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Creativity and Constraint: Developing as a Writer of Poetry

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of progression within the poetry writing of children is a relatively new one within the field of research on writing (Dymoke, 2001, 2003; Wilson, 2005a). By far, the most common literature on poetry writing by young people in the UK context is the practitioner-related 'handbook' (Wilson, 2005b: 20). Since the work of Hourd (1949), a tradition of this type of literature has arisen, which has been dominated by a mixture of poet-practitioners or inspired experts: Hughes (1967); Corbett and Moses (1986); Dunn et al. (1987); Brownjohn (1980, 1982, 1990, collected in 1994); Pirrie (1987, 1993, 1994); Rosen (1989, 1998); those collected in Barrs and Rosen (1997); Sedgwick (1997); Carter (1998a and b); and Yates (1999). As the word 'handbook' suggests, these books are practical in their approach, with an emphasis on imparting ideas for teaching poetry writing, which are then interpreted and adapted accordingly. Many of these also contain, however,

a good deal of rhetorical material, in which the author touches on elements of the theory, which underpins his or her own distinctive approach to teaching poetry writing. Of these, the best known in the UK are Hughes (1967), Brownjohn (1994), Pirrie (1994) and Rosen (1998).

This is also true of a significant literature on the merits of poetry practice, in terms of both reading and writing: Benton (1978); Wilner (1979); Stibbs (1981); Fox and Merrick (1981); Jackson (1986); Walter (1986, 1990 and (1993); Lockwood (1993); Taylor (1994); Clements (1994); Carter, 1996, 1997, and 1998a, b and c); and Rudd (1997). In describing this literature as rhetorical, one is drawing attention to the fact that research on poetry writing by children remains scant. Claims for poetry's importance within the curriculum, what Andrews (1991:128) summarizes as the 'jewel in the crown of the verbal arts', are largely based on opinion formed from practice rather than empirical studies. Some of the handbook literature, for

example Pirrie (1994) and Carter (1998c), contends that poetry writing can be of benefit to young people, and does this in the context of arguments about the importance of its close study.

There is a small but nevertheless important literature based on research looking into teachers' views on teaching poetry. This suggests that for some it remains a problematic and even difficult area of the curriculum (Benton, 1986, 1999, 2000; Mathieson, 1980; Wade and Sidaway, 1990; Sedgwick, 1988 and 1990). There remains a gap, however, within the literature of writing theory as a whole, where poetry is concerned. Poetry does not feature in the models of writing established by Flower and Hayes (1980), Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), Kellogg (1994), and Sharples (1999) leaving extant descriptions of its worth based not on studies of young people's writing but on rhetoric. This leaves poetry at something of a disadvantage.

One can only speculate upon the reasons for the comparative lack of systematic rigorous enquiry into poetry writing by young people. Perhaps the views and opinions of English teachers (Benton, 1986, 1999, 2000) are felt to be easier to research than the cognitive demands of poetry writing; it may be that critiquing problems with practice and/or curricular documentation (Walter, 1986; Benton, 1978) is perceived to be more straightforward than theorizing about such issues as progression and assessment of poetry writing, and planning for creativity within it. Furthermore, one could infer that poetry writing is not seen to be either important or interesting enough to study in depth; alternatively, one could hypothesize that poetry is felt to be too difficult a subject for close scrutiny, often allied to deeply felt personal experience and values and therefore beyond the scope of academic enquiry. One could argue, with Benton (1978), that the lack of serious enquiry into poetry writing, at least in the UK context, can be traced back to its depiction in the Bullock Report (DES, 1975: 135) as 'something odd, certainly outside the current of normal life … numinous and therefore rarely to be invoked'.

POETRY AS 'KNOWLEDGE DISCOVERY'

The purpose of this chapter is to address this issue by reporting on a small-scale research study of the poetry writing of children aged 10–11. It has been argued before (Wilson, 2005a, 2005b, 2007) that progression in poetry can indeed be planned for and does not need to be seen by teachers as remote or impossible. Readers will be familiar with Bereiter and Scardamalia's concept of writing, moving from knowledge-telling to knowledge-transformation (1987; and Sharples, 1999). This chapter will develop those arguments further, by synthesizing writing and creativity theory with insights about young writers' use of language, form and models in poetry, to propose the concept of poetry writing as knowledge discovery. The chapter will argue that poetry writing can be an aid to language development, enabling children to engage with creative habits of mind and extending their schemas of what writing can achieve.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT

As a way of problematising these issues, it is first necessary to report on the current context. In England, this is formed by the curricular recommendations in the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) (DfEE, 1998), the orders in the English National Curriculum (NC) (DfEE, 1999), and recommendations of the renewed Primary National Strategy (PNS) (DfEE, 2006). The status of poetry writing within the curriculum can be described as secure but mixed (Wilson, 2005a: 230).

This mixed status first became apparent with the orders of Cox (DES, 1989; Cox, 1991) who was of the view that poetry writing would never be found in formal writing attainment tasks, or Key Stage 2 National Tests, because it cannot be given accurate and consistent marks, and therefore levels, compared with other types of writing.

(Wilson, 2005a: 231). Therefore, because poetry is not formally tested, it lacks the kind of rigorous assessment shown to other writing. As has been noted, this may be a contributing factor for the comparatively scant amount of research into poetry writing by young people. This would tie in with the findings of Benton (1986), who speculated that the comparatively low status of poetry writing is due to the uncertainty of teachers who find it difficult to know whether to treat their classes as artists/poets, or to respond as they would to other pieces of writing done in school. How far various curricular interventions have ameliorated these issues is discussed in the following section.

When it first appeared, the NLS (DfEE, 1998) contained the most detailed curricular material on poetry pedagogy to appear in the UK. The outline of progression within poetry writing which it implied was the first of its kind. It was far from perfect. While it offered a wide range of content, mostly in the manner of following 'conspicuous structures and forms' (Beard, 1999: 46) and 'models' (DfEE, 1998:48), the model of progression being promoted was one centred on poetic *forms* as opposed to handling of poetic *form*. Surprisingly, there were only two references to writing from first-hand experience (Wilson, 2005a: 231). Moreover, it could be argued that this privileging of forms was more about the forms themselves rather than the learning that they encouraged. To use the phrase of Jones and Mulford (1971), the NLS was not about engagement with form, but in a reversal of the Romantic ideal of faithfully reflecting on events from life (Wordsworth, in Heaney, 1988: 169), about replicating the forms themselves, apparently for their own sake.

By concentrating on a wide range of poetic forms, the NLS contained a great deal of material about how to solve problems within what Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) and Sharples (1999) refer to as the rhetorical space thinking in the writing of texts, which seek to go beyond mere knowledge telling towards knowledge transformation. In theory, this would appear to be helpful for poetry writing pedagogy. The irony is that, far from giving teachers a better view of what poetry is, this concentration on forms, but not on how to use form as part of the meaning making process, came at the expense of a coherent view of content space thinking, what Sharples (1999: 23) calls the writer's beliefs about the writing topic. Thus, children were told that mastering poetic forms, from haiku and cinquain through to rap and choral poetry, was the goal, rather than exploring questions such as 'Why do we write poetry?', 'What are the challenges of writing poems?' and 'What do we learn when we write poems?' We could speculate that there was a concentration on forms as opposed to questions such as these (which are more focussed on purposes, and, perhaps, values) because they were felt to be less problematic to teach.

Evidence that responsibility for poetry's mixed status is also to be found within curricular orders (DfEE, 1999) must not be overlooked, however. It is encouraging that the NC promotes Cox's view of young writers learning, as it were, not mere technical mastery of language, but also the habits of adult or 'real' writers (1991: 24), with all that that entails about pedagogy of the writing process, from planning and drafting to revising and editing. It can also be argued, however, that the level descriptors for writing are unhelpful in describing progression for poetry, with little to guide teachers (DfEE, 1999: 58–9) as they make their assessments of poems by young writers, due to the imprecision and lack of differentiation in the language used (ibid). Furthermore, as Cox himself has accepted (1991), level descriptors are best used to assess the technical aspects of writing. Children's progress in the NC is measured via levels, and, since the introduction of league tables, these frame the debate about 'improvement' of teaching and learning in the UK context. It could, therefore, be speculated that teachers, seeing an assessment framework geared towards technical improvements within writing may well be tempted to spend little time engaged in the

teaching and assessment of nontechnical writing, such as poetry, because of the tacit admission that it is harder to assess (Wilson, 2005a: 232). In crude terms, the system does not reward it. Indeed, there is some evidence (Henry, 2001; Ofsted, 2007) to suggest that this is now an established pattern, with teachers of 10-11 year-olds (Year 6) not including poetry writing in their curriculum until after their classes have sat the English (not Scottish and Welsh) National Tests.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

England is not alone among English speaking countries, however, in presenting a mixed view of poetry writing within the English curriculum. Curricular recommendations in the State of New York, for example, (The University of the State of New York, 2005) contain references to young children being required to write poetry only until Grade 3. The remainder of the curricular documentation for the State mentions poetry implicitly ('select a genre and use appropriate conventions, such as dialogue, rhythm, and rhyme, with assistance': 2005: 55), but only under the heading of 'Standard 2: Literary Response and Expression'.

It is also instructive to read the curricular recommendations for the State of Queensland, Australia (Curriculum Corporation, 2005) and the Province of Ontario, Canada (Ministry of Education, 2006), for they echo the approach of the NLS and PNS on more than one level. Firstly, and not surprisingly, they present poetry as one of many genres. which learners are expected to engage with, including digital and other multimodal texts, in both written and reading (viewed) form. Secondly, there is a real attempt to build progression into poetry writing, but as in England, this is achieved through the use of models and forms with even less mention of writing poetry from direct experience. Of these two, the Ontario recommendations are the more consistent, moving from writing

a variation on a familiar poem, chant, or song, in Grade 1, to cinquains/shape poems modelled on the structures and styles of poems read in Grade 4, to original poems based on a model such as a haiku in Grade 6 (Ministry of Education, 2006: 44, 84, 110).

In New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1994) poetry writing is also encouraged through the use of models, but in a context, which also promotes poetry as a medium with which to explore film-making, performance, and writing from experience on similar themes (e.g., relationships, and the environment). Notable among the foregoing recommendations, the New Zealand context for poetry writing also includes notes on assessment, which promote metacognition: 'students are to review their expressive writing to observe their own processes' (Ministry of Education, 1994:106). It is a rare example of what might be called a holistic approach to writing pedagogy, of which poetry is a part.

POETRY'S STATUS

This secure but nevertheless mixed status of poetry writing perpetuates what may be called a vicious cycle of indifference and, worse, ignorance, of its merits. This leaves teachers and researchers alike with little agreed language of how progression may be accounted for within it, and with no real sense of how it might aid language development. It is as though poetry's inclusion in the curriculum provides evidence that 'creativity' is thriving, despite findings (Benton, 1986, 1999, 2000) and views (Cox, 1998; Marshall, 1998; Leach, 2000; Alexander, 2003), which suggest otherwise. As Benton (2000) has said that poetry is being taught is not a guarantee that it will be taught well. The metaphor he uses to describe this is one of a 'conveyor belt'. This is useful in indicating a process of pedagogy which, ironically perhaps, places little emphasis on process itself, and concentrates upon the 'production' of poems, regardless of their worth, beyond their adherence

to certain forms (Wilson, 2005b). To reassert the value of poetry writing with young people and to explore how poetry can be taught creatively, and with an awareness of development, it will be necessary to report on a small-scale piece of research.

EXAMINING DEVELOPMENT IN POETRY WRITING

Methodology

The theory proposed in this chapter is developed from a small-scale ESRC-funded doctoral study on teaching poetry writing at Key Stage 2 (KS2). This was based on an eighteen month period of teaching a class of children aged 10–11 (Year 5 and Year 6, in the UK) in a large combined school in Exeter in southwest England.

The research was a case study within the interpretative paradigm, and sought to illuminate the poetry writing processes of young children, as well as the pedagogy developed over the project. The methods one uses to do this were qualitative. They included in-depth analysis of children's writing, semistructured interviews, fieldwork notes, diaries, reports and tapes of conversations, and triangulated observations (Bassey, 1995).

A central theme in the literature of poets talking about their work (Curtis, 1996; Crawford et al., 1995; Wilmer, 1994; Wilson, 1990; Koch, 1998; Brown and Paterson, 2003; Brown, 2004) is the valuing of risk-taking and experimentation within each poem as a sign of progress. By thorough reading of the poems written by the children and through drawing on ideas raised in the literature, criteria were devised, which were observable as signs of progress. These criteria formed two categories as a framework for analyzing the writing: use of language and use of form. This became the basis for developing a coding tool, which was used to identify patterns and areas of difficulty across the group. (For further details see Wilson, 2005a.)

Theories of learning

Underpinning the research were the constructivist theories of Bruner (1986) and Vygotstky (in Britton, 1987). In the former, we find the idea that, though a child is young and inexperienced, they may be instructed and become proficient in activities and ideas beyond their normal scope. In the latter, through the idea of the 'zone of proximal development' (Harvard, 1996: 39), we see the concept of learning being scaffolded by adults, in order that children may become self-regulatory and eventually independent (Harvard, 1996: 47, 40). Key to this, according to Harvard is the setting of goals by the adult, and their 'gradual and sensitive withdrawal from the regulatory role' (Harvard, 1996: 47). The poems by children discussed in the following section are analyzed in the light of how far they can be seen represent these two key processes at work.

The cognitive load of poetry writing

Also underpinning the research was theory regarding the nature of poetry itself. The overarching aim of the teaching was to create a 'poetry-*writing*-friendly classroom' (Rosen, in Barrs and Rosen, 1997: 4, author's italics), where poems were read, discussed, performed, analyzed, and brought in from home as well as written. Underpinning this goal was Auden's concept of poetry as 'memorable speech' (in Mendelson, 1996: 105), an elastic and scavenging form (Rosen, in Barrs and Rosen, 1997: 3) where risk and playfulness with language, including the appropriation of other forms of discourse, is encouraged. In terms of creativity theory, therefore, the practice sought to embody 'possibility thinking' (Craft, 2005: 19) and Andreasen and Powers' idea (1974) of 'over-inclusive' thinking, in which concepts or spaces 'coded as separate by most people [are] treated as belonging together' (Cropley, 2001: 38). Thus, the practice embodied the notion that poetry was

both 'everyday' and a separate language (Koch, 1998: 19).

Koch's own example was a useful precursor in that he believed (1970, 1973), in the tradition of Bruner and Vygotsky, that children could learn the 'language' of poetry and become expert in it. This was important because, as has been stressed before (Wilson, 2007), the cognitive demands upon children of writing poetry are great. Not only do they have to unlearn the 'rules' of prose in order to apply what Strauss (1993: 3) calls its 'hedged-off area', in the current context they have to also unlearn the rules of different poetic forms each time they experience a new form or model. This may explain why children often revert to the use of rhyme in their early attempts at writing poetry, because they see it as the foremost quality, which sets it apart from prose, and therefore the one they try to replicate, regardless of meaning. This may also explain, in part, why children find it hard to lay their poems out on the page as poems and not prose. Sharples (1999) and Kellogg (1994) both stress the importance of the organizational aspect of mental schemas in writing development. Children's difficulties with writing poems can perhaps be explained by their inexperience, and in cognitive terms by their limited schemas of what poetry can be, what it can include, and what it can look like.

Progress within poetry writing

Without detailed repeating what has been reported on before (Wilson, 2005a), the tools of practical criticism were used to discuss children's poems, but were rejected as a means of pronouncing on what they showed about overall development. This was partly for practical reasons. The idea of 'scoring' poems was found to be unrealistic and unpredictable and would say little about the progress being made. A more useful approach was found to be an extension of Sedgwick's notion (1997) of wanting to discover and praise individual moments within poems: or,

what Dunn (2001: 143), reporting on pedagogy with creative writing students, calls taking pleasure in 'small improvements and […] flashes of the genuine'. Another influence was Sharples' idea (1999) of paying close attention not only to what children did better, but also to what they did differently in their poetry writing.

Long-term scaffolding of poetry writing

These signs of progress (Wilson, 2005a: 232) were organized into three strands: use of language, use of form and use of poetic models. Wilson (2005a) discusses all three areas of progression; Wilson (2005b) reports on development in handling of poetic form; and Wilson (2007) reports on development in the use of models and literary forms. In the latter, I argue for a reconceptualization of the use of models to teach poetry writing, introducing them at points of developmental need. It is suggested that this could take two forms: early or direct scaffolding; and long-term scaffolding. The former has been reported on (2007), so it is the latter of these concepts, which is explored in detail next, by looking at poems by children.

As Harvard (1996), in the preceding section, says, the hallmarks of independent learning are the increasing of the child's self-regulation and the sensitive withdrawal of the adult. These can be seen in the examples presented in the following section. They can be classified as poems written under the stimulus of modelled processes such as 'guided fantasy' (Sansom, 1994) (sometimes referred to as guided narrative), and deep or untutored modelling. It is important to point out that both of these pedagogical approaches occurred with most success towards the end of the project.

Guided fantasy is a writing exercise, which begins by being controlled by the teacher and ends with the child taking control of the material and form of the writing for themselves. The teacher asks a series of questions

('Recall a place that you know well. Describe it.', etc.), pausing to give the class time to write after each one. Through these questions the teacher takes the class on a journey, which is at once both general and completely personal to each child. At the end of a number of these questions and answers, each child will have a 'block' of writing as it were, which they are then invited to use as a starting point, by adding to it, or to quarry, by editing and refining. This exercise is compatible with Vygotskian learning theory, because it begins with goals set up by the teacher and ends with goals being explored (or discovered) after the teacher's withdrawal.

Deep, or untutored modelling is the name given to poems which were written right at the end of the project, during a period of intense redrafting in which the class was encouraged to create a portfolio, which represented their best work from the project as a whole. In practice, these poems emerged as a result of children reading a range of poems for themselves, and choosing to write poems based upon them. As has been reported (Wilson, 2007), young poets have difficulty in 'going beyond' the model given to them. This can be because the model in question is not stimulating enough; or conversely because it is too strong in itself, allowing the young poet too little space to develop their own ideas, approach to the subject, or voice. Deep/untutored models have the advantage of being chosen by children themselves. This is also compatible with Vygotskian learning theory, therefore, in the sense that the goals and rationales of the writing are directed and regulated by the child from the start. The implications for a pedagogy, which used this model are discussed in the following section.

Guided fantasy explored

Three poems, which were generated using guided fantasy are presented next. They are examined in terms of their own merits or signs of progress out of which a discussion emerges about creativity and schema theory in relation to progression in poetry writing.

> Things are going pear-shaped
> It looked like a music shop
> An outline of 3 cellos in a turquoise blue
> In a swimming pool
> Like a pear in the fruit bowl
> Don't go into a music shop with a turquoise
> Background
>   Tim, 10 (November)

Stimulated by guided questions about an 'art' postcard of a painting, this was Tim's second poem in the study. It is interesting because, although not very organized, the writing shows a willingness to take risks with language, through the technique of simile ('like a music shop'; 'like a pear in a fruit bowl') and the metaphor in lines 2–3. This was more than what had been asked of the class. The next example shows Tim's writing some 15 months later.

> The Express
> Pulling out of the London termini
> The engine thumps
> And the wind in my hair
> Gets to 100
> Passing nowhere
> Brake with air
> You whack off the power handle
> And breaking madly
> Crossing the Border of Scotland
> Pulling into Waverley station
> The lady saying "This train waiting"
> Resting in the Scottish city
> Pulling out of the London Termini
>   Tim, 11 (February)

Since Hughes (1967) and Hull (1988) the idea has persisted in poetry pedagogy that what appears on the page is only a shadow of the original 'inspiration' of the writer, and thus their intentions can never be fully known. What can be observed, nevertheless, is Tim's use of rhyme, half rhyme, onomatopoeia, and repetition. Whether or not the rhyme in the poem ('hair/air/nowhere') occurs by chance is not known. Likewise, the half rhyme: 'station/waiting; city/termini'; and the assonantal 'madly/handle'. The onomatopoeic 'thump' and 'whack' seem deliberate by comparison, perhaps more closely allied to the actual speaking voice of the writer. The result

of these sound effects is to emphasize and mirror the poem's subject matter, that of rapid movement, 'below the conscious levels of thought and feeling' (Eliot, in Andrews, 1991: 53).

In terms of use of language the phrase 'the wind in my hair/Gets to 100' is pleasing, a telling evocation of speed and excitement. This is formally of note also, the phrase stretched out across two lines, the line breaks slowing down the reader's experience of the moment. The description of the arrival in 'the Scottish City', with its longer lines ('And Braking madly/Crossing the Border of Scotland/Pulling into Waverley station), and verbs in the present participle, has the effect of slowing down the reader, as the poem and the journey draw to a close. This is partly created by the way the poem uses only one 'idea' per line in the second half of the poem, a subtle and thoughtful use of form.

Creativity and constraint in guided fantasy

What gives the poem its 'finish and lift-off' (Heaney, 1980: 221), however, is the way it is bracketed by the same first and last lines. This has the effect of causing one to wonder whether this was an event that really happened, is imaginary, or is a foretelling of an event yet to happen. Together, these small signs of progress can show that there was development in Tim's poetry writing during the practice.

How far that development is due to maturation of Tim's other writing skills remains an open question. It is always a risk on the part of a teacher or observer to make claims based on the draft of another poet's work (Hughes, 1994; Paterson, 1996). It is instructive, however, to attempt to make judgements on Tim's poem in terms of recent poetry writing theory (Dunn, 2001). Writing on poetry and pedagogy Dunn uses three metaphors to describe progress. While Sharples (1999) is right to caution against using metaphors to describe writing progress, the advantage in using them is that they can formalize that which we find hardest to express. Dunn speaks of 'surprising oneself' and 'know[ing] what might surprise others' (2001: 139); of 'saying things you didn't know you were going to say' (140); and of taking steps 'into the unknown or vaguely known' (142).

Taken together, these metaphors describe and embody risk in the poetic enterprise. They also embody great cognitive and meta-cognitive awareness, centring on the idea that it is a sign of strength and of developing maturity to discover what needs to be said, as it is being written as opposed to a plan created beforehand. Otherwise, in the words of Longley, one is in danger of 'merely versifying opinion' (1996: 119). The idea of surprising oneself, for example, demands that one has enough self-knowledge to make judgements about what would or would not be a surprise in a poem. On another level of complexity is the consideration of what would surprise others. This perhaps helps to explain why progression in poetry is difficult to demonstrate for children. Quite apart from wanting to please the teacher, it is as though there is a struggle not only to access and use stimulating material, but also to play with it and shape it so that discoveries about form and language and meaning making are made along the way. This is why guided fantasy has benefits as a strategy. It provides both the constraint required for creativity to take place (Sharples, 1999; Boden, 2004) but with enough freedom for playfulness to occur with language and form. The child is given two chances to make their writing surprising, not just one. It should be remembered that Tim's first guided fantasy poem, while showing signs of language-play, was fairly limited. This would suggest, as been reported elsewhere (Wilson, 2005a; 2007) that progress in this area is slow and nonlinear.

Flexible schema in guided fantasy

One of the central paradoxes of creativity is that in order for discoveries to make, while

> Query: "Longley, 1996" is not listed in Reference list.

engaged in an activity, it is sometimes necessary to 'narrow down the possibilities at each step [of the journey]' (Sharples, 1999: 44), that is, to 'relax some of the constraints', or to begin again by returning to a previous point (ibid: 43). These creative habits of mind demand flexibility and a preparedness to take risks. They are what we might call inventive operational schema. Extending the idea of schema as cluster or map of ideas, this could be likened to a manual of instructions, which the writer develops and refines to produce a web of tactics that can help in solving problems. Tim's way of achieving this in 'The Express' is to do something at once very simple (he repeats a line; he 'back[s] up' (ibid) to a previous point) and very complex. This results in surprise or what Dunn (2001: 140) calls 'discovery'.

One cannot know whether it was a last minute decision to repeat it, or whether it was intended all along. It is an indication of significant progress, however, because of the discovery it represents in terms of the poem's content and energy; it literally takes the poem in a new direction and adds a further layer of meaning. Nevertheless, one can also speculate that it signifies discovery about the process of writing poems, that, for example, through the relatively simple technique of repetition, it is as though a whole new poem can come into being.

Knowledge telling and rigid schema in guided fantasy

In contrast to Tim's poem, it is useful now to discuss a poem, which resulted from the same stimulus, but does not display the same sense of adventure, and which is based on a limited operational schema.

> The Feeling
> It looks like a girl going on holiday for the first time.
> It sounds like a scream or a shout.
> It smells like a sunflower.
> It feels like fluff or wool.
> It tastes like a sweet strawberry.
> It says 'I can't wait!'

> It is surprised and jumpy.
> Sometimes, it makes you feel sick.
> Or nervous.
> Camilla, 11 (February)

This is an effective poem, which uses the techniques of simile and metaphor, some of which can be described as unusual ('like a girl going on holiday for the first time'), to describe without naming a particular feeling. In this way, it shows awareness of, while also engaging, the reader's interest by drawing them in to solve the (unasked) question, like a riddle. It is organized and purposeful, with one idea presented on each of its lines. Every one of its lines is a full sentence, except for the last, which makes an attempt at giving the poem a 'twist' both tonally and in its content. These are all signs of progress compared with Camilla's guided fantasy poem from earlier in the project. However, in spite of all of its felicities, the poem does not give off the same level of excitement, either with the material in question, or with the process of writing, that Tim's demonstrates.

'The Express' is not concerned with making prose sense but with creating an experience. 'The Feeling', for all its reader-awareness, does not create an experience, but attempts to persuade the reader that one has taken place. In terms of models of writing already mentioned, the poem is stunted in its ambition by adhering, too closely, perhaps to the stimulus which prompted it, resulting in a knowledge telling approach. To refer to the theory of two major twentieth-century poets, Camilla's poem is unconscious when it needs to be conscious, and conscious when it needs to be unconscious (Eliot, 1951). It is 'forged' rather than 'hatched' (Heaney, 1980: 87, 82). Tim's poem, on the other hand seems to take pleasure connecting 'original accent' with 'discovered style' (Heaney, 1980: 43), and appears to have created purposes that break free of its original stimulus and constraints.

The problem with such discussions is that Camilla has executed the instructions of the guided fantasy to the letter in 'The Feeling'. It is a poem, which demonstrates that progress has been made, which nevertheless makes

one aware of how much more could have been achieved. Unlike Tim, she has shown rigidity, not inventiveness, in her operational schema, and has produced a poem, which, while modestly effective, has not left the 'script' (Craft, 2005: 69) of the original draft. Her poem is, therefore, an example of how a creatively promoted constraint was used not as a safety net but as a straitjacket.

Freedom and flexibility in untutored modelling

Though they extended their range of the poetry language (Koch, 1998), demonstrating qualities missing from their earlier work, Tim and Camilla's poems illustrate that progress within poetry writing is nonlinear, not easy to quantify, and above all, takes time to appear, even with careful scaffolding. Presented in the following section are two further examples of poems arising from long-term scaffolding, which also have mixed results. They are both based on poems by Allan Ahlberg. 'Slow readers going out' is based on 'Slow Reader' and can be found in Ahlberg (1983: 13); 'Bags I', which stimulated the second poem, is from Ahlberg (1989: 30–31).

> Slow readers going out
> I-am-go-ing-fly-ing-less-ons
> I-am-go-ing-bed
> I-am-go-ing-to-my-grand-
> ma's-house-and-never-coming-
> back.
>   Kezia, 11 (March)

This short poem, while demonstrating engagement with the original and a desire to use its techniques for new purposes, is a good instance of the difficulty children have in going beyond the model they have chosen. As in the original all of its words are hyphenated, and some broken up into separate syllables, to convey a sense of reading slowly out loud. Different from the original is that each of the poem's three sentences represents the interior speech of the speaker's head. Hinted at, but never stated, is the idea that

having flying lessons etc. would be preferable to being in the slow readers' group. Despite this sense of subtle sophistication, the poem is, finally, quite limited, with its ideas never reaching full development.

Also written at the end of the project in a phase of untutored modelling is 'Bags off'. This poem is of a different order to that of 'Slow readers going out', because it uses the chosen model as a jumping off point to create its own world, as opposed to journeying via a series of techniques or phrases, which in some way require replicating. It should be noted that the original poem is written in quatrains and has regular rhythm and rhyme. All that it shares with the following poem is the word 'Bags'.

> Bags off
> Bags off,
> Bags off heavens up above,
> Bags off soft white furry kittens,
> Bags off 7:00 o'clock in the midnight,
> Bags off my yellow sunflower,
> Bags off,
> Bags off,
> Bags off pigs flying higher and higher,
> Bags off babies crying,
> Bags off 2:00 O'clock in the morning,
> Bags off love flowers,
> Bags off.
>   Kezia, 11 (March)

The central technique is one of repetition, where the phrase 'Bags off' is used as a kind of battering ram to which other phrases ('heavens up above'; 'babies crying') are fused. In contrast to Tim, mentioned earlier, her poem gains impetus from explicit play with sound, via repetition, as well as meaning ('7:00 O'clock in the midnight'; 'pigs flying higher and higher'; 'love flowers') to create deliberate nonsense. Also in contrast to Tim, there is no discernable autobiographical material in the poem, so it could be argued that it represents an adventure with pure form and meaning, requiring the reader to take it on its own terms and make of it what they will. As in 'The Express', Kezia demonstrates a flexible operational schema to achieve the effects she does. Viewed as writing from a model, one observes the confidence needed

to depart almost completely from it. Viewed as an exercise in problem solving, it is as though the heavy repetition in the poem provides the constraint against which the 'free association' (Heaney, 1988: 142) of the wordplay can have full rein, where the 'tongue is suddenly ungoverned' (ibid: xxii).

Styles (1992: 74) has called children 'natural' poets. Drawing on Chukovsky's theory (1963) that a carnivalesque subversion of reality through repetition, role play and use of metaphor are all observable attributes of young children's language, Whitehead (1995: 52) reminds us that 'language is not just a system for communicating and transmitting information'. This is arguably what Kezia discovers in the foregoing poem, namely, that confident and wholehearted wordplay can 'alert us to the poetry and incongruity which pervades our everyday use of language' (1995:51). In terms of writing development, therefore, one could argue that it is paradoxically in their use of nonsense, where their language comes closest to the playful utterances of the very young, that developing writers are able to display greatest sophistication. This is perhaps a counterintuitive concept for teachers to reflect upon, for it challenges notions of 'linear' development. In the current pedagogical context, where the poetry curriculum is narrowed or even dispensed with in Years 6 and 9 due to the concentration on preparation for National Tests (Ofsted, 2007), it also acts as a reminder that 'attempts to by-pass […] exploratory thinking by imposing adult information and realism too soon' (Whitehead, 1995: 46) disinherit both teachers and children from potentially rewarding experience.

Query: "Ofsted, 2007" is not listed in Reference list.

Immersion and improvisation in untutored modelling

The foregoing poem, therefore, bears no semblance to the one it is based on. Yet, this poses a difficult question for teachers. Faced with writing of this kind, one could speculate that many teachers would express puzzlement and even incomprehension. The poem makes no attempt to observe the 'normal' 'poetic' niceties found in poems by children. Moreover, it can be said to represent progression in poetry writing for two reasons. Firstly, it is an example of flexible, self-regulated and independent learning, where the goals and rationales for the writing were devised not by the teacher, but in the child's own time and at their own pace. It is knowledge, which is discovered and directed by the child. Secondly, while the poem was written quickly, it could be argued that it was based on a long period of immersion and 'incubation' (Wallas, in Cropley, 2001: 41; in Sansom, 1994: 60; and Nickerson, 1999: 418). To use a very old cliché, the poem is like the tip of an iceberg: what we do not see is the eighteen months of reading, sharing, discussing, performing, drafting, and redrafting of poems in which the child has been immersed and which lead up to this final period of work. One could argue that it is this, which gives the child the confidence to 'improvise'. In terms of pedagogy, many poems, which displayed little desire to go beyond the model were written before this poem, which was created for its own purposes.

This can also be explained in terms of creativity theory (Weisberg, 1999), which explains incubation in terms of 'immersion' (ibid: 236), in a useful analogy with jazz musicians learning to improvise:

> They learn other's solos until they can play them back effortlessly … and this forms the basis for the development of the ability to go beyond what they have learned and to create new music. The new music may be related to the models that they have 'internalized', in the sense that often one can tell who has influenced a given player, but the new music will go beyond the music of the model, sometimes in relatively radical ways (ibid: 236–7).

Bruner (1979) describes this process as having the 'freedom to be dominated by the object' (25), where 'we get our creative second wind, at the point when the object takes over', where we 'permit[…] it to develop its own being' (ibid). It seems there are two kind of immersion going on here.

Firstly, there is the kind suggested by the phrase 'long-term scaffolding', mentioned earlier, which relies on the patient and careful setting of goals by teachers, in the knowledge that progress may take a while to become visible. Secondly, there is the immersion of the child in the task at hand, perhaps below the levels of conscious thought, as Eliot would put it, where thinking is so rapid and intuitive as to be almost wordless. This is the state of mind, coupled with flexible operating schemas, which can allow children to make sudden progress in their poetry writing.

Writing about children's ability to use rhyme in their poems, Brownjohn (1995:93) says that such development is possible '*if* they have received enlightened and informed teaching throughout their career' (author's italics). It would seem that much hangs on that small but important word 'if'. On one level, as Brownjohn notes, it has implications for individual schools' policies on poetry. On another, however, it requires us to consider that the deep immersion within and self-directed modelling of poetry writing actually begin much earlier in children's school careers, at the earliest stages, when language, sound, sense, and nonsense are most explicitly played with. The challenge to pedagogy in the current context, therefore, is to consider the notion that promoting poetry as 'the "wow" factor in children's language development' (Whitehead, 1995: 51) cannot be 'left' until the latter years of the primary school, when children's ability to write is more developed. Instead, it needs 'bedding [in] the ear with a kind of linguistic hard-core' (Heaney, 1980:45) of nursery rhymes, non-sense, songs, tongue twisters, jingles, and riddles throughout the early years (Beard, 1999:47). Without this foundation, it is probable that using more sophisticated models later on will have only limited effects.

Implications for pedagogy

Development as a writer of poetry can be described as the use of flexible operating schema in activities of long-term scaffolding, which provide both freedom and constraint and allow for improvisation and immersion. The implications for practice are serious, but need not be daunting. The main considera-tion, as analysis of the current context has shown, is that of time. In a climate where poetry writing is secure but not overtly valued, it is possible to imagine a situation where pedagogy remains concerned with replicating models and forms rather than the learning within them (Wilson, 2005a) and which are 'shortcuts' to poems being produced (Wilson, 2007).

For the deep and long-term scaffolding and the exploratory thinking, which has been described to take place, there need to exist 'environments of possibility' (Grainger, Goouch and Lambirth, 2005: 187), where teachers' subject knowledge is considerable, as well as their 'pedagogical knowledge and awareness of the significance of creative con-texts and purpose in teaching writing' (ibid). This can be described as a pedagogy of risk: as has been shown, development in poetry is slow and requires not only patience but also good knowledge of possible models and strategies. It necessitates an emphasis on choice. For children to develop flexible oper-ating schema for writing poems, and there-fore to have choices as they write, both explicit and implicit habits of mind need to be explored with them. The 'not wholly pre-dictable' (Wormser and Cappella, 2000: 48) nature of poetry, far from being seen as a weakness, should be embraced by teachers and researchers alike. As Dunn (2001: 187) says, 'Inherent in such knowledge is that our choices narrow with every word we put down, and that these constrictions are oppor-tunities for invention and virtuosity'. These can be present in use of language, of form and that of models, on a continuum from the commonplace to the effective to the ambi-tious. How we define invention and virtuos-ity, will of course, vary from person to person and teacher to teacher. What can be taught can also be observed, however, and the best place to start looking, however our views of

it may change, is with those special moments when we encourage and 'identify the genuine' (ibid: 139).

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