class sharing time so that all authors have sharing opportunities. For example, a strategy called TAG: T–Tell what you like, A–Ask questions, G–Give ideas a positive and effective means to promote sharing (Zaragoza, 1987). The inclusion of a weekly sign up sheet also helps children and teacher monitor sharing opportunities, i.e., "if you already signed up this week you need to leave space for someone else to share". This ensures that all children have a chance to share. Therefore, while there are differences in types of social interactions across different writing settings, the bottom line is: Authors are authors no matter where they write!

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Newspapers in Education and Children's Writing

David Wray and Jane Medwell

Abstract

Emphasis upon authenticity in children's writing leads us to consider the possibilities in engaging children in producing authentic texts such as newspapers. In this article David Wray and Jane Medwell discuss their research into the effects of three approaches to this newspaper production, one of which involved the collaboration of a teacher with a worker from the Newspapers in Education scheme. The very positive outcomes of this partnership are stressed.

Introduction

Reports (e.g. Ofsted, 1993) have noted that literacy work in primary schools is still predominantly concerned with children's abilities to read and write narrative fiction. Although an important aspect of literacy development, experience with narrative fiction is limited in the extent to which it reflects the experience of the literate adult in a modern print-dominated society. If schools are to fully prepare their children for the literacy demands of the world beyond their walls they need to give a greater degree of attention to other genres of text (Lewis & Wray, 1995).

Newspapers are a particularly important example of such non-fiction genres in that they represent perhaps the most widely used source of text among adults, encompassing a wide variety of text functions, from informative to persuasive, from narrative to procedural. It might be hypothesised that experience of working with a newspaper in school should have a significant impact on children's attitudes towards this range of text types and the newspaper format in general and on their abilities to handle these. Newspaper articles are written for a range of purposes, with particular audiences in mind and in working with them children will naturally encounter this range.

Many teachers have recognised the usefulness of newspaper work with school children and there have been a number of case study reports of such work (e.g. Huggins, 1995). As yet, however, there have

been no studies which have attempted to assess the effects of newspaper experiences on children's understandings of the purposes and forms of print, nor which have tried to compare the relative effects of different forms of such experiences.

Forms of newspaper experience

The study reported in this article addressed three ways in which teachers focus their children's attention on the purpose, format and structure of newspapers. Each of these ways involves children in some kind of newspaper creation, during the course of which they have to 'tune in' to the appropriate style, content and layout for the various sections they compose. There is a strong argument that the best way of enhancing children's abilities to respond critically to the forms of text they encounter in formats such as newspapers is for them to wrestle with the problems of producing their own such text (Wray, 1990).

Approach 1: Making a class newspaper

Most primary teachers will at some point involve their children in the making of a newspaper, usually with content derived closely from the children's direct experience. The most common way into such a project is for teachers to get children to brainstorm possible contents, to decide on a list of features, reports and other items, to volunteer for particular roles such as proof reader, art editor etc., and then to get most of the class involved in contributing in some way. The newspaper produced will usually be a straightforward cut-and-paste affair, often using handwritten text and hand-drawn artwork stuck onto a sugar paper backing.

Approach 2: Using desktop publishing

This approach is a variant of Approach 1 but involves children producing their newspaper using computer technology and word processing or desktop publishing software. There are several software packages available which emulate the production of newspapers and several packages which provide an introduction to simple DTP. Some teachers will, however, still use cut and paste to produce the newspaper from word-processed text.

Approach 3: Involving Newspapers in Education (NiE) personnel

This involves personnel from local newspapers working with children to introduce them to the various features of a newspaper. At some point children may visit a newspaper office where there may be activities

for them to carry out and, almost certainly, they will produce their own newspaper during or after this visit. The actual production may not, however, be terribly hi-tech and physical cut and paste may still feature largely.

The current project

The aim of the current project was to provide a comparison between these three approaches to newspaper production with children. More particularly, it aimed to investigate the following questions:

• What are the effects on children's knowledge of and attitudes towards newspapers of the experience of creating their own newspaper using either of the three outlined approaches?
• How useful an extension to children's experiences with newspapers was the link with NiE?

To explore these the study looked at the teachers' aims for the experiences they organised for their classes and the children's reactions to these experiences, as well as at the nature of these experiences.

Three classes of Year 5 children (referred to here as Class A, Class B and Class C) were studied as they went through the process of working with newspapers and then making their own newspaper. Class A used a straightforward cut and paste approach although parts of the text were prepared originally on a word processor (Approach 1). Class B used a desktop publishing software package and had the use of two computer systems for the duration of their project (Approach 2). Class C had some input from a local NiE representative and then visited the local newspaper offices where they made their own newspaper using some of the office facilities but mainly straightforward cut and paste (Approach 3). In all three cases the work was entirely completed within a period of two and four weeks, although within that period there were variations in the amount of time actually spent on it, as will be described later. Information about each class's experiences was collected through interviews with children and teachers involved and by observation of classroom activity.

The classroom experiences

Class A

Class A were asked to make a class newspaper to report on the work they had been doing and the events which had happened during the current half term. When asked to describe her aims for this activity, the teacher emphasised the need to introduce children to writing for a wider audience than the teacher, to writing in newspaper style and the accur-

ate reporting of events, and to the process of drafting and editing writing.

The teacher introduced the activity to the class by showing them a newspaper and discussing its various parts such as the front page, headlines, the sports page, horoscopes, pictures. The children were then asked to work in groups to brainstorm possible contents for the newspaper. Each group prepared a list of items which were subsequently read out to the whole class. The teacher compiled a master list on the flip chart using the group suggestions.

The teacher then discussed with the class the various jobs involved in making a newspaper. A list was made on the flip chart of jobs such as Editor, Art Editor, Proof-reader, Sports Editor, Reporters. Children were asked to think about which job they would like to do and to volunteer. During the next quarter of an hour or so jobs were allocated by the teacher to groups of children, more or less following their preferences. By working on a group basis (for example, a group of four children were given the collective title, Editor) the teacher was able to allocate jobs to every child in the class.

Each group was then asked to get together to draw up a description of what their responsibilities would be in the making of the newspaper. The teacher circulated around the groups and helped them clarify these responsibilities. When each group were happy with their job specifications, they were asked to begin their work on putting together their newspaper.

The preliminary work described above took up the whole of a teaching session (about 1½ hours). The rest of the work done on the newspaper was integrated into the work of the class. Thus a group or groups worked on their part of the project during most of the sessions in the following two weeks. Most children were involved in activities such as: discussing and planning together the detailed contents of their sections of the newspaper, writing draft entries and carrying out a preliminary proof-read, writing final drafts, drawing and/or cutting out pictures to accompany their pieces. Some children used the class computer to word-process their pieces. The group with the title Editors had the responsibility of ensuring everything fitted into the space they had available in the newspaper and produced an initial plan for others to work to. They also spent some time debating with other children about which parts of their articles could be cut to make them fit in the space available. The Proof-readers group checked their colleagues' spelling and they were actually the busiest group in the class for most of the time.

When everything was prepared and ready to be stuck finally into place, the teacher held a half hour whole class session during which she checked with the children that they all agreed the newspaper was

almost finished. Each group were asked for their feelings about what they had done. Three children were then allocated the task of carefully sticking down the sections of the newspaper. The final product consisted of a four page newspaper with articles stuck onto four pages of white sugar paper. The paper included advertisements for school-based activities (sports day and the class trip). It was displayed prominently in the classroom and children encouraged to read it.

Class B

Class B were asked to make a class newspaper which was to be produced using a desktop publishing software package on the two computers they had available in their classroom. The aims of the teacher for this activity included writing for the needs of a wider audience which she further described in terms of style and presentation. This teacher also intended the children to learn about the creation of a genuine newspaper including the constraints and effects of desktop publishing and advertising.

The experience of this class was similar to that of class A in terms of classroom organisation and the division of classroom responsibilities. The teacher in this case asked them to focus their newspaper on events in the local community which involved some trawling through the pages of recent local newspapers and interviews with adults in and out of school. Groups were allocated to particular roles in a similar way to class A, with Editors, Art editors, Reporters etc. This class also appointed a Features group, who were responsible for such things as a crossword and a horoscope page.

The newspaper was printed in draft form for groups of children to read and comment upon before it reached its final draft. As in class A, some time was spent in whole class discussion of the contents of the paper before final draft stage. When a final version was agreed upon, copies were printed and sold in school at a cost of 2p each.

Class C

Class C undertook to produce a Dartmoor newspaper with the involvement of NiE personnel. The aims discussed by the teacher and the NiE co-ordinator included writing for a wider audience, an examination of the style and content of newspapers, a greater awareness of the role of newspapers in the wider community and an investigation of the technical constraints involved in creating a newspaper. The involvement of the Newspaper in Education representative included detailed planning with the teacher, a visit to school and a visit by the class to the local newspaper office.

The NiE co-ordinator began her session in school by involving the children in a discussion about newspapers and what might make a good newspaper story. In this discussion she introduced a number of technical terms such as solus, masthead, negative and plate. She showed them actual negatives and a plate and discussed their purposes and uses. The children were then given an activity to do which involved finding a series of items such as a classified advertisement and a picture of someone with glasses in a real newspaper and cutting these out. This session lasted about an hour.

The following hour session was spent on introducing children to the nature of newspaper reports and then asking them to write one based on a photograph they were given. During this session a great deal of information was given about the structure of reports using the What, When, Where, Who, Why inverted triangle (Harcourt, 1991). The difference between this structure and that normally used in story telling was stressed.

This session was followed, a week later, by a visit made by the class to the local newspaper office. The second NiE session involved children in the creation of a hand-written front and back page of a newspaper, using cut-and-paste techniques. They then observed the production of these two pages as a negative. Although the session was led by a different NiE co-ordinator it followed directly from the previous session. The children had prepared content for the stories to be used, and the NiE co-ordinator briefly revised the key points of the previous session, with the participation of the children. A key feature of the session was its restricted timescale. This was intended to give the children the real experience of producing a newspaper to a tight deadline.

Key themes

A number of key themes emerged from a comparison of these experiences.

Aims

All the experiences observed were judged to be broadly successful in their aims by the teachers or NiE leaders. Given that the aims of all the teachers involved shared a degree of similarity, it was noticeable that the ways they introduced the writing tasks emphasised differing features. The teacher in class A used very few technical terms (such as headline etc.) and emphasised accuracy both in the factual content of reports and in the features of language used such as spelling and punctuation. In class B the initial emphasis was upon detailed content (journalistic language including phrases culled from newspapers). By the second observation instructions to the children

were firmly centred upon the technicalities of using the computer and upon layout. Comparison with authentic newspaper creation was limited to a display of books. In class C the structure of newspaper reports and the technical process of newspaper creation were emphasised most heavily, even where children were not subsequently able to use the full technical processes themselves.

The children's perceptions of their experiences were slightly at variance with the expressed aims of the teachers. The children in class A discussed the experience in terms of it being a different type of writing exercise but when probed felt the criteria for writing were essentially similar to those of other writing tasks they undertook in class. They were able to discuss the roles of reporter and editor etc. In class B the children were much more focused upon the production of a finished product. They were concerned with issues such as how the writing would sound and look. In class C the children were also extremely focused upon the production of a final product and were able to describe the value of exercises such as the creation of a front and back page in moving towards their goal of creating a Dartmoor newspaper. The children's statements reflected the teacher's statements about the importance of reader awareness in writing.

Enthusiasm

All the experiences created enthusiasm amongst the children. They offered a variety of reasons for this enthusiasm, including a change from normal school work, and having a specific audience, such as parents or a general audience, such as local people to write for. The reasons for enthusiasm did not seem to be particular to either of the experiences, although it was noticeable that the tight deadline in their final NiE experience produced an atmosphere of irrepressible excitement among this class.

Teacher introductions

The teacher introductions were broadly similar in such features as the selection of groups, general classroom management etc. However, in discussing newspapers the type of vocabulary used varied greatly between classes. In class A, very limited technical vocabulary was used at the beginning of the project and this was largely confined to terms familiar to the children from other writing experiences. Thus terms such as proof-reading, editing and punctuation were used regularly, there was some use of newspaper terms such as headline and column but no use of terms such as masthead, solus which have meaning only within the newspaper world. The children's vocabulary reflected that of the teacher.

The vocabulary used by the teacher in class B was heavily influenced by the technical demands of the medium in which the children were working, i.e. the computer. Terms such as keying in and layout were used throughout and, in the second session in which this class was observed, terms such as font, type-size and even serif began to be used extensively. Little specific newspaper vocabulary was used, with exception of terms such as column. Children varied in the extent to which they used this vocabulary and some of the computer terms were not used at all by them.

In class C a selection of highly technical newspaper vocabulary was used consistently in both sessions. This did not resemble the general vocabulary about writing in the National Curriculum so much as specific newspaper terms. Thus terms such as solus, negative, masthead and sub-editor were used extensively. Perhaps surprisingly, the children had little difficulty with such terms and could explain them quite clearly to the researchers.

Audience

In all the classes the teachers stated that one of the aims was for children to write for a wider audience. However, in each class, the ways in which children perceived a wider audience varied. In class A children were initially not certain that other children would read their work, despite the fact that the teacher stated this clearly. By the second session most had begun to realise that this was a likely outcome. In class B children were aware from the outset that their work would be seen by the whole school and this was seen very positively. Their reader awareness was voiced in terms of details of layout and format. They were concerned that their newspaper should look professional. The children in class C were also quite clear they were working towards a public product. They discussed this in a number of ways including layout, accuracy, visual appeal and story structure. They were also very aware of the persuasive power of newspapers, especially of the power of advertisements. This class were unique in their awareness of the need for a newspaper report to capture its reader's interest very quickly, with the consequent implications of this for the report's structure.

Timescale

The timescales used for the activities in classes B and C were more precise than that used in class A. Deadlines were interpreted much more rigidly and, especially in class C, the children were aware that overshooting deadlines would have a disastrous effect upon their achievements. These deadlines naturally contributed a great deal to the perceived authenticity of the experiences the children underwent.

Conclusions

This study was very small scale and inevitably short term. Conclusions drawn from it are therefore tentative. There do seem, however, to be some issues of interest arising from the study which may have wider implications and these we will try to detail briefly in this section. An overriding point we wish to make first, however, concerns the general value to children's learning of experiences such as the three we report on here. There was considerable evidence in all three classes studied that the children were gaining a great deal from their experiences with newspapers. They all set about their tasks in a committed and enthusiastic way which, even if one discounts the novelty factor, suggests in itself that there is learning potential in each experience.

This said, there are points to be made which stem from the examination of these three experiences. Perhaps chief among these is the fact that each approach studied seems to rest upon a different view about the teaching of writing. For class A the dominant issues in teaching writing appeared to be those of accuracy. While concepts such as editing were used in this classroom, they were discussed by the children in such a way that it was clear that they were seen as school activities rather than reflecting an appreciation of the needs of a reader. Reader awareness appeared little fostered by the approach used in class A, probably largely because their finished product was actually not read by anyone other than the class themselves.

For class B, emphasis was upon drafting and revision, aspects which the use of the computer encourages, and children were encouraged to take potential readers into account in a more elaborated way. Computers also, of course, have a public dimension in that writing being done on them is easily viewed by those not directly involved in its creation. There are thus few barriers between writing and its readers and this fact appears to generate a more acute awareness of audience among child writers. The dominant view of writing which appeared to underlie the work of this class might well be termed a process view, a view which is predominant in current National Curriculum requirements.

The experience of class C seems, on the other hand, to reflect a view of writing which places much more emphasis upon text structure and audience needs. This class spent a great deal of time discussing and thinking about the structure of what they wrote and the effects of this structure on potential readers. Such an approach to writing fits with recent theories concerning the importance of text structure knowledge and sees writing primarily as a medium of communication rather than a means of exploring and elaborating one's own reality.

These views of writing suggest different approaches to writing for an audience and lead on to a consideration of what constitutes authenticity in writing. In all the classrooms studied the teachers valued the authenticity of the writing experience. For the children too, the experience of creating a newspaper seemed authentic, although differently expressed. In class B the authenticity of the writing was expressed in terms of the format of the final product and use of technology to produce a physically appropriate document. In class C the children discussed other aspects of the task, including the commercial constraints of newspaper production, and the effects of reading articles upon the readers. It may be that the concept of authenticity in writing needs some expansion. Authenticity is unlikely to reside simply in the production of a real product: it also implies that product having a role in a social world which the child can recognise. This is much enhanced when that role is clearly demarcated in the social world of adults.

The role of newspapers in the social world of adults is also crucial to increasing children's knowledge about newspapers. In the experience which involved the NiE co-ordinator, the children's developing knowledge about newspapers was linked clearly to the technical and social world of adult newspapers. In this way the children's reflection was not only on their own activities but also on those in the adult world. In class B book displays relating to newspapers were an attempt to bring this adult world to children but the vocabulary these children used suggested this had had a very limited impact upon them. In class A the teacher was not particularly concerned with increasing children's knowledge about newspapers and in that sense their writing for a newspaper was little different from their writing of any other kind of text in school.

A final evaluation of the experiences described in this report should stress that, while all three were of some positive benefit to the children who experienced them, that which involved NiE personnel appeared to have some special qualities. It was a rich experience for the children involved and did appear to teach them a great deal about newspapers and their functions. Whilst many of the positive teaching points of this experience are applicable to school, it appears that interaction with the workings of a commercial newspaper offers children a particular type of authenticity which can develop not only these children's knowledge of newspapers, but also their understandings about writing. As such, the partnership between teachers and Newspapers in Education has much to commend it educationally and deserves to be more widely used than it is.

Note

For further information about the Newspapers in Education Scheme, contact your local newspaper or Keith Harcourt, Northcliffe Newspapers in Education Project, Longfield Road, North Farm Industrial Estate, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN2 3HL.

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