Instead there was insufficient time to ponder too carefully and therefore I took risks.

I have benefited from writing alongside existing and published poets and writers. I have observed the ways in which a variety of techniques have inspired a writer to write and that a first draft is not always easy, even for a professional. I have been as much inspired by

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<sup>viii</sup> Cliff Yates, 'Writing like writers in the classroom: free writing and formal constraint', *English in Education*, 41(3) (2007) : 6-19, p.10



their occasional difficulty in finding the 'right' word or phrase as by their polished and inspirational writing. Similarly, by sharing my thoughts and inadequacies with the children, I hope to demonstrate that interesting and original writing cannot always be achieved by following a formula. I have worked closely alongside the poet-mentor who was assigned to me during the Summer Term and we spent two half days with the children exploring old mine workings, footpaths and the 'fells' around the school. We encouraged the children to use their senses; e.g. to observe closely, to listen intently and, most important of all, gaining pleasure and personal fulfilment from the experience. I have often wanted to facilitate more of this sort of learning, but lacked confidence to break away from a more structured way of teaching. However, I no longer feel any fear or reluctance in trying out new ideas and embracing new ways of writing because of the support given. My motivation for change was due to the fact that it was more enjoyable, more fun and I knew that the children felt this too.

The writing that resulted from these outdoor activities, which use the senses had more originality, greater feeling and some colourful words and phrases. Quite often, descriptions were original and written from 'the heart' without the need for me to mention adjectives or similes.

The 'creative voice' of a primary school child may be described in terms which include whether the child's writing includes metaphors and similes and other figurative language. A teacher using the '*Assessing Pupils Progress*' assessment forms, commonly in use in Primary Schools, considers whether a child achieving 'Level 4' i.e. the standard which most children aged ten or eleven are expected to achieve, can, 'Write imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts, across a range of writing, with some ideas and material developed in detail e.g. descriptions elaborated by adverbial and expanded noun phrases.'<sup>ix</sup> However, I feel there is an extra dimension within creative writing that is linked to emotion and it is difficult to measure this in terms of a simple statement. Good writing cannot be created just by following the 'rules' of writing.

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<sup>ix</sup> Assessing Pupils Progress . Department of Education archives [ accessed 5 August 2011]  
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110202093118/http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/47028>

Following a 'visualisation' exercise with my class, an eight year old boy, with low attainment levels for writing and who was receiving support in the form of intervention strategies, read aloud a poem which he had written about his granddad. The writing that this boy produced, seemed, to me, to be the outpourings of the 'creative voice' that I had been searching for. I discovered far more about his personal life than I had known before. It was a simple, but thoughtful piece of work, but which was arguably more creative than a polished piece of prose containing the necessary expanded noun phrases. Within a short poem of six lines, I learned of the close relationship between grandson and grandfather and the mood of an evening spent looking after his grandfather's pigeons, chasing the hawks away and gazing at the blood red sunset.

Sue Dymoke, writing in *Taking Poetry off its Pedestal*, gathered views from a group of teachers. One teacher commented that, 'A pupil who is not particularly able might suddenly produce a little jewel of a phrase which might be difficult to compare with something which was workmanlike but not inspired.'<sup>x</sup>

It could also be argued that a child who has been shown how to write creatively will produce the technical standards required without having to engineer them by simply structuring words and phrases. In addition, to assume that a teacher's role is simply to help a child to achieve statutory levels of attainment in terms of writing, is somewhat limiting. Surely the ability to write with originality is a greater gift that is more sustainable throughout a child's life.

Having taught in two schools, I have come to know that there is a common feeling amongst practitioners that the assessment process does not encourage creativity, as it is too formulaic. Using the *Assessing Pupils Progress* guidelines, much emphasis is placed on a child's ability to use the technical skills of writing. The perceived time constraints may also discourage creativity.

However, perhaps the notion that I have been constrained or limited in my teaching of creative writing has been self-imposed. On reflection, I believe that my lack of confidence

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<sup>x</sup> S. Dymoke, 'Taking Poetry off its Pedestal' *English in Education*, 35(3) (2001) : 32-41 p.36

and ignorance of the writing process has contributed towards a limitation of the potential creativity in my writing lessons.

It would also be misleading to suggest that the Department of Education is as formulaic as some guideline documents might suggest. Ofsted, writing in the report, *Poetry for Schools* found that, 'Success lay in the delicate balance between analysis, composition and personal response which involved thinking about poetry and providing the opportunity for them to enjoy their own creativity.'<sup>xi</sup>

If teachers engage as writers and gain real personal fulfilment from the activity, I believe that they will be better able to develop the creative voice of the child. The ensuing empathy, personal motivation and the ability to share with the child the notion that writing can be fun and personal, puts the teacher in a much stronger position.

However, it may be argued by test results from previous years, that teachers who do not engage as writers at all, are still skilled in facilitating children to produce high standards of writing, even creative writing. Children can be taught how to write a simile, they can be taught how to use alliteration appropriately. They can write metaphors. The child's writing will also be influenced by external factors other than their teacher, such as family life, their home surroundings and personal relationships.

Sometimes, though, the child needs to see what motivates and inspires another person to creativity. I believe it is the role of the teacher to create this spark of interest and excitement. The teacher cannot do this effectively by issuing a set of rules for students to follow. I would not teach children how to make a chocolate cake without first attempting to make the cake myself and finding out what might go wrong, or, more positively, by discovering what a pleasure it may turn out to be!

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<sup>xi</sup> OFSTED (2007) *Poetry in Schools* [http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/English/Poetry-in-schools/\(language\)/eng-GB](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/English/Poetry-in-schools/(language)/eng-GB) London [accessed 5 May 2011] ( p.8 )

I agree with Jane Spiro, writing in *Teaching Poetry: writing poetry-teaching as a writer*, who states that, 'By recognising our 'natural' capacity for creativity, reflecting on this, and reconstructing it pedagogically, we are better able to bring our skills to class as vehicles for authentic learning.'<sup>xii</sup>

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<sup>xii</sup> J. Spiro, , 'Teaching poetry: writing poetry-teaching as a writer', *English in Education*, 41(3) (2007) 78-93 p. 93.

## Appendix 6 Continued: Poetry Portfolio (T6)

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### Delineator

The day blocked out  
by your grey plaid trousers  
and the wrestling on television.  
Big Daddy, a morbid morsel,  
plastercine man, is dressed obscenely for the crowds  
who jeer him  
and that fat bellied being with the rude hairs  
protruding from his proud pink flesh.  
The other one, who dances as if accidentally  
caught up in this mayhem on the top tier  
of a wedding cake, shouts,  
'a one a two a three.....' and Grandad is joyous,  
part of the crowd in this little brown box.

This weekly visit to Mastile Cottage is Grandad's Utopia in the North.  
Forty long years 'Delineator' at Head Wrightson, 'The Works', in town,  
he took his pencil and drew a neat line underneath it all.  
Wife, Edith, bends to the sideboard, one  
hand in, and drags out the Saturday china.

The seams of wood jostle together in the dead oak. Where did this tree, whose roots are  
now weighted and resigned to be forever without purpose,  
once lift its branches to the sky and breathe?

We three, my Mother, my Father and me  
are as voyeurs.

He performs his starring role  
while Edith, supporting actress,  
fills the kettle in the unlovely blue kitchen.  
The clock ignores the performance and  
beats out its resolute rhythm,  
assured of its time.

The delineator, with outstretched walking stick, prods the knob on the screen and changes  
the direction of our journey;

the highlight is the monologue

and it is a strange song

to be listening to

in the springtime

on a Saturday

when I am ten years old.

He recites it to the bitter end.

Nobody laughs.

But the pride in his face gives us to understand

that admiration

is all that is required here.

He huffs a while and heaves his lumbering bulk  
to the door.

Like attendants, we follow and tread the concrete towards the eggs,  
the fledglings, the budgerigars in his shadowed back yard.

There is a chatter in the birdhouse

but the birds fall silent as we steal inside

and He proceeds to inspect the nesting boxes  
of his babies.

The birdseed scattered carelessly on the floor of their brief cages,  
this is as far as we venture  
into the mouldiness of his country living.

My father leans forward as He talks.

Doing the right thing.

I wait for my fish and chips

and the ice cream to follow,

home made by Edith

from a packet bought circa 1947,

intended as a treat for me, the Granddaughter,

is inedible, and I

escape to the bathroom for as long as I dare.

The talk outside continues to my muffled horror.

'Is she ill?' and I return

to my chair.

My mother tries to rescue the milky globule with a cupped hand.

A tiny sepia photograph hangs on the wall

I have seen it before and it is a favourite.

Faded and forlorn it has a title;

'World's Smallest Railway',

promising a journey

much sunnier

than this.

Homeward now, and we stop outside 'The Blacksmiths Arms'.

The dank interior breathes relief and we are greeted,

like family,

by a landlord with warm eyes.

Half past five.

A lone man, a farmer, perhaps,

face bloodied by the sun, sits hunched against the bar.

His stubby fingers protect

a pint, almost empty, and the day is in no hurry to run into

the evening.

A lemon (bitter) for my father,

warm red wine for my mother served in

a dusty small glass

and the grass outside

is growing still.



### Poetry Commentary : 'Delineator'

The poem was developed from a visualisation technique demonstrated to me during a seminar. I was asked to think about my Grandfather and the tutor then posed a variety of questions, e.g. *'Which room do you see your Grandfather in? What is he wearing?'* etc and I was asked think about the answers. Immediately following this, I produced a narrative based on my thoughts. Using this technique, I recalled many 'forgotten' details, such as the 'sepia photograph' of the 'world's smallest railway'. I then chose two sentences from this piece of writing and wrote them out again in a 'free verse' poem. The words,

and it is a strange song  
to be listening to  
in the springtime  
on a Saturday  
when I am ten years old.

have not been altered since that first draft. I recognise now that the lines of verse contain alliteration, although I was not aware, when writing, that I was using this as a technique. I tried to analyse why it seemed, to me, to work and I experimented with counting the syllables in each line. Although, using this specifically as a poetic device in order to write a poem, is, I feel, too prescriptive.

I have redrafted the poem many times. I have learned much about editing and the need to be wary of repetition. In order to redraft effectively and develop the poem, I found it necessary to again use the visualisation technique. Although I had received feedback and advice on editing, I recognise now that I had still not edited sufficiently. Some of the phrases in the initial drafts sounded contrived. The course has inspired me to read the works of a wide variety of poets and I tried to write using 'clever' literary words to raise the level of my writing. The resulting phrases were 'words without meaning', and I have learned that my best poetry is written using my own thoughts, feelings and memories. Ted Hughes reaffirmed this to me in his book, *'Poetry in the Making'* when he writes that,

‘after telling yourself you are going to use any old word that comes into your head so long as it seems right at the moment of writing it down, you will surprise yourself.’<sup>xiii</sup>

As I was redrafting, I recognised that the meaning of the poem needed to be more explicit. There is a fine balance between explaining to the reader exactly what one wants to say and leaving room for interpretation. I tried to achieve this balance by asking for feedback, although inevitably, each person has his or her *own* interpretation!

I am experimenting with line length. I recorded myself reading the poem and then listened to the recording to try to determine whether the emphasis that is subsequently placed on each line is warranted.

I was not happy with the original ending, which was clichéd and sentimental. The last lines on the final draft,

‘.....and the grass outside / is growing still.’

seem to me to epitomise the mood of those evenings, although I am still not sure why. Perhaps there is a sense of calm after the emotionally dulling at Grandad’s. There may also be a sense of new growth despite the staid feeling of those Saturdays. However, the phrase,

‘Where did this tree / once lift its branches to the sky and breathe....’

is perhaps overly sentimental. I was trying to convey the image of the ‘dead’ oak sideboard, but when I re-read this, I feel that it is still slightly contrived.

While working on the final draft of the poem, I added the lines ‘He took his pencil / and drew a neat line underneath it all.’ By placing the lines near to the beginning of the poem, I believe I have provided a point of reference and therefore some initial clarity for the

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<sup>xiii</sup> Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the Making. A handbook for Writing and Teaching* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2008), pp 18-19.

reader. I wanted to be more explicit about the meaning of the word delineator and its link to Grandad's job at Head Wrighton's as draughtsman. I also wanted to show the connection with Grandad's retirement from that world.

I was surprised at the powerful recollections that surfaced in writing this poem. I had not thought about this part of my childhood for a long time and I was not aware that I had any emotion at relating to these visits. Indeed, if the subject cropped up in conversation with my mother, it was talked about briefly but with mild amusement. I can see now that there was a darker, perhaps more intense side to the experience. I enjoy observing people and watching how they behave and react. The references to my Grandad as having a 'starring role' and his wife as being 'supporting actress' seem to me now to reinforce the idea that I was observing these people as actors, while I was a 'voyeur' in the audience.

Since starting the course, I have become much more aware of the way in which poetry has always been an influence in my life. As a very young child, I particularly enjoyed the humour in A.A. Milne's, *The Christopher Robin Verses*. Christopher Reid's, *Song of Lunch* is a modern poem which tells a story and I am attracted to the way in which he manages to convey the mood of the day and the implied feelings of his characters, using simile and metaphor. More recently, I discovered Molly Holden's, *To Make Me Grieve* and the way in which she describes rural scenes with honesty and simplicity greatly appealed to me.

The experience of writing this poem has been enjoyable. Each part of the process; thinking, recalling, writing, redrafting, has been an opportunity for reflection and development. Coupled with the advice given by Ted Hughes, I feel that I was given 'permission' to create, without unnecessary restraint, a piece of writing which is a conveyance of my inner feelings. I have started on a journey that I hope will never end.

**Bibliography (to Appendix 6 Poetry Portfolio):**

Molly Holden, *To Make Me Grieve*. (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd, 1968)

Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the Making. A handbook for Writing and Teaching* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn  
(London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2008)

A.A. Milne, *The Christopher Robin Verses* (London: Methuen, 1932)

Andrew Motion, *Selected Poems 1976-1997* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1998)

Christopher Reid, *Song of Lunch*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2010)

## **Appendix 7: Creative Writing in the Classroom Module Guide**



School of Arts and Social Sciences

Department of Humanities

Module Guide

### ***Creative Writing in the Classroom***

2010-2011

Module Code: EL0747

Level: 7

Duration: Semester Long

Credit Points: 60

## **Creative Writing in the Classroom**

### **Synopsis**

This module offers practising primary and secondary teachers the opportunity to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of approaches to creative writing and the delivery of creative writing in the classroom. Seminars will allow students to explore and gain confidence in using a range of creative writing techniques and to reflect on both their own writing and their approach to the teaching of creative writing. The overall emphasis is on helping students to develop their own writing and a pedagogy that supports their teaching of creative writing.

### **Aims**

To provide students with the experience of producing their own creative writing.

To enable students to reflect on how this experience will impact on their pedagogy.

To equip students with a range of skills, knowledge and understanding that will enhance their teaching of creative writing.

### **Learning Outcomes**

The ability to:

Demonstrate an understanding of the processes involved in developing their own creative writing.

Reflect critically on their own writing practice and on its impact on their pedagogy.

Demonstrate that they are able to use their experience of writing to plan, implement and critically evaluate their own teaching of creative writing.

### **Outline Syllabus**

This module is taught through seminars, supplemented by a one- to-one tutorial during the semester. In the seminars students will write regularly in response to exercises designed to stimulate and teach the craft of writing and will offer feedback on the writing of other students. In seminars pedagogic practice will be problematised and evaluated in the context of peer and tutor-led discussion.

In addition to developing and learning in these contact hours, students will be expected to undertake directed learning and independent learning.

Students will also work with a poet mentor within their own schools during the summer term, developing strategies to deliver creative writing teaching in the classroom and to disseminate their teaching practise across the school.

## Teaching Schedule

Seminars will take place in Lipman Building Room 033.

### **Seminar 1 Tuesday 1 February 4 pm – 6.30 pm** – Introductory session

**4 pm – 5.30 pm** Sound: alliteration, assonance, rhyme and half rhyme

Introduction to Required Reading 1: Introduction (p 11-13) and 'Words and Experience' (p 118- 124) from *Poetry in the Making*, by Ted Hughes (Hughes, 1967)

**5.30 – 6.30 pm** Final hour spent on induction to the university (This will take place in Room 107 in Squires Building.)

### **Seminar 2 Tuesday 15 February 4 pm – 6.30 pm**

Discussion on classroom practice arising from previous session.

Visualisation, the development poetry drawn from prose.

Discussion on Required Reading 1. Introduction to Required Reading 1: 'Creativity, uncertainty and discomfort: teachers as writers,' by Teresa Cremin

### **Seminar 3 Tuesday 1 March 4 pm – 6.30 pm**

Discussion on classroom practice following previous session.

Senses and stories: the use of the sense in writing.

Discussion on Required Reading 2.

Introduction to Required Reading 3: Chapter Two – 'Folk Pedagogy' from *The Culture of Education* by Jerome Bruner

### **Seminar 4 Tuesday 15 March 4 pm – 6.30 pm**

Discussion on classroom practice following previous session.

Line Breaks – working from an example poem.

Writing own free verse poem.

Discussion on Required Reading 3.

### **Seminar 5 Tuesday 29 March 4 pm – 6.30 pm**

Discussion on classroom practice following previous session.

Vantage point: Observation; Automatic writing; Using the 'I' persona

### **Seminar 6 Tuesday 12 April 4 pm – 6.30 pm**

Discussion on classroom practice following previous session

kennings, metaphor, Anglo-Saxon poetry, riddles

### **Mentoring Planning Session**

**Tuesday 10 May 4pm – 6.30 pm** Meeting with all teachers on the course and mentor poets to plan their 3 days in school during the Summer Term.

### **Tutorials**

You will have one tutorial during the semester to discuss your poetry with a tutor. Tutorials are usually 20—30 minutes. Tutorial times will be announced during the semester.

Any work to be discussed during a tutorial needs to be submitted to your tutor a **week in advance** (to give us time to read everything.) Please make sure that the amount of material you are submitting is reasonable. **All work should be typed or word-processed. It should be in 12pt type, single-spaced, with adequate margins. Put your name on the front and remember to number your pages.**

### **Mentoring**

You will be allocated a professional poet who will work with you in your school to support you in your own writing and in the teaching of creative writing during the Summer term. The poet will also support you to disseminate the learning from the course amongst your colleagues. The poet will be based in your school for up to 15 hours. A total of 1.5 hours can be used as tutorial time for your own poetry. We have identified one extra session on Tuesday 10 May at 4pm when all participants on the course will come together with the mentor poets to plan the poet's time in your school. All the poets will be familiar with the course you have undertaken and each poet will sit in on at least one of the seminars.

### **Funding**

The development of this course has come out of a national project called Well Versed, which aims to promote poetry amongst young people. Well Versed is funded by Arts Council England's Thrive programme with Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE) as the



national partner. The project is taking place in three regions, the West Midlands, the East and the North East. New Writing North is running the North East programme. This course is delivered by Northumbria University in partnership with New Writing North.

### Reading List

Alexander, R. (2004). "Still no pedagogy? Principle, pragmatism and compliance in primary education." *Cambridge Journal of Education* **34**(1): 7 - 33.

Astley, Neil (ed) (2003) *Staying Alive: Real poems for Unreal Times*. Bloodaxe.

Bruner, J. (1996). *The Culture of Education*. London, Harvard University Press.

Cremin, T (2006) "Creativity, uncertainty and discomfort: teachers as writers." *Cambridge Journal of Education* **36**(3): 415-433

Domaille, K. and J. Edwards (2006). "Partnerships for learning: extending knowledge and understanding of creative writing processes in the ITT year." *English in Education* **40**(2): 71-84

Dymoke, S. (2001). "Taking Poetry off its Pedestal: The Place of Poetry Writing in an Assessment-Driven Curriculum." *English in Education* **35**(3): 32-41.

Flynn, N. (2007). "What do effective teachers of literacy do? Subject knowledge and pedagogical choices for literacy." *Literacy* **41**(3): 137-146.

Freire, P. (1985). *The Politics of Education*. London, Macmillan.

Grainger, T. (2005). "Teachers as writers: learning together." *English in Education* **39**(1): 75-87.

Hughes, T. (1967) *Poetry in the Making*. London: Faber and Faber Limited.

OFSTED (2007) *Poetry in Schools* [Online]. Available at: [http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/English/Poetry-in-schools/\(language\)/eng-GB](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/English/Poetry-in-schools/(language)/eng-GB) London.

Spiro, J. (2007). "Teaching poetry: writing poetry - teaching as a writer." *English in Education* **41**(3): 78-93.

Wilson, A. (2001). "Brownjohn, Hughes, Pirrie, and Rosen: What Rhymes with Oral Writing?" *English in Education* **35**(2): 2-11.

Wilson, A. (2007). "Finding a voice? Do literary forms work creatively in teaching poetry writing?" *Cambridge Journal of Education* **37**(3): 441 - 457.

Yates, C. (2007). "Writing like writers in the classroom: free writing and formal constraint." *English in Education* **41**(3): 6-19.

## ASSESSMENT

There are three assignments for this module:

**A) Poetry** (formative assessment—you will receive written feedback on this work but will not be given a grade), due **Tuesday 7 June 2011**

**B) Portfolio of poetry and commentary** (summative assessment, 30%) due **Tuesday 21 September 2011**

**C) Essay** (summative assessment, 70%), due **Tuesday 21 September 2011**.

See below for further details.

### Submission of Assignments

**Hand-in:** Your work is to be submitted to SASC office, ground floor, Squires Building.

**A) Poetry due** by 4pm **Tuesday 7 June 2011. Submit TWO copies of your poetry.**

**Return Date:** Your work should be available for collection from SASC on **Tuesday 21 June**. If it becomes necessary to change this date you will be notified in advance by email. An email from SASC will confirm from what time your work will be ready for collection on the day.

**B) Portfolio due** by 4pm **Tuesday 21 September 2011. Submit TWO copies of your portfolio. Return Date:** Portfolios should be available for collection from

SASC on **Tuesday 18 October**. If it becomes necessary to change this date you will be notified in advance by email. An email from SASC will confirm from what time your work will be ready for collection on the day.

**C) Essay due** by 4pm **Tuesday 21 September 2011. Submit TWO copies of your essay. Return Date:** Essays should be available for collection from SASC on

**Tuesday 18 October**. If it becomes necessary to change this date you will be notified in advance by email. An email from SASC will confirm from what time your work will be ready for collection on the day.

SASC have advised that their opening hours are as follows:

<b>Term Time</b>	<b>Vacation Time</b>
Monday – Thursday	Monday - Thursday
8.45 – 18.15 hours	8.45 – 17.00 hours
Friday	Friday
8.45 – 16.00 hours	8.45 – 16.00 hours

**A) Poetry. 90 lines of your own poetry**, developed from exercises given in the seminars. This is formative assessment, which means you will be given written feedback but not a mark that will contribute to your final grade. TWO copies to be submitted.

**B) Portfolio. 90 lines of your own poetry**, developed from exercises given in the seminars (this can be the poetry submitted in A), **AND a 1,000 word commentary.**

You must submit TWO separate but IDENTICAL portfolios, each including the poetry and the commentary. Each copy should be held together securely in some way and, of course, all pages must be numbered. Put your name, module title and code, on a title page.

#### **Guidelines for the 1,000 word commentary.**

The Commentary is a discussion of the poetry you have submitted and the process of writing that poetry. In your Commentary you should address the following:

- The way in which reading has informed your poetry in terms of both content and craft.
- The aims of your writing and the extent to which you feel the finished work achieves or confounds these ambitions.
- What you have learned about writing poetry in producing the poems for the portfolio.
- You should identify what you feel to be the weaknesses, and strengths, of your work and how you have attempted to engage with the elements of craft and technique discussed in the module.
- Using technical vocabulary appropriate to the genre you should discuss how you have approached editing and redrafting, including how any feedback you have received has affected the editing process.

In seminars you will be told about the correct layout of poetry. For the layout of your Commentary see the section below on the presentation of written work. Your commentary **must** include a bibliography and footnotes (or endnotes.) The footnotes, but not the bibliography, make up part of the final word count.

#### **C) Essay**

A 2,500-3,000 word essay reflecting on how the experience of writing the poetry for the Portfolio has affected your pedagogic practice.

The essay will respond to the following:

***'If teachers engage as writers, taking part in the creative process of composing, they arguably will be in a stronger position to develop the creative voice of the child.'***

(From T, Cremin (2006). 'Creativity, uncertainty and discomfort: teachers as writers.' *Cambridge Journal of Education*, **36**(3): 415 - 433.)

**Reflecting on your own experience of both practising and teaching creative writing, and drawing on the literature that you have read for this module, discuss the theory that taking part in the creative process strengthens teachers' practice in the teaching of creative writing.**

This is a reflective essay and it is important that your response draws on your own experience of creative writing as encountered on the Creative Writing in the Classroom module. You should draw on your experience of being taught how to write poetry in the seminars, and your experience of working with a poet mentor. You should also demonstrate your understanding of the theoretical frameworks discussed in the literature you have read and explain how you would implement what you have learnt in your own teaching practice.

Your essay **must** include a bibliography (this is not counted in the final word count) and footnotes (or endnotes), which are included in the final word count. For the correct layout of bibliographies and footnotes see the section below.

### **Presentation of written work**

It is important that your written work should be presented properly. You will be taught the correct layout of poetry in the seminars. For the Commentary and Essay please see the Presentation of Written Work Guide, which is on Blackboard. The paragraphs below are from this Guide, which also includes advice on correct referencing of your work—the presentation of bibliographies and footnotes. The Presentation of Written Work Guide follows the MHRA style for referencing. You may either follow this style, as outlined in the Guide, OR the Harvard-based style outlined in the University's 'Cite Them Right' guide:

<http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/central/library/resources/referencing/cite/>

It is your choice which guide you follow. If you use 'Cite Them Right' we suggest that you also look at the general advice offered in the Guide on Blackboard.

### **Writing an Academic Essay**

The purpose of your essay is to present an argument, not to amass information. It should be clear, relevant and concise. You must give evidence to support your case, but avoid the temptation to include everything you know.

Be aware that some of your grade is apportioned to quality of presentation, appropriate use of secondary sources, correct referencing and bibliography. Similarly, your writing skills will be assessed in accordance with your use of grammar, punctuation, and your ability to organise your thoughts into a coherent argument. **Good presentation is essential; you will be penalized for failing to follow the guidelines laid out in the following pages.**

- ❖ Essays must be **typed** on **one side of white A4** paper using a 4cm margin.
- ❖ Essays must be **double spaced**.

- ❖ The print should be **size 12** and in **Times New Roman** or **Arial**.
- ❖ Each page should be **numbered**, and pagination should continue throughout in one numbering sequence.
- ❖ Essays must be **stapled** together prior to submission.
- ❖ The first line of every **new paragraph** should be **indented**. You do not need to leave a line space between paragraphs.
- ❖ The word count of your essay should be indicated at the end of your essay. Your word count includes quotations from texts, footnotes, any endnotes, and bibliography.

As the SASC (Student Advice and Support Centre) is responsible for processing large numbers of essays at any one time, there is no absolute guarantee that your work will not go astray. **For this reason, you MUST ALWAYS keep a spare hard copy of your assignment, as well as a back-up copy in a safe electronic format, and be able to submit these for marking if asked for them.**

### **Assessment Criteria**

The aim of assessment is to encourage and test students' engagement with the subject matter of the module, their intellectual and creative sophistication, and their capacity for work. Assessment of the quality of a piece of writing must have about it some flexibility and cannot simply be reduced to a set checklist. At the same time, however, it is necessary to provide a general outline of the criteria used in awarding marks. The criteria outlined below describe some of the features which should characterise the various categories of marks, and are generated by the requirements of an academic Post Graduate Certificate.

### **Poetry**

#### **Distinction 70% and above**

Excellent work which demonstrates considerable sophistication and is an outstanding achievement. Writing in this category is exciting, ambitious, risk taking. It is likely to demonstrate an awareness of the contemporary literary landscape and its own place within that landscape. It shows a thorough understanding of craft and the technical demands of the chosen genre; an appropriate match of subject and form; and evidence of thorough drafting and redrafting. The writer has developed their own literary voice, producing work which is, in the opinion of the examiners, of publishable quality in a journal of high standing, or by a reputable publishing house. (This is not to say, however, that such a publication is guaranteed!)

**Commendation 60-69%**

A mark in this category indicates very good work and is a considerable achievement. The writing will demonstrate a good use of the chosen form and evidence of successful drafting and redrafting. The redrafting process will demonstrate an ability to respond constructively to criticism from other readers. There will be evidence of the growing strength of the writer, their increasing ability to hold an audience's interest, and a growing confidence in taking risks. Overall, writing in this category will engage the reader's interest. A mark in the higher range of this bracket will indicate work that is, in the examiners' opinion, of potentially publishable quality (although in its current form it is not yet of that standard).

**Pass 50-59%**

Writing in this category is satisfactory and provides evidence of appropriate knowledge and skills for a Post Graduate Certificate. It will demonstrate an understanding of the chosen form that is sometimes matched by technical ability, and there will be evidence of preparation and redrafting. It will have the potential to engage the reader.

**Fail 49% and below**

Writing in this category does not provide evidence of the knowledge and skills appropriate for a Post Graduate Certificate. It might demonstrate a lack of engagement with the programme or a lack of understanding of what it is that makes a piece of writing readable. It is likely to show little sign of useful redrafting or technical ability. It might demonstrate a failure to understand what will make good subject matter, or could fall seriously short of the word length required for the project.

A mark of 0 should be applied to work not submitted OR work showing evidence of serious academic misconduct (subject to regulations in ARNA Appendix 1) OR work showing no evidence of the knowledge, understanding or skills appropriate to the level, where none of the module's learning outcomes are met.

**Essays****Distinction 70% and over**

- Full understanding of the main concepts and theories related to the topic without misunderstanding, and integration of this understanding into a coherent framework.
- The student has drawn on the major sources related to the topic and has in addition located and referred to other relevant sources. S/he has developed a critical understanding of them, and has integrated the ideas from this material into a coherent, analytical framework.
- Extended critical discussion of most of the issues relevant to the topic; these are brought together into a coherent framework, and there is cogent reference to potential and actual application of concepts in the student's professional context.

- Sophisticated engagement with relevant critical and theoretical debates, demonstrating extensive independent research and own judgement.
- The implications of theory for practice are thoughtfully discussed and their limitations specified.
- Well-structured, sustained and persuasive argument.
- May display elements of originality.
- Extremely well written and presented.
- Exemplary referencing and bibliography.

### **Commendation 60-69%**

- Full understanding of the main concepts and theories related to the topic without misunderstanding.
- The student has drawn on the key sources relevant to the topic, and has integrated the key ideas from these sources into a coherent analytical framework, showing a reasonable degree of critical understanding.
- Critical discussion of most of the issues relevant to the topic; these are brought together into a coherent framework, and there is some reference to potential and actual application of concepts in the student's professional context.
- Very good engagement with relevant critical and theoretical debates, demonstrating independent thinking and research.
- The main implications of theory for practice are outlined and their limitations specified.
- Well-structured and coherent argument.
- Well written and presented.
- Accurate references and bibliography.

### **Pass 50-59%**

- General understanding of the main concepts and theories related to the topic, although this may be relatively superficial, and/or there may be some misunderstanding

- The student is familiar with some of the sources relevant to the topic, and has been able to use these sources appropriately, though the range may be limited. There is, however, little evidence of a critical understanding of the sources.
- Critical discussion of most of the issues relevant to the topic, although there may be a lack of integration of issues. There is some reference to potential and actual application of concepts in the student's professional context.
- Adequate engagement with relevant critical and theoretical debates, demonstrating some independent thinking and research
- Some implications of theory for practice are outlined
- Clear argument, although it may not always be fully sustained and carried through
- Clearly written and presented, although some stylistic errors may remain
- Appropriate references, with occasional mistakes in bibliographical presentation

**Fail 49% and below.**

- Little or no understanding of the main concepts and theories related to the topic, and/or the theories and concepts are handled in a way that demonstrates considerable misunderstanding or omission
- There is little or no evidence of familiarity with the key sources for the topic and/or those sources which are used are largely used irrelevantly or with misunderstanding.
- There is little or no critical discussion of the issues relevant to the topic. Reference to potential and actual application of concepts may be absent, or consist of largely descriptive and anecdotal content and/or unsupported assertions and unquestioned assumptions.
- Inadequate engagement with relevant critical and theoretical debates, with little or no evidence of independent thinking and research
- Failure to identify implications of theory for practice
- Muddled argument, failing to make a clear case
- Work is not well written or clear, containing grammatical, stylistic and/or typographical errors
- Inadequate references and bibliography



