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Exploring teacher-writer identities in the classroom: Conceptualising the struggle

ABSTRACT

In the light of increased interest in teachers' professional identities, this paper addresses the under-researched area of teachers' writing identities and examines the factors which influence how primary phase teachers are positioned and position themselves as teacher-writers in the literacy classroom. It draws on case studies of two practitioners in England who seek to model their engagement as writers in order to support young writers; they undertake this through demonstrating writing in whole class contexts and composing individually alongside children. Data collection methods include classroom observation, interviews, video-stimulated review and examination of written texts. The data show that the writing classroom, in which the practitioners performed and enacted their identities as teacher-writers and as writer-teachers, appeared to be a site of struggle and tension. The research reveals whilst institutional and interpersonal factors influence their identity positioning, intrapersonal factors are significant with regard to teachers of writing. Their situated sense of themselves as writers, relationship with their unfolding compositions and emotional engagement, personal authenticity and authorial agency all have saliency in this context. The paper presents a model for conceptualising teachers' writing identities and considers the pedagogical consequences of their participation as writers.

KEYWORDS

Authorial agency, emotional engagement, personal authenticity as a writer, positioning, teachers' writing identities.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade considerable attention has been paid to teachers' professional identities in performativity cultures (Day et al., 2006; Sachs, 2003; Stronach et al., 2002; Troman, 2008). In relation to literacy teaching, the identities of reading teachers have been subject to exploration, revealing both the professional compromises effected by high stakes testing (Assaf, 2008; Dooley, 2005) and how teachers' conceptions of reading identities, frame and limit children's identities as readers (Hall et al., 2010). Additionally, research has documented teachers' identity crises triggered by the digital divide and the changing face of literacy (McDougall, 2009) and has examined the significant role that literacy plays in young people's identity construction (McCarthy, 2001). In relation to writing, the ways that home, peer and institutional practices shape children's writing identities have also been examined and the model of the isolated author questioned (Bourne, 2002). However, scant attention has been afforded teachers' identities as writers with reference to their classroom roles and pedagogic practice as teachers of writing.

This paper reports upon a study which explored two practitioners' identities as teacher-writers as they demonstrated writing and wrote alongside primary aged children in the classroom. It was undertaken in England, where writing performance continues to lag behind that in reading and where teachers are expected to demonstrate their proficiency and expertise as model writers. Whilst a call for a UK

National Writing Project (Andrews, 2008a) to develop teachers' assurance as writers has been ignored by politicians, the reflective engagement of writing practitioners is receiving increased interest. Scholars in England have suggested that teachers' development as writers has the potential to enrich writing pedagogy and impact positively on young writers (Andrews, 2008a, b; Cremin, 2008; Cremin, 2006; Grainger, 2005; Ing, 2009).

TEACHERS AS WRITERS

The purpose and value of teachers engaging as writers, both within and beyond the classroom, has been the subject of academic and professional debate over many years. Emerging largely from the process writing movement (Calkins 1986; Graves, 1983), the underlying argument has been that in order to be effective, teachers of writing need to be keen and competent writers themselves. Advocates who support teachers' authentic involvement as writers argue that when practitioners demonstrate writerly behaviour, model interest and share their challenges, younger writers benefit (Atwell 1987; Draper, Barksdale-Ladd and Radencich, 2000; Hansen, 1985; Murray, 1985; Grainger, Gooch and Lambirth, 2005). Some of the work of the Bay Area Writing project, now the US National Writing Project (NWP), has also highlighted the value of teachers adopting the position of writer (Camp, 1982; Root and Steinberg, 1996; Susi, 1984), and recent UK research has shown the value of affording professionals the time and space to consider the compositional process and the thinking strategies involved (Cremin, 2006). However, most of the research in this area, as Andrews (2008a) observes, focuses either on small scale self-reports or on larger scale quantitative data often drawn from evaluations of NWP activities and measured in

student outcomes. The former tend to rely upon 'exemplary writing instructors' or those who write extensively in their private lives (e.g. Brooks, 2007), whilst the latter contextualise teachers' roles as writers within numerous pedagogical shifts and then make arguably questionable claims about the influence of this position (e.g. Buchanan, et al., 2005). Few studies, like the one reported here, explore teachers' identity enactments with reference to the interplay between their dual roles as teachers and writers in the classroom.

Teachers in many countries are expected to model writing and demonstrate their proficiency as writers, yet this is potentially problematic if they lack self-assurance and positive writing identities. Indeed most are drawn to teach English by a love of reading not writing; Peel's (2000) UK research suggests that whilst many student teachers associate reading with pleasure and satisfaction, few view writing so positively. An Australian study by Gannon and Davies (2007) affirms this perspective: a love of literature or an inspirational English teacher prompted most of their respondents to teach the subject, not an interest in writing. Canadian research in the elementary phase also reveals that reading, not writing forms the backbone of teachers' literacy experiences and that this has an impact on their classroom practice where reading is profiled over composition (Yeo, 2007, p.125). The discomfort and uncertainty experienced by teachers when composing at length also indicates a degree of difficulty in this area (Cremin, 2006), as does research which suggest that the accountability discourse which foregrounds the assessment of written products may have distorted professional understanding of writing and the composing process (Grainger et al., 2005). Taken together, these studies suggest that teachers are neither as keen nor as assured writers as they are readers, and that many do not view

themselves as writers. If this is the case, it is likely to influence their identities as writers and their understanding and attitudes towards teaching writing. This has implications for pedagogy and for children's development as writers.

Teachers in England, positioned as expert writers by the Primary National Strategy (PNS) (DfEE, 1998; DfES, 2006), are required to explicitly model the set genres and use their own texts as exemplars for children to imitate. This conception of teachers as accomplished writers, demonstrating skill mastery and genre knowledge is arguably underpinned in England by a narrow conceptualisation of schooled writing which focuses on teaching the linguistic features of the specified forms.

Demonstrating the successful public production of required genres appears to have proved challenging for many professionals who report composing their exemplars in the comfort of their own homes, before 'pretending' to write spontaneously using their pre-polished texts in school (Andrews, 2008a; Grainger, 2005). Trainee teachers also indicate a high degree of apprehension about demonstrating authorial expertise in school (Luce-Kapler et al., 2001; Turvey, 2007). This pressure to perform 'set pieces' is likely to further restrict teachers' understanding of the process and experience of writing and may hamper their expressions of identity and authentic involvement as writers, arguably reducing their efficacy in the classroom.

The teacher-writer stance, encompassing as it does notions of writing, identity, role positions and pedagogic practice, is the focus of the research reported in this paper. This investigation developed from 'Writing is Primary' (WisP), an Esmée Fairbairn funded project which was undertaken in three areas of England in 2007-8 (Ing, 2009). The southern site of WisP afforded a central role to the experience and practice of the

teacher as composer, both within and beyond the classroom and revealed the importance of expanding teachers' knowledge and understanding of the multidimensional process of writing (Cremin, 2008). By drawing upon new data from case studies of two of the WisP practitioners, the current study sought to examine the nature of their identity work and how they position themselves and are positioned as teacher-writers in the literacy classroom, considering the pedagogical consequences.

IDENTITY AND WRITING

This research, situated within a sociocultural approach to literacy, recognises the plurality of literacies across the different realms of life, home, work and school and the significance of identity in literacy practices. How identity is viewed will, Moje et al. (2009) argue, influence the way literacy is viewed and vice versa. The conceptualisation of identity adopted in this paper, drawing on the work of Holland et al. (1998) and Holland and Lave (2001), is of identity as positional and thus multiple and enacted in interaction. This 'identity as position' metaphor is based on a social practice approach to literacy in that:

...subjectivities and identities are produced in and through not only activity and movement in and across spaces, but also in the ways people are cast in or called to particular positions in interaction, time and spaces and how they take up or resist those positions. (Moje et al., 2009, p. 430)

Underpinning this positional view of identity is awareness that positioning is relational such that when teachers discursively construct their identities as teacher-

writers, they do so in relation to others - children, other teachers, teaching assistants and parents for example. Identity is not only context-dependent, but is also actively positioned and maintained by the individual, both through adopting cultural tools that help individuals seem and feel literate (Bartlett, 2007) and through their interaction with others (McCarthy and Moje, 2002; Hall, 2008). This notion of relational identity positioning is significant when considering how teachers both perceive themselves and are perceived as teacher-writers on a micro (personal, classroom) level and at a more macro (institutional, political) level.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study borrowed from the academic literacies approach for the methodological framework, since it ‘constitutes a specific epistemology, that of literacy as social practice, and ideology, that of transformation’ (Lillis and Scott, 2007, p. 7). While research in the area has predominantly used written texts as the ‘practice’, this research sought, in tune with Ivanič (1998) and Lillis (2009), to encompass ‘talk around texts’ and used video footage as examples of social practice, where written texts were initially constructed by the teacher in front of the children and then developed whilst he/she was writing alongside them. The term “demonstration writing” was used when teachers were writing and thinking out loud as they did so, the term “joint composition” was used when child intervention occurred and the teachers took advice from younger authors. Thus both practice and product were able to be considered.

A qualitative methodology was adopted in this naturalistic collaborative inquiry. The exploration of two teachers provided the bounded system or cases investigated over a month through data collection involving multiple information sources (Yin, 1989). In framing the research as a process of collaboration and inviting the teachers to engage in considerable “reflection on action” (Schon, 1983), the study sought to reduce the potentially inhibiting relationship of “researcher-researched”. As a consequence, the professionals invested more in their contributions to the study, thereby generating richer data and “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of their experiences.

The cases were both instrumentally and intrinsically chosen (Stake, 1995). This was the result of the combination of theoretical interest in how demonstration writing and writing alongside children affect teachers’ writing identities (intrinsic), and the availability of participants (instrumental), since writing in the presence of children, sitting alongside them and undertaking the same compositional activities are not mainstream practices in England. The teacher participants were selected on the basis of their use and experience of these practices which they had gained mostly through the WisP project

Data collection

A researcher was assigned to each teacher and visited four times across a month, initially for an in-depth interview exploring the teacher’s literacy history and perceptions of self as a writer. Three literacy sessions (one per week) were then video recorded in each classroom, capturing both demonstration writing and joint composition. The teachers also wrote alongside the children in each session. This range of teacher modelling activities was viewed as part of the teachers’ normal

pedagogic practice, however as this was the start of the academic year, neither teacher had yet undertaken these activities with their classes. After each session, the teachers were interviewed and reflected on what it meant to be a teacher and a writer.

Additionally, video stimulated review was used to encourage critical conversations; such dialogic-view viewing can be a potent tool for reflection on action (Walker, 2002; Zellermyer and Ronn, 1999). In this study it helped make visible the significant moments of classroom practice selected by both university researchers and teachers, these were watched and discussed with a view to prompting reconstructions of practice and consideration of the roles adopted. In addition, the teachers kept personal journals, documenting their thoughts, feelings and observations about sessions across the month in which the researchers were absent. Through these systematic and reflective documentation methods, the study sought to enrich the thinking and discourse of all involved.

The data sources for each case study comprised:

- An initial in-depth interview (one and a half hours)
- Video recording and non-participant observation of literacy sessions (3 x one and a half hours)
- Reflective one-to-one teacher interviews following the sessions (3 x one hour)
- Teacher's personal journals
- A focus group interview with both teachers, using video-stimulated review at the end of the month (1 x three hours)
- A focus group interview with six randomly selected children from each of the classes at the end of the month (1 x half an hour)

- A final focus group interview with both teachers three months later (1 x three hours).

Data analysis

The data analysis in this study encompassed several stages. Initially, all interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researchers in order to generate a relationship within and between the data and the analysis. This process facilitated the emergence of categories regarding the teachers' relational identity positioning which were grounded in the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The whole dataset was then inductively analysed in relation to these categories using the iterative process of categorical analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). In order to confirm a 'standard' of analysis and ensure robustness, the examination of each case was cross-moderated and where appropriate modified by the researchers. The categories of interpersonal, institutional and intrapersonal influences upon the teachers' identity positioning were identified, as well as specific strands within the intrapersonal category. Finally, in order to further ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, member checks (Patton, 1990) were undertaken; the university researchers shared the categories and strands with the teachers in a focus group enabling them to critique, extend and/or confirm these interpretations.

Through the process of analysis, it became clear that considerable tensions and difficulties were associated with the two professionals' positions as teachers and as writers. Two vignettes from the classroom have been selected to demonstrate the constant state of flux and tension and to evidence the identity dilemmas which surfaced when they positioned themselves as teacher-writers and as writer-teachers.

The vignettes also reveal the intrapersonal strands that were empirically grounded in the data, namely the teachers' emotional engagement in their compositions, and the degree of personal authenticity and authorial agency that they exercised as writers at any given moment. Their assurance as writers was also context dependent. These intrapersonal influences operated in a dynamic relationship with the interpersonal and institutional identity influences, shaping their identities as teacher-writers and writer-teachers in a fluid and emergent fashion.

Initially, an introduction to the teachers is offered alongside their writing histories, these draw upon the initial interviews which involved the teachers' sense of themselves as writers and past experiences that they perceived to be significant.

THE TEACHER-WRITERS, WRITER-TEACHERS: FINDINGS

Introducing the teachers

The case study teachers, Jeff and Elaine, whose names are both pseudonyms, were experienced practitioners working in neighbouring towns in the south-east of England. Through the period of the WisP project, which was completed 18 months previously, they had written in the company of 15 other practitioners, professional writers and children in school, and documented their compositional processes in these contexts.

Elaine was in her early thirties, and had been working as a teacher for over 12 years after completing an Education and Drama degree; at the time of the research, she was studying for an MA in Literacy. Elaine worked in a Catholic primary in a

predominantly middle-class area on the edge of town, where she was responsible for Numeracy, although she had been responsible for Literacy in her previous post. After several years of teaching 10-11 year olds, Elaine was teaching 7-8 year olds for the first time.

Jeff, in his mid thirties, had also been working as a teacher for over 12 years, having completed an Education and Geography degree. Jeff had finished a Masters degree in Literacy five years previously. During the study, he was working in a large school, situated in a socially-deprived area. Jeff was the Deputy Head and Literacy Co-ordinator; he did not have a class responsibility, but planned and taught Literacy to four classes of 9-11 year olds, with the class teachers working alongside him.

The teachers' writing histories

Elaine recalled that she lacked confidence in writing throughout school, until, in the 4th year in secondary, she encountered a teacher whom she perceived valued students' writing differently, "He made us feel like writers, like we had a voice, we had a say. It just made such a huge difference." This teacher not only had impact on Elaine's sense of herself as a writer, but also years later on her sense of an 'effective' professional: "There were teachers who are 'the teacher' and there were teachers who are more of ... 'you're one of us, we're here together and we're going through this together' kind of thing." Elaine specifically attributed her growth in confidence as a writer to this teacher and his commitment to writing tutorials. The memory of these prompted her to articulate connections between her experience and her current approach: "It's like, I am understanding now why we were taught things in school ...and the importance of being more reflective and critical of your own writing."

As an adult, Elaine actively maintains a writing persona in her private life; she spoke of writing poetry fairly regularly as a way of collecting her thoughts and keeping a weekly journal. As a new teacher, she did not recall having made any connections between her own writing and teaching writing, but perceived her involvement in WisP had highlighted this possibility, enhanced her understanding of the practice of writing and renewed her pleasure in it. She strongly identified herself as someone who enjoys writing, although despite her commitment to writing as a form of self-expression, did not view herself as an accomplished writer.

Jeff had negative memories of writing at primary school which he recalled with “horror”: “I always felt and was always being told that I wasn’t good at it.” He remembered red marks, his writing being struck through, struggling with spelling and handwriting and being kept back at break time to practice something he “didn’t enjoy and couldn’t see the point in.” He could bring to mind no positive experiences of writing at secondary school either, where he still struggled. However, at university when he was afforded more freedom as a writer, this altered: “It was down to you and you were in control of what you wrote ... it was your own views at times as well and I just think that powered me and it was from that point... that I started to enjoy what I was doing.” Jeff experienced increased self-esteem through his undergraduate studies and arguably began to find value and purpose in writing, both in relation to achieving his goal of becoming a teacher and in being able to voice his own perspective. He stated that, “the whole thing just clicked... it seemed to make sense- they were interested in what I had to say.”

As a new teacher, Jeff commented he wrote for “school purposes only - reports, forms, planning etc”, although he perceived that through WisP he began to write more recreationally, experiencing a degree of pleasure in writing “in the group, in class and sometimes even at home.” Jeff reported that he occasionally writes at home and regularly in school now: “I feel I am a writer now, I still find it something very hard to do, but I don’t think that’s strange, I think everyone does, ... to actually get into the spirit of it, to get the right feeling.”

In summary, both Elaine and Jeff initially lacked confidence as writers, although this altered later in life. Whilst Elaine reported engaging in “recreational writing”- writing undertaken for the personal satisfaction of the writer (McClay, 1998) - more regularly than Jeff, both observed the WisP project had impact on their teaching and their assurance as writers.

Elaine as a teacher-writer, writer-teacher in the classroom

The second lesson observed was selected to demonstrate both the identity struggle as evidenced across the data and the intrapersonal influence strands. It was part of a two week literacy unit which had commenced with a visit to the local Catholic church where the 7-8 year olds had written descriptions. Elaine initially revisited these through editing a child’s text on the interactive whiteboard, before demonstrating how to use this in a story (see Figure 1). She did this on the flip chart as “it doesn’t feel natural writing on a whiteboard to be a writer” vocalising her thoughts as she did so, before she and the class wrote individually.

Elaine	<p>Right, I'm going to read this back, just to make sure that it makes sense to me, then it'll make sense to my readers</p> <p><i>(reads)</i> 'I looked at Mary's face, for some reason I was drawn to her eyes. Suddenly she blinked' ...</p> <p>I'm probably going to be sort of... unbelieving, disbelieving. <i>(pause)</i> So I need to convey that, I might say ...<i>(pause)</i> 'I couldn't believe it'</p>
Paul	I couldn't believe my eyes?
Elaine	<p>I appreciate your idea, Paul, but I'm going to have a think myself first, though I may need help in a little bit, but I'm trying to sort of get my own ideas down first...</p> <p><i>(writes and reads aloud)</i> 'Was I imagining it? I looked at her eyes again - they were' ...</p> <p><i>(long pause, Elaine looks at her own writing apparently thinking about options)</i></p>
Nathan	Glowing?
Paul	Beautiful eyes?
Elaine	<p><i>(acknowledges the suggestions, then turns back to the flipchart)</i> I'll say 'they looked... they were full of kindness'</p> <p><i>(writes)</i> 'full of kindness.'</p> <p><i>(re-reads)</i> 'I looked at her eyes again - they were full of kindness' <i>(pause)</i></p> <p>I don't know what to say now <i>(long pause)</i> I want to say something else happened, not blinking, like... maybe...I kind of want her to come to life, but I'm not sure... ...<i>(looks uncertain and uncomfortable)</i></p>
Several children	<i>(multiple suggestions from children calling out simultaneously)</i>

Elaine	Oh, thank you very much but I won't be able to concentrate if you're giving me ideas. I might get confused if people are shouting things out. (<i>long pause, Elaine still looks unsure</i>) (<i>Writes and reads aloud</i>) 'And then her lips began to twitch' (<i>long pause</i>)
Elaine	Could you finish it off for me guys because I don't know what to...I want to say 'eventually she smiled'- you know- that kind of thing?
Paul	How about "until she smiled"?
Elaine	Okay how about (<i>writes and reads aloud</i>) 'until she smiled so brightly at me! It was a miracle'

Figure 1 - extract taken from Elaine's demonstration writing, session 2

At the start of this extract taken from the middle of the demonstration, Elaine, genuinely trying to express her own thinking and accordingly her authorial agency, had arguably begun to position herself more as a writer-teacher than a teacher-writer; she was profiling her role as a writer and voicing her views from inside the process. Then inadvertently, through pondering upon her emerging text, she opened up a discursive space for the children to become involved. She commented afterwards that she had been struggling with ideas, needed more time to think them through and wasn't sure the children's suggestions would improve her writing, so initially she resisted them. Later, still faced with uncertainty, she turned to them for help. In doing so, it could be argued that Elaine's authorial agency was compromised, although she re-asserted herself as the author of the piece by adding the adjunct 'so' to brightly, (which she stressed as she wrote) and the additional phrase 'It was a miracle.' A few lines later, apparently dissatisfied, she halted the demonstration, saying, "I'm not sure

this is working, it feels too obvious,” and invited the class to start their own stories, sitting alongside a group of children to continue her composition.

INSERT Figure 2 – An extract from Elaine's demonstrated writing

Both the oral extract from Elaine’s demonstration (Figure 1) and her written text (Figure 2) show evidence of hesitation, ongoing error correction and problem solving. This may confirm that initially she was authentically involved in her writing. But in reflecting upon the demonstration, Elaine made it clear she had become distanced from her composition: “I just couldn’t connect to it -where’s the emotional engagement in that?” she commented dismissively. This had consequences for her later positioning. As she sat to write, she sighed heavily, staring at her text before copying it from the flip-chart with a disinterested demeanour. Shortly afterwards however she stopped writing, rejected the position of fellow-writer and in her own words “ended up being more of a teacher” moving around the room responding to individual writers. “I was absolutely bored to death with it.” she noted and “really didn’t feel like writing it any more and I thought -what’s the point of forcing it?” Several layers of conflict and constraint lie at the heart of this example. Firstly, Elaine perceived that the church theme had restricted her to the extent that she was unable to engage emotionally. Cognisant of her school’s expectations about integrating church and literacy work, she had planned this, but when composing found it an uninspiring focus for a narrative; it lacked salience for her. With the clearly stated objective “to use our descriptions as the setting and start for our stories”, she found herself not only distanced by the subject matter, but also dissatisfied with her emerging text. As she

observed, “I suppose unless it’s directly meaningful to me... I write for the sake of teaching.” As a result Elaine shifted from arguably a writer-teacher position, working on her own text, to a more teacher-writer position monitoring the children’s work.

The challenge of demonstrating how to translate the description of the setting into a story may also have influenced Elaine’s assurance in this context which she described as “messy – messy for me to explain and messy for the children to understand. So much for unrehearsed writing!” Combined with the lack of subject/genre choice, this may have reduced her sense of agency as a writer still further. Elaine’s attempts to balance demonstrating authorial agency and meeting school and PNS (DfES, 2006) requirements also created tension, in the earlier part of the demonstration she focused more on the lesson objective and the use of description in her writing to evoke the story setting. She noted, “I still feel lots and lots of pressure to focus on targets and success criteria... you’re constantly torn between the objective, the target... and the connections, the juicy bits...” As a consequence of these institutional expectations, her disengagement in the composition and her quandary as to whether to include the children’s suggestions, Elaine reflected a fragmented and discontinuous sense of self in this session. As she observed, “It’s a struggle, one minute I feel like a writer and then I don’t feel like a writer and then I do feel like a writer.” She experienced the oscillation between enacting her identity as a teacher-writer and a writer-teacher as problematic.

Jeff as a teacher-writer in the classroom

Jeff commenced the first session, which is the focus of consideration here, by explaining, “Our challenge today is to write about someone in our lives and see if we

can really get the reader engaged, wanting to know more.” He led the class of 10-11 year olds, the class teacher and the teaching assistant (TA) in a discussion about their extended families and everyone drew one special person adding ironic speech captions to typify that person. He then spent 10 minutes demonstrating the process of translating his drawing into a piece of prose in front of the whole class, after which he continued his writing alongside a group for 25 minutes, before leading a plenary. From the outset, Jeff positioned himself, in his words, as “a colleague in writing”, a fellow-writer, and referred to this during the demonstration (see Figure 3 for the opening extract).

Jeff	I’m going to do now what you’re going to be invited to do in a minute, write about someone in my family. Whilst I write I’m going to talk about what I’m thinking, just to see if that helps you when you come to write, ‘cos I’m a writer too and it’s not easy - writing. Who do you think I’ve chosen?
Chris	Your nan?
Jeff	<p>Yeah well done, Chris, my gran. I’m talking a lot at the moment ‘cos in my head I’m thinking what I’m going to write. What do I want tell you about her?</p> <p><i>(pause)</i> I’m not sure and I’m putting it off.</p> <p>But I’m gonna do my title <i>(writes)</i> ‘MY GRAN’ though it may change later. I’ve done it in capitals because she’s important- she’s special to me. The hardest part, for me I think is starting, I’m not sure <i>(pause)</i> um</p> <p><i>(long pause, then writes and reads aloud)</i> ‘The gentle rhythm of the car’</p> <p>For some reason I’ve started in story mode, instead of saying my gran was this, my gran was that, which would be boring. I’m in the car on the way to her house <i>(re-reads)</i> ‘the gentle rhythm of the car’ <i>(writes and reads)</i> ‘and the sound of ‘</p>

Callum	The engine
Jo	A train
Jeff	<p><i>(writes)</i> 'The engine slowly rocked me to sleep.' I'm trying to remember her and 'cos she's dead, I find it hard, so I think perhaps if I dream about her she'll be more vivid.</p> <p><i>(writes)</i> 'Now in my memories I can remember and hold on to those precious [sic] memories'. I've used that word twice (<i>underlines memories in both places</i>) an' it doesn't sound write to me (<i>crosses out 'remember and' and the repeated use of 'memories' and changes it to 'moments'</i>)</p> <p>Does that sound better? (<i>re-reads</i>) 'Now in my memories I can hold on to those precious [sic] moments'</p>
Several children	<i>(simultaneously)</i> Yeah, much. It's fine. murmurs of agreement
Jeff	I'm not sure "precious" is right?
Class teacher	Mr. Mac, don't worry about the spelling now, it's not important, just underline it and come back to it later
Jeff	Oh, okay (<i>looks unsure but underlines it</i>)
Callum	Mr. Mac, it's got an "o"
Jeff	Thanks Callum, I'll come back to it

Figure 3 – extract taken from Jeff's demonstration, session 1.

Later, Jeff concluded the demonstration by publicly evaluating his composition, sharing his view that it didn't "feel right" because "she was more special to me than my words here, so I need to keep working on it." He explained that he was going to "try and expand on a couple of specific memories to bring her to life." Then he gave out the books, including his own, and joined a table of boys to write. His behaviour signalled his horizontal positioning at this moment, sitting alongside other the younger writers, not standing before them in more hierarchical position. Immediately, Callum talked to him about his own chosen focus and, though he listened, Jeff made it clear he wanted to get writing. Demonstrating a personally authentic and involved stance, he sucked his pen, re-read his writing from the flip chart, muttered to himself, "I think I'm going to change that" and then wrote in a highly focused manner with his head down, absorbed in his writing and ignoring almost all distractions. The boys watched him intrigued and then also began to write.

After a while, however, the class began to lose focus. Jeff observed later that he had noticed some girls messing around and felt "caught between I'm writing this or I'm teacher ... in a sense it was like being pulled in two ways, so I sat there feeling a bit guilty." At this point, due in part to Jeff's emotional engagement in his composition and his desire to model being a writer, he demonstrated disregard for the traditionally conceived institutional demands of being a teacher. The class teacher and TA, also writing, implicitly assigned responsibility for the class' learning and discipline to Jeff, who did intervene finally when noise levels grew markedly and requested a volume reduction. He said, "...then we can keep our thinking going - okay? I can't do justice to my gran with all this noise." His comment further affirms his position as a writer-

teacher at this moment; he explained the need for quiet with reference to his needs as a writer connected to his desire to honour and capture a sense of his gran. Although for Jeff this was problematic, as he noted, “maybe I was being self-centred too...I was finding my way in and didn’t want to be disturbed.”

In the demonstration writing, initially the views Jeff voiced were arguably also those of a writer-teacher, he explained his thinking, revealed his emotional engagement in the subject and, in a personal and authentic manner, shared both his difficulties in starting and his insecurity over spelling. In the interchange with Cathy, the class teacher, his relational identity shifted; he was positioned more as a child writer, and observed that he felt “exposed somehow” by her intervention but “supported” by Callum’s contribution. His positioning in this public demonstration also created other tensions and dilemmas for Jeff, related in part to institutional time constraints and to his deep emotional engagement in the content of his composition.

“You’re there and you’re writing and you’re trying to write and you’re trying to remember... there’s all sorts of things on your mind, but you’re also a teacher, if I’d been writing that by myself, then I would have stopped and waited and I would have thought much more. In that situation, you can’t really.”

Jeff’s expressed intention in both demonstration and alongside contexts is to “share with them that I’m a writer too and help them see how I solve some of my problems” as well as to “show them that you need to satisfy yourself, that you need to fulfil something within you when you write, particularly this kind of text.” But in seeking to achieve this by positioning himself as a writer-teacher, he created difficulties and

dilemmas for himself, reducing his sense of authorial agency and authenticity in this context.

DISCUSSION

In the case of the two teachers profiled in this paper, a number of interpersonal, institutional and intrapersonal factors influenced the ways in which they were positioned and sought to position themselves as teacher-writers and writer-teachers. These identity positions were often in conflict and were the subject of sustained identity work, such that the writing classroom was a site of struggle for the practitioners as they performed and enacted shifting identities. It was evident that their relational identities were influenced by their interaction with children and other adults in the room and by the wider institutional context, but also, significantly, by their engagement or disengagement in their own compositions produced spontaneously in class. In the sessions reported upon in this paper and in all the others observed, the teachers experienced considerable tension and were faced with a number of different dilemmas. Elaine was caught between her desire to demonstrate her authenticity as a writer and respond to institutional/ Strategy requirements, the children and her unfolding texts. Jeff, keen to support children as a “colleague in writing,” was less concerned about the Strategy, but experienced conflict in interaction with the class teacher and the children and in response to time constraints for producing his own compositions. Their identity constructions were also influenced by their school settings, their professional autonomy in these contexts, and their roles as Numeracy and Literacy coordinators.

Whilst interconnected factors influenced their identity positioning, the practitioners' involvement in their writing and sense of themselves as writers, albeit as writer-teachers, were significant. Through writing and expressing their identities as writer-teachers, Elaine and Jeff engaged in considerable intrapersonal identity work. In each session, they sought to model and demonstrate the challenges they experienced when composing authentically and shared their emotional engagement/disengagement in their subjects and the process. They talked openly of their authorial agency, variously accepting or rejecting children's suggestions and worked to complete the writing activities they set the children themselves. The teachers' relationship with their unfolding compositions, their emotional engagement, degree of authenticity and authorial agency were identified as significant intrapersonal strands. These operated in a dynamic relationship with interpersonal and institutional influences.

Whilst the practitioners talked of their dual personas and experienced this at times as a relatively dichotomous positioning of 'writer' or 'teacher' more frequently they referred to the conflict and fluidity involved as they shifted in a moment-to-moment fashion. Elaine likened this to a process of "constantly feeling pushed and pulled in different directions". At times both wrote 'for the system' or in Elaine's words, "for the sake of teaching", demonstrating the knowledge and skills laid down by the PNS (DfES, 2006). In such contexts, they were positioned more as teacher-writers at one end of the proposed identity continuum (see Figure 4). At other times, their writing was less institutionally aligned, and whilst still constructed in the classroom, appeared to have more personal resonance and emotional connection for them as individuals. On such occasions, it is argued they were writing more for themselves, were engaging more authentically as writers, and were positioning themselves more towards the

writer-teacher end of the continuum. As Figure 4 indicates, movement across the continuum was constant as the teachers' positioned themselves and were positioned by complex interpersonal, institutional and intrapersonal factors. This conceptualisation of the struggle of these writing teachers represents the interplay between these factors and the intrapersonal strands. It suggests an ongoing oscillation between more conforming identities: teacher-writers writing for the system and more liberating identities: writer-teachers writing more for themselves.

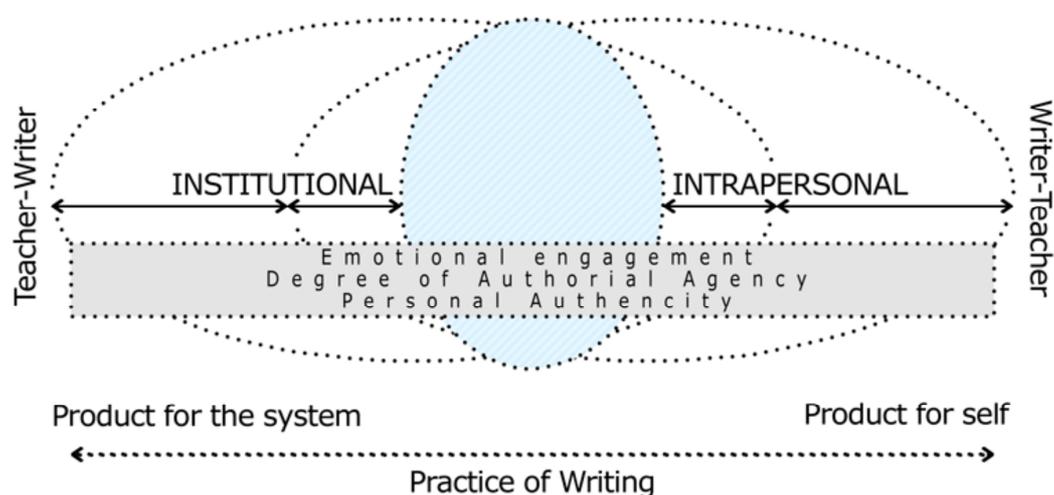


Figure 4 – A diagram to represent a teacher-writer, writer-teacher continuum

Pedagogical consequences resulted from their participation as fellow-writers with their students. In recognising their authorial agency and the importance of choice, they sought to afford the children more rights as writers – enabling them to choose their subject, form and audience, for example. They also worked to provide opportunities for children to share their engagement or lack of it in the content of their writing, both chosen and imposed, and discussed the young writers' feelings about their texts. Pondering upon their own difficulties and dilemmas, the teachers questioned whether the children in their schools were positioned to “write for the

system” too often, and in tune with Fisher (2006) asked, “Whose writing is it anyway?” They were also interested in the way their language and actions positioned the children. As Elaine noted, she had exercised the right to cease writing due to her lack of emotional engagement and had explained this to the class, but had not extended such volition to them. Through reflecting systematically on their positional identities, the teachers developed increased awareness of the ways of participating and possible writing identities that they made available to the young writers, and after discussion sought to broaden these and pay more attention to the children’s agency as authors.

CONCLUSION

This study, albeit small scale, reveals the marked degree of tension and challenge for professionals who in order to support young writers are positioned/position themselves as writers in the classroom. It highlights that their identities as teacher-writers and writer-teachers constantly shift and are emotional, relational and conflictual, a complex and interwoven mix of jostling interpersonal, institutional and intrapersonal influences. The impact of interaction with others and wider institutional factors on the relational identity positioning of professionals was significant for these teachers of writing. Additionally, their situated sense of themselves as writers, their relationship with their unfolding compositions and emotional engagement, personal authenticity and authorial agency all had saliency in relation to their identity positioning in the writing classroom. A conceptual model is offered to exemplify the factors influencing the ongoing shaping of teachers’ identities as they participate as writers in school.

”To ask people to read or write,” Murphy (2002) asserts, “is to ask them to engage in an act of self-identification that echoes biography, history and a sense of place” (p.87). This is complicated in the teaching context by the range of competing pressures on practitioners who, in order to more effectively apprentice young writers, are constantly crossing personal and professional boundaries. An inherent tension exists in the public practice of teachers demonstrating writing in a classroom, since their compositions whilst constructed personally, are contextualised professionally. Their compositions may represent hybrid texts in the classroom context where the act of self identification is blurred. Writing spontaneously in demonstration contexts is challenging since the purpose of such a composition is complex and time constraints mitigate against personal authenticity and a teacher’s ideational fluency. Sharing the process of generating ideas and discussing the social and emotional elements of writing as a writer-teacher is better suited to contexts where a teacher writes alongside a small group, in such situations, conversations about one’s text and the art of writing may emerge more naturally. Equally, the position of teacher-writer may be better suited to demonstrations where the craft of writing can be modelled and textual features displayed. The separation of these dual positions of teacher and writer may reduce the apprehension and disquiet experienced and improve the teaching of writing, though further research is needed to examine this proposition.

Whilst exploring the consequence of teachers’ shifting identities upon children’s understandings about the process and practice of writing is not the purpose of the current paper, it is clear that the struggle represents a professional challenge.

Evidence suggests that teachers who write in their personal lives, thus developing

their intrapersonal writing identities, “demonstrate” the benefits of such practice in teaching writing (Yeo, 2007), it also indicates that teachers create and privilege their own understandings of available identities in the classroom, expecting young people “to ascribe to the dominant models of identity or risk being marginalized” (Hall et al., 2010, p.241). It is important, therefore, to extend professional knowledge and understanding about writing identities, so that teachers can appreciate the influences upon their own identities, recognise diversity, widen their understanding and explore how their use of language and action positions young writers. It is suggested that teachers and student teachers would benefit from considering their experiences and identities as writers and as teachers of writing. How teachers assume agency as writers and find their writing voice in school has not been extensively examined (Rodgers and Scott, 2008), yet such an exploration in the context of initial training or professional development could help professionals handle the struggle, develop their practice, and afford more positive and informed writing identities for young writers.

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