PART
2

Writers

develop creative skills … as they innovate and make meaning

21st century skillset: risk-taking, imagination, innovation

Writing is different for every person. For me, it came out of the trauma of growing up in a post-war Hungarian refugee family, fraught with conflict over resettlement, war, loss, religion, migration, yet filled with rebuilding family, community, and driven by hope for the future. Writing nursed me through those dark times, laughed with me during the funny times, and held me when I was afraid. Everyone has their own story, facing challenges and potholes, but is also filled with ways to navigate them. In our lives we search for meaningful relationships, in a world facing major issues from climate change to the rise of right-wing fascism. Writing unlocks personal creativity and critical thinking to make sense of it all. Writing sucks you in emotionally, physically and intellectually, exercising demons, releasing angels. It's scary, exhilarating, frustrating. I often don't want to go there, because writing is hard. I love it. I hate it. I do it because it releases endorphins. I do it, like a jogger running through hazards, for that high. I'm always looking for that thrill. It's so sweet when the words flow and suddenly there's that special resonance. That special insight.

I've always wanted to be at the bottom of those desk calendars with a quote of the day. A quote of wisdom. I wrote this sentence in my novel, *The cave*: 'War is not brave, but men can be brave in war and in life.' I savour these words and understand the significance of being a writer.

Susanne Gervay

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Writing is creativity and creative thinking at its best. In a supportive writing environment, writers put their vulnerability on the line, step into a void and come face to face with a blank screen or empty piece of paper. Everything from that point on is a creation born out of and informed by experiences, interactions, reading … by life. The writer, as opposed to the reader, provides everything. Every mark carries meaning. How important it is to instil the love of writing, so that all students can tap into and find the hidden potential of their own creative thinking.

> Most of the things that are interesting, important, and human are the results of creativity. When we are involved in [creativity], we feel that we are living more fully than during the rest of life.
>
> *(Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 78)*

Writers scour the writing of others to feed their passion. They find inspiration wherever they turn their attention – in conversations overheard on the train, on billboards, in Facebook comments and on ice-cream wrappers. They use the work of other authors to refine their ideas, techniques and styles. And, in this day and age, texts are easily added to, reworked and remixed; as Burnett and Merchant (2018) say, it is the merging of consumption and production. In this day and age, children have rich opportunities to generate, without much effort, new possibilities designed to reach new audiences.

According to Kampylis and Berki (2014, p. 6), creative thinking is the 'thinking that enables students to apply their imagination to generating ideas, questions and hypotheses, experimenting with alternatives and to evaluating their own and their peers' ideas, final products and processes'. Creativity, on the other hand, focuses on the process of having original ideas that have value. It is the production of ideas that are not just novel but simultaneously useful (Amabile, 1983, 1996).

The literature broadly defines three dimensions of creativity: overall value, originality and craftsmanship (Csikszentmihalyi & Getzels, 1971; Grainger et al, 2005). Creativity does not take place in the abstract. Learners are creative in something, be it music, cooking, engineering or art.

As learners go through the creative process, they move from a generative state (exploration, experimentation, discovery) to an evaluative one (self-reflection, self-criticism). These two states interweave, and learners shift back and forth between them. Any pending outcome results from the synergy created between the two.

Inherent trait or learned skill?

While some say 'I haven't got a creative bone in my body' or 'My sister got all the creativity in my family', 'It stopped with my grandfather', researchers debate whether creativity is about genes and chromosomes, or results from a combination of many factors, including genetics, being human, intentional application and environmental influences. Irrespective of the argument, most agree that creativity can be learned and cultivated through effort, strategies and help from others. As Robinson (2001, p. 12) points out, 'we all have creative abilities and we use them differently'.

We all have the capacity to be creative, 'to generate novel, clever, or ingenious products, solutions, and techniques – if that capacity is developed' (Sternberg, 2006). We have creative attributes that we call on to solve life's problems and make decisions. While we may not be creative to the extent of Mozart or Einstein, we can still conceive solutions to problems, explore alternative possibilities, visualise, analogise and imagine. In classrooms every day, children are encouraged to think creatively: they write imaginary texts around unicorns living in rainbow forests; they describe pups as 'puffs of tumbleweed'; they create characters and imaginary settings with portals, and solve self-generated and perplexing problems in their writing.

Risk-taking

Creative thinking and creativity imply doing something differently, where the outcome is not already guaranteed or known – it means taking a risk. Creative people are compelled to take risks and often push the boundaries of their perceived limits (Perkins, 1991).

Creative people enjoy the aesthetic challenge (intrinsic reward) rather than the material gain (extrinsic reward). They are intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated. Sawyer et al (2003) say that intrinsic, task-focused motivation is essential to creativity. In classrooms where children are fully engaged in a community of writers, they enthusiastically read their writing to peers, they regularly publish and they describe passionately their latest stories to anyone who listens. Teacher-assigned stickers pale into insignificance in such classrooms. The children do truly creative work in writing because they love what they do and they focus on the work rather than the potential rewards (Amabile, 1983).

Creativity can be learned. It flourishes when there is a systematic strategy to promote it. For this reason, Robinson (2001, p. 117) says it is critical that creativity is forward and centre on teaching agendas:

> If we fail to promote a full sense of people's abilities through education and training, some, perhaps most, will never discover what their real capacities are. To that extent they do not really know who they are or what they might become. Now, more than ever, human communities depend on a diversity of talents not on a singular conception of ability. When we talk of realising our potential, we should aim to do so in both senses of the word. We need to understand its range and variety. We also need to turn it into reality. *This is why creativity should be centre stage in school, work and life*. (My emphasis)

Robinson (2001) encourages teachers to be creative. He says that while talents, aptitudes, interests and temperaments are as diverse as the people to whom they belong, it is possible to develop creativity through application and experience. This is all the more reason for teachers to take risks too and be writers. Writing alongside their students, as well as conferencing and writing for them, not only helps students to become writers, it builds teachers' creativity and confidence through application and experience.

> The future is not some place we are going to but one we are creating.
> The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.
>
> ***John Schaar*** *political scientist*

Risk-taking has vulnerability attached. Creative ideas are often rejected, especially when the creative innovator stands up to vested interests and defies the crowd (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). In such circumstances, hearing feedback constructively takes confidence and a high degree of self-assurance. It is essential then that writers, throughout the creative process, keep an open mind and act on feedback that contributes to their creations.

Culture

Creativity is firmly grounded in culture and, in turn, it has a profound impact on culture itself (Rudowicz, 2003). When classrooms are created to be communities of writers, the culture of the class changes. Students develop 'habits of mind' that reflect the thinking of the community. They want to write, they want to belong. They see themselves as creators, not as regurgitators of content or filler-inners of forms and blackline masters. The creative process is cyclic because creativity is intimately connected to the cultural environment in which the individual is embedded (Chiu & Kwan, 2010; De Dreu, 2010; Leung & Morris, 2010).

Creativity is not an individual pursuit. It arises out of interactions with the ideas and achievements of others, and it prospers in environments that favour the flow of ideas between people. In the case of writing, writers do not write in a vacuum. They seek ideas from other authors, crave feedback and value interactions about their work.

Creativity + writing ≠ 'anything goes'

Leftover remnants of the misinformed 1980s notion of creative writing as anything goes (free writing) have to be shut down. Thinking of creativity in writing as 'anything goes' is a misconception and extremely detrimental to the progress made in improving writing pedagogy. Writers work hard to master their craft, and they do not do it alone or without structures or systems to support their efforts. The structures or systems do not have to be lock step or artificially contrived. Such controlling structures do little to support creativity, but do a lot to shut down to the writer's verve, voice and thinking.

To some, it seems like a paradox. How do we give writers freedom to explore their creative thinking and at the same time apply structures and systems? Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels (1971) explain that even in play students abide by rules and impose structures. Robinson (2001) adds some clarity when he explains that just as play depends on 'rules' in order to liberate inventiveness, creative improvisation obeys certain kinds of regularities in making sense of experience. To be creative in any domain, learners must understand how the domain functions. It's not possible to be creative in an unfamiliar domain. In the world of writing, writers must be steeped in the tradition – texts of all shapes and sizes are powerful demonstrations of how the domain works.

Bourdieu (1977) offers another explanation with the introduction of 'regulated improvisations'. Learners, he says, cultivate a 'habitus', a way of being that is nurtured by and results in regulated improvisations. Writers are regulated by the constraints that make a text meaningful to the reader. They are also constrained by purpose and they write with a particular audience in mind. Learners become habituated by developing intimate knowledge of how writers write through listening with a writer's ear, attuned to the magic of words, reading like a writer, reading quality literature across a range of genres, paying particular attention to what authors do and listening to the feedback of their audience.

If we go down the path of Csikszentmihalyi, Robinson and Bourdieu, promoting creativity and creative thinking is not a laissez faire free-for-all. Promoting creativity and creative thinking in children's writing comes about when teachers are writers who understand the craft.

Fearlessness

When children start out as writers, they are fearless. Unless they have been convinced that writing needs to be perfect and they should not try to write words that they can't spell (the death knell for beginning writers). Young writers play in the world of writing just as they play in the world of paint and paintbrushes,

sand and water. Their approximations carry significance and they enthusiastically share their writing with all those who take time to listen. They write for the sake of writing. In these early stages, even when their best attempts resemble 'chicken scratchings', they are proud of their efforts. Their efforts are significant and should be taken seriously. However meagre these initial attempts at writing may appear, they are a legitimate, valuable form of self-expression. Judgement of any kind is not necessary. It is creativity as it should be.

In these early stages, children write for themselves in the present moment. Tomorrow is another day and they will have most likely forgotten what they wrote about yesterday. They happily pursue other topics. As Newkirk and Kittle (2013, p. 48) point out, 'Egocentricity has its own protective mask which is shed at the end of the first formal year of school'. The protective mask scaffolds young children's risk-taking in writing and they write what they want to say, even with limited mastery of sound–symbol relationships.

When fear slips in, creativity diminishes, or at the very least is disrupted. Bohm (1996, p. 5) highlights the difference between the 'creatively fertile' and the 'creatively withered mind':

> One thing that prevents us from thus giving primary emphasis to the perception of what is new and different is that we are afraid to make mistakes … If one will not try anything until he is assured that he will not make a mistake in whatever he does, he will never be able to learn anything new at all. And this is more or less the state in which most people are.

Bohm goes on to say that the fear of making a mistake then becomes habitual and the best that 'fearful' learners can hope for is mediocrity. Sternberg (2003) adds that creativity is as much a decision about an attitude to life as it is a matter of ability. He claims that as we age, creative potential is suppressed by society and in its place we are left with intellectual conformity. It begs the question, when did you last write something that made you feel proud?

By sheer necessity, creative people have to be fearless. They exhibit talent for converting setbacks, misadventures and mistakes into success – they turn lemons into lemonade. Creativity researchers concur. A poll consisting of 143 creativity researchers agreed that this trait was the number one quality in creative achievement (Dweck, 2008).

Imagination

Thinking and imagination go hand in hand. Spencer (2003) claims it is impossible to keep thinking and imagination apart, especially in the 'firstness' of children's early encounters, when they are trying to make sense of the world.

Robinson (2001) defines creativity as 'applied imagination'. He points out that the difference between imagination and creativity lies in its application. With creativity, the learner chooses to do something in a deliberate way. With imagination there is no compulsion to do anything. Sitting on the lounge imagining means you don't act on that trip to the wilds of Africa, even though it looks tempting. With imagination, outcomes remain private; this is not so with creativity, where there is an outcome of value.

Rorty (1999) wrote, 'Human imagination has no limits'. We are all born with imaginations. Harnessing the imagination through writing is for some the biggest challenge. Imagination is at the heart of the writing process and it can't be fully accounted for in words. As you read 'The land of Nod' on the following page, your imagination takes over and images begin to materialise that take you beyond the words you're reading.

The land of Nod

From breakfast on through all the day
At home among my friends I stay,
But every night I go abroad
Afar into the land of Nod.
All by myself I have to go,
With none to tell me what to do—
All alone beside the streams
And up the mountain-sides of dreams.
The strangest things are there for me,
Both things to eat and things to see,
And many frightening sights abroad
Till morning in the land of Nod.
Try as I like to find the way,
I never can get back by day,
Nor can remember plain and clear
The curious music that I hear.

R. L. Stevenson

Good writers imagine all kinds of things to do with texts. They are wired to be on the lookout, much like forensic scientists. Their imaginations are fuelled by writer's craft. They want to know what this writer did to have this affect, why these words were used this way, why the print is written on an angle. Writer's craft brings life to their imaginative flair. They read like writers and garner ideas over time. Writers collect ideas to spark their imagination as an interior designer collects fabric swatches to create beautiful homes. Fletcher (1996, p. 2) describes his writer's notebook not as a catalogue but as a ditch that fills up with all sorts of fascinating creatures: 'If you dig it, they will come. You'll be amazed who you will catch there.'

Award-winning and best-selling writers describe their perceptions of imagination and how it helps their writing in different ways. In *Light the dark* (Fassler, 2017, p. 182), Angela Fluornoy, US author of *The Turner house*, concedes that when she focuses on doing the work every day, the imagination part takes care of itself: 'The beautiful thing about imagination is how it keeps opening doors for your characters to walk through. You'll be surprised – they'll walk through these doors, if you free yourself to allow that to happen.' On the other hand, in *The writer's room* (Wood, 2016, Kindle location 1245), New Zealand author Lloyd Jones describes his imaginative process as emergent: '... as you're putting words down, more clarity is achieved. So you're writing something that's going to deliver you somewhere, rather than writing about something.'

Dreams and imagination

While there is little research connecting the power of imagining that occurs through dreams to writing, it is a common connection made by Epel (1994). In her book *Writers dreaming*, Epel explores the connections that award-winning writers make between dreams, imagination and writing. Richard Bach,

for example, wrote the first few chapters of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* after hearing the title spoken in a dream. Eight years later, after Bach dreamed about a seagull, he completed his famous novella. Mary Shelley closed her eyes to be confronted by a horrific mental image that became the inspiration for *Frankenstein*.

Maurice Sendak, the US illustrator and author of *Where the wild things are*, said that for him dreams raised the emotional level of what he was doing and added colour or provided counterpoint to his work; a 'symphonic accompaniment' is what he called it. US short story writer Andre Dubus (Fassler, 2017) explained that his stories came from the same place as his dreams. He explained that as humans we share a desire to step into someone else's dream world – he called it a universal impulse and this, he said, is the basis of making fiction.

Play and imagination

Continuity is at the heart of play and through play children connect aspects of their lives – home, school and the wider world. Writing follows a similar path. When children write, they write about what they know and what is of interest to them. In socio-dramatic play, children role-play and act out various experiences they may have had, or situations that interest them. In the context of both play and writing, children gain new insights and generate fresh connections. Play and writing provide children with a foundation to build on what they already know.

Play links concepts and skills. It is a creative process that encourages the integration of ideas, different learning domains, processes and materials. Children learn to think autonomously, apply self-discipline, follow directions and rules, collaborate and enhance decision-making skills (Prairie, 2013; Bodrova, 2008; Stephens, 2009). In playful situations, they develop language and communication skills.

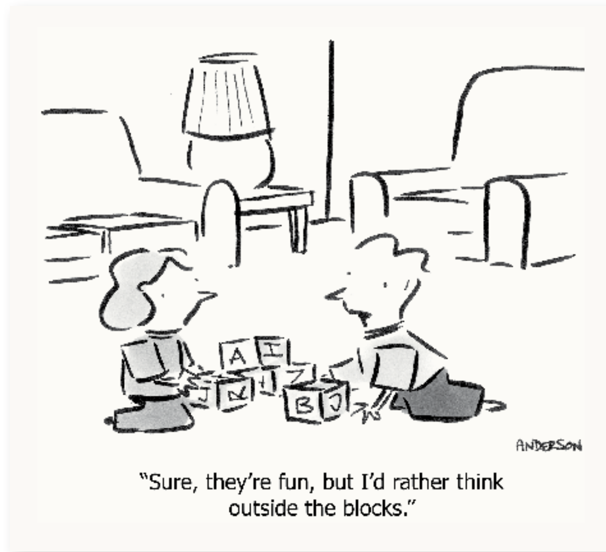
Children's curious and exploratory natures are fully activated in play. Exploring their imaginations, playing with language, using ICT and multimodal applications, engaging in physical play, and exploring ideas and feelings with others contributes significantly to their capacities for storytelling and their writing potential. Play engages all the senses and, as Claxton (2006) points out, imaginative activity draws on a more varied range of human functioning than linear, logical and rational patterns of behaviour.

According to Grainger et al (2005, p. ix), 'Just as play depends on "rules" in order to liberate inventiveness, creative improvisation obeys certain kinds of regularities in making sense of experience'. When children interact through play they establish a relatively even distribution of power. Together, they establish the rules of the game (for example, 'Let's give the baby a bath'; 'We are building a tower up to the top of the desk'; 'You be the elephant and I will be Piggie'). From approximately four and a half years old, children engage in cooperative play where they work together to achieve a common goal. It is at this time that they learn to collaborate and negotiate.

Innovation

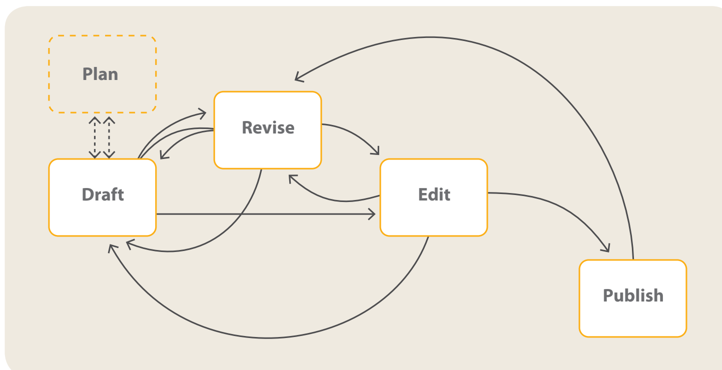
The ability to learn or do something new, to think outside the box and innovate, depends on a state of mind. It does not depend on special talents, nor is innovation restricted to specific disciplines, such as science or art (Bohm, 1996). By 'state on mind', Bohm means passion and desire to seek out new ideas. Innovation takes time and a concerted effort. The same sort of time and effort is required when children are learning to walk and talk.

Writing itself is an innovative process. Ideas are conceived and massaged through a process to production. The writer at various stages decides what to keep, discard or rewrite. It takes equanimity and detachment to make the call. Young children have difficulty discarding anything and often insist on publishing everything they write.



Like any innovation, writing goes through a process to completion. Not all writing is completed; not all innovations see the light of day. Good writing happens at the end of a process of revision, failure and misdirection. It takes willpower, determination and commitment to stay the distance. The process of refinement (rewrite, revise, rewrite, discard, rewrite) is convoluted and at times frustrating. While professional writers have unique writing processes, there are similarities in the stages that a piece of writing goes through.

Figure 2.1 The writing process



Writers differ in the way they manage the sequence of tasks required to produce a text. While the process is often represented as a linear sequence of tasks (draft, revise, edit, publish), in reality it is a recursive or nonlinear process. Recursive refers to the way in which writers are not locked into a set of rigid stages, and move back and forwards editing, revising, editing again. US author E. L. Doctorow, reported in *The New York Times* (20 October 1985), said: 'Planning to write is not writing. Outlining, researching, talking to people about what you're doing, none of that is writing. Writing is writing.' I agree. We can spend a disproportionate amount of time talking about writing and write very little.

Irish-Canadian playwright and novelist Emma Donahue describes the innovative nature of what it means to be a writer (Fassler, 2017, p. 236):

> For me, the writing is about the basic thrill of making something out of words that never existed before. That hasn't changed since I was a child. I really love writing. I am not one of those writers for whom it is a crippling task. Not that I always write beautifully, but I just love that business of dreaming up new things that never existed before and then endlessly fiddling with it.

As does author Lloyd Jones (Wood, 2016, Kindle location 1015):

> But I'm writing to find out the answer, to some extent. I'm writing to unlock something I don't know exists. It's in me somewhere, and I'm in search of it. I'm trying to find this thing. It's exciting when you surprise yourself.

Children need uninterrupted time to stretch their imaginations and write. That is how they come to innovate and develop flair. When children are given ownership and control of their writing along with flexible situations, innovation and enterprise follow (Craft & Jeffrey, 2004).

Curiosity

Students are born curious. They want to commune with the world around them, stop to smell a flower, throw stones into a puddle, recognise shapes in the clouds, taste lemons and feel the warmth of a kitten's breath. Provoking curiosity in classrooms is a driving force for exploration and imagination. When children are interested, they ask a lot of questions. They want to figure it out. William Faulkner (US writer and Nobel Prize laureate) emphasised why it is so important to develop curiosity:

> The most important thing is insight, that is to be – curious – to wonder, to mull, and to muse why it is that man does what he does, and if you have that, then I don't think the talent makes much difference, whether you've got it or not.
>
> *(University of Virginia, 1957)*

Writing is a form of voyeurism. The writer pokes and prods to find the germ of an idea. It takes curiosity to pry open the writer's eyes and mind to get the work done. Andre Dubus (Fassler, 2017) highlights the indisputable need to nurture curiosity. Nothing, he says, in a writer's toolbox supports the writer's efforts more than pondering, wondering, meddling, prying, snooping and probing into other's lives, other events, other experiences – other than writing. The toolbox remains locked if the writer is not genuinely curious about what he or she is writing about. It's easy to spot the child who is not curious about their topic choice – they are distracted, producing a minimum amount of writing, apathetic. Children do have topics about which they are all curious. Watching for the spark of light in the one-on-one conference is the key to tapping into the child's passion.

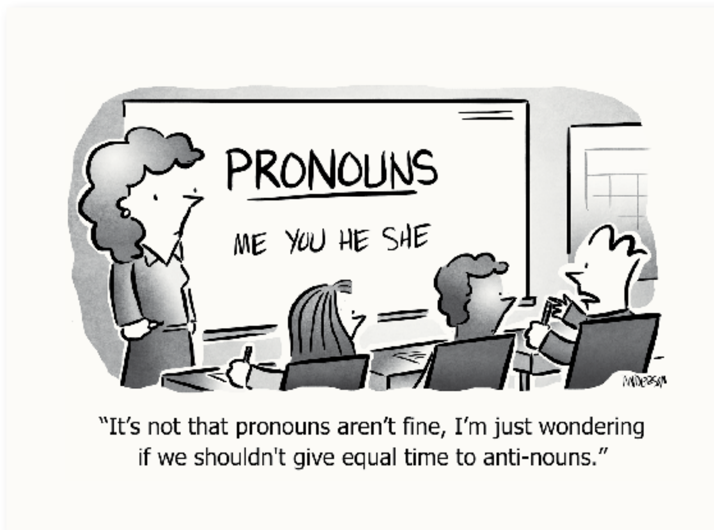
Effective teachers of writing model their own curiosity with words. Are you one of those teachers who are fascinated by the new words added to dictionaries each year? If you are, then you might know that in 2018 hundreds of new words were added, including:

- **nothingburger** – a person or thing of no importance
- **fam** – an abbreviation for 'family'
- **prepper** – a person who or thing which prepares or readies something.

The fact that Morris Gleitzman used terms such as 'lo', 'wrath', 'bountiful' and 'it came to pass' in *Grace*, stops you in your tracks; as does the fact that the Macquarie Dictionary's 2018 Word of the Year was 'Me Too', closely followed by 'deepfake' and 'single-use'. Such curiosity is a catalyst for your students to learn more about the wonders of words.

Harry, a Year 4 student, researched the longest word in the world to include in his humorous story about writing enough to fill two pages. Finding the longest word to fill up space was a creative choice:

Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis!! YAY!!! I've reached the



"It's not that pronouns aren't fine, I'm just wondering if we shouldn't give equal time to anti-nouns."

Elizabeth Gilbert (of *Eat, Pray, Love* fame) explains that her writing journey is fraught with drama-dramatic pursuit, full of catastrophes as well as disasters and emotion and attempts that fail. She claims that her writing life is now much smoother since acknowledging her 'struggles as curious, not tragic' (Fassler, 2017, p. 19).

Decision-making

When defined as the ability to select from alternatives after gathering information, weighing up alternatives and consequences, decision-making is at the core of writing. Writers are called upon to be creative decision-makers. They choose their purpose and how to craft their content, they decide how to present it and with whom to share. They make thousands of choices as small as discarding the word 'the' to deciding to kill off their main character (or not). They make choices whether to write fact or fiction: what to include, what to leave out, what to embellish, what to ignore and from whose perspective the text is told. They decide whose voices are prioritised.

Writers make decisions throughout the writing process, not just with content. It is a recursive process of generating new ideas, analysing them, evaluating them and testing them out on other people. In the process, writers switch between conventional and unconventional thinking.

For decision-making to be effective, students must take ownership and responsibility, and see relevance in their writing. Genuine creative choice must be at the heart of their writing. Choice 'transforms writing from an assigned task into a personal project' (Calkins, 1986). If students don't own their writing, then making decisions is easy – they just conform. Genuine choice leads to unique and unexpected ideas presented in the writing classroom. Craft and Jeffrey (2004) say that in flexible situations, when high value is placed on the children's ownership and control, innovation and enterprise are likely to follow. When writers make personal choices, connections between identity and self-expression are fostered. They want to write and believe they are writers with something to say. They write in a flurry and don't want to stop. Csiksentmihaly (2002) calls this the 'state of flow' and it is developed through creative play.

Children don't come with a repertoire of a hundred ways to write. Their reading helps, reading aloud to them helps, as does interacting with others, but planting seeds that are tailored to each child's interests and respecting their writing choices goes a long way in making a difference for each and every student. It supports and acknowledges their capacity to decide and create.

>>PROMOTING CREATIVE SKILLS IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

Creative classrooms are characterised by:

- **Routines and rituals – we benefit from the security of knowing what is happening next**

  Students know the daily routine, and because of that they are continuously preparing and ready for it. Creative learners don't push the pause button the moment a bell rings; they are always composing.

- **Minimal distractions – we can concentrate and engage fully**

  In many schools, bells, announcements and classroom visits have ceased during the daily literacy block (see below). Some teachers put signs on doors reading: 'Please do not disturb, writers at work'. Personal distractions such as sharpening pencils, rubbing out, watching the clock, getting words from walls and topics out of boxes are eliminated.

- **Self-directed exploration – teachers 'get out of the way'**

  Students take responsibility for their output and benefit from discovering their own solutions. Rescuing a student does little except reinforce the idea that 'you can't do it on your own', and hovering around desks, policing, cajoling or manipulating inhibits self-motivation and problem-solving. It just impedes the writer's progress.

- **Mental freedom – we don't get stuck in thinking**

  Students who think they need to know what to create before they've created it tend to produce very little. 'Letting go of thinking' means letting go of self-consciousness and trusting that you have the capacity to find a solution. It takes the courage of simply getting started.

Kathryn Harrison, US author of seven novels, two memoirs and two collections of personal essays, describes her writing process as one of 'groping' towards something and not even knowing what she is groping for until she has arrived (Fassler, 2017, p. 111). The following strategy can help students find their own way in a creative writing classroom.

Creative skills strategy: daily 110-minute literacy block

Hold tight to the expectation that everyone writes every day, that 'it's just what we do here'. Routines work. Children like the predictability and security of knowing the literacy block: they know that they write every day, and because of this they are on the lookout for things to write about.

The following literacy block framework ensures there is time for 20 minutes of sustained writing and 20 minutes of sustained reading each day. In addition, the literacy block includes a teacher read-aloud, whole class and small group sharing, teacher-led inquiry and literacy activities.

Table 2.1 Daily 110-minute literacy block

Component	Teacher read-aloud	Teacher-led inquiry	Independent writing	Whole-class sharing	Voluntary free reading	Whole-class sharing	Literacy activities	Group reports
Minutes	10	10	20	10	20	10	20	10
Parallel activity			Teacher conferences		Teacher conferences		Group reports	

Table 2.2 Literacy block in detail

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
Teacher read-aloud (10 minutes)	Teachers read quality literature, preferably a chapter book, to the whole class. The read-aloud provides the exemplary model of everything we want writers to achieve.
Teacher-led inquiry – connected to data and an identified learning outcome or content descriptor (10 minutes)	Teachers prepare a text as an exemplary model of a learning outcome, and lead the investigation or inquiry. Some options to try: • Co-constructed text with the class. For example, a story about 'the magpie problem', because your data tells you that your class has difficulty constructing narratives that have a beginning, middle and end. • Excerpt. For example, the description of Mr Twit from *The Twits*, because your data tells you that your class has difficulty adding detail. • Teacher-constructed text. For example, you construct a text of about four to six sentences leaving out the punctuation, because your data tells you that your class needs to pay more attention to the role of punctuation in texts. • Samples of student writing. Select these for exemplary purposes, not to be 'fixed up' or corrected with the class. For example, Chen wrote a factual text about snakes and it would be useful to examine the components of factual text; Aleesha has an exceptional introductory paragraph; Jack has written a screenplay. Throughout the term, make sure all children have their writing showcased for exemplary purposes. The class reads the text many times, so that it becomes predictable for students who need support with reading. It stays visible for the whole class to continue reading as they move into the writing session.

<table>
<tr><td>Independent writing
(20 minutes)</td><td>Children write independently every day. Extended time and regular opportunities allow writers to tune in to their inner voices. The inner voice does not get a chance to project itself when students are limited to spasmodic, short bursts of writing.
• From Foundation/Kindergarten, students write for a minimum of 20 minutes a day in their writer's notebook about topics of their choosing.
• For the first two weeks, Foundation/Kindergarten write for 10 minutes every day and build to 20 as quickly as possible. Some will 'chicken scratch' and some will write recognisable letters and narratives. They all write something to be celebrated.
• Writers simply need to get started for the magic to happen. Begin by writing the date – for some children that is enough. Tell students that they don't need to know what they're writing about; they just need to start. Say, 'Just start and the pencil will take you on the journey.'
• In the first week, teachers sit with the students, away from their desks, and write too. Once the routine is established and all children are writing, teachers conference with every child one-on-one during the week for around five minutes.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Whole-class sharing OR peer conference OR authoring circles
(10 minutes)</td><td>Teachers restate the learning outcomes and connect the earlier inquiry (associated with the learning outcome) to the students' writing. Share multiple responses and interpretations from the writing by:
• calling on children who can provide an example
• drawing children's names from a pop-stick container
• asking the children to turn and read to the person beside them
• arranging author circles consisting of three children who read and share their writing with each other
• holding author circles and peer conferences on a regular basis.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Voluntary free reading
(20 minutes)</td><td>Students read books of their choice for 20 minutes every day. Hold five-minute, one-on-one conferences with individual students during this period.
• Teachers check that the books chosen by each student are a 'right fit'. A risk is that some get stuck in their reading choices and don't know how to choose more challenging books. This is often the case with boys around Year 2 when they discover Andy Griffiths, Ahn Do, Terry Denton and the like (authors who have done us a great service, writing for this age bracket). Never take a book out of a child's hands though; suggest that it becomes the afternoon read and offer other, suitably challenging options. Choice matters, so I offer two to three to choose from.
• Kindergarten/Foundation children need access to a collection of predictable texts and their published writing. Books must be accessible and are best placed in containers on tables within easy reach. They will read four to six in 20 minutes. For children who need additional support, teachers and/or learning support teachers create books based on the children's interests (for example, family, friends and pets). They scribe short sentences dictated by the student on each page, so that a predictable text is created. Photos, clipart and rebus are included as visual prompts. During reading time the student takes responsibility for choosing a selection of these personal books, as well as favourite published books. After five minutes, the learning support teacher and student echo-read the chosen books and work together on creating another personal book for the collection.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Whole-class sharing
(10 minutes)</td><td>Teachers reinforce learning outcomes and connect the earlier inquiry (associated with the learning outcome) to the students' reading (for example, students find exemplars in their reading books).</td></tr>
</table>

Literacy activities (20 minutes)	Literacy activities are organised around the following headings, with the choice of activities informed by data and designed to reinforce a learning outcome: • Spelling • Genre • Teacher-led (purpose-based group) • Activity attached to a learning outcome associated with grammar or vocabulary or punctuation • Literature based.
Group reports (10 minutes)	Group members report on their group's efforts. Teachers reinforce the learning outcomes through sharing.

Clearing up a misconception

Elbow (1973, p. 14) explains that we have been teaching writing the wrong way around, and I agree.

> The idea of writing is backwards. That's why it causes so much trouble. Instead of a two-step transaction of meaning-into-language, think of writing as an organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning – before you know your meaning at all – and encourage your words gradually to change and evolve. Only at the end will you know what you want to say or the words you want to say it with.

Lamott (2018, p. 176) describes vividly her state of writer's block, 'where you sit staring at the blank page like a cadaver, feeling your mind congeal, feeling your talent run down your leg and into your sock'. Most writers might not feel quite as bad as Lamott, but there are times when we have nothing to write, we can't write and we give up on writing.

Children unblock quickly. Rather than being 'blocked', I suspect they are trying to write on empty. To replenish their creative supplies, use the following strategies.

Strategy 1: make lists

Ask students to create three lists:

- For one minute, students write down the names of everyone they know (first names will do).
- For one minute, they list all the places they have ever been (throw in McDonald's, the kitchen and school, so students know there are no bonus points for exotic locations).
- For two minutes, they list all the important events in their lives. Start with, they were born and what happened after that ... Then look quickly at the list and ask: 'Which of these topics do you know most about? Tell me two things about it. Try starting with that today.'

Strategy 2: plant seeds

Sometimes students get stuck writing about the same topics and genres. A child's topic can't be wrong – look for ways to expand on their topic by planting seeds around other genres that they could try. Suggest that a descriptive piece of writing could in fact be a poem, or instead of the writing being a recount it could be made into a factual text. The child doesn't know how to recognise different genres as possibilities, and it is up to the teacher to help students expand their limited repertoire.

Strategy 3: highlight possibilities

When students get attached to particular topics and that is all they ever choose, suggest options that expand on the topic. A single topic can contain many potentials. For example, with the child who always writes about Pokémon, suggest including a description of each character at the front of their book (their physical characteristics, fighting groups and so on). With the child who writes only about fishing, suggest an alphabet book of factual information about fish. To the child who writes recipes, suggest a family cookbook that includes information about the people in the family who cook and their favourite recipes.

Strategy 4: just write

Say, 'I'm sorry that you don't have anything to write about. Write, "I am blocked". Keep writing that, and you will soon unblock.' (Usually they don't write 'I am blocked' too many times.)

Strategy 5: jump start

Ask, 'If you weren't blocked, what would you write about?' In the true nature of children, they usually say something – and that's what the teacher needs to get excited about.

Children need to know that 'Writers don't sit down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. Very few writers know what they are doing until they've done it' (Lamott, 2018, p. 22).

Linking writing, creative skills and ICT: a classroom example

Teacher	Luke Mooney
Writing output	Video script and digital book
Students	Year 2

'There are different devices that support augmented reality (AR) technology. I have found AR Makr on the iPad simple to use and accessible for primary school students. For example, students watch a short video on how wheat is grown, harvested and turned into flour. They work in pairs, or groups of three, to create an AR video with pictures that are either hand-drawn or provided digitally by their teacher (through AirDrop). Students place these pictures into their immediate environment using an iPad. They then prepare a script based on the pictures and narrate the video, explaining the journey from wheat seed to flour. The video can be inserted into a digital book, using an app such as Book Creator, and students write an accompanying text.'

Reflections

On the writing student

Do your students write every day for a minimum of 20 minutes?

Do they write about topics of their choice?

Do students capitalise on reading as a means of improving their writing?

For the writing teacher

What is your area of creativity?

What has been your most creative writing endeavour?

How would you describe your self as a writer (five words)?