

CHAPTER 10.

“A MATTER OF PERSONAL TASTE”: TEACHERS’ CONSTRUCTS OF WRITING QUALITY IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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In the UK, as in many other Anglophone countries, standards of children’s writing remain a public cause for concern. A recent summary report from Government inspectors concluded that, despite improvements in teaching writing, “many secondary-age students, especially boys, find writing hard, do not enjoy it, and make limited progress” (Ofsted, 2008). At the same time, the complexity of writing as a social and cultural act makes it difficult to specify the gold standard being aimed for or to clarify the nature of progression. It is hard to delineate the features of good writing generically (Marshall, 2007) but in any case simply providing students with criteria for a good piece of writing or performance is insufficient to help them progress: the interrelationship between the components is always too complex to be itemised meaningfully and the potential outcomes are too diverse (Sadler, 1989). Progression in writing is fuzzy, characterised by a broad horizon rather than clearly-defined goals (Marshall, 2004). The complex and less than tangible nature of writing is an issue for pedagogy and for assessment, affecting decisions about “what precisely is to be taught and what and how it is to be evaluated” (Parr, 2011, p. 51). As a consequence, the “non-trivial problem” for the classroom is “how to draw the concept of excellence out of the heads of teachers, give it some external formulation, and make it available to the learner” (Sadler, 1989:127).

Past research into teachers’ judgments of writing quality reveals a picture of variation and discrepancy (Huot 1990), “evaluative ambiguity and conflict” (Broad, 2000, p. 214) and subjectivity (Beck, 2006). This seems particularly true of judgments made in the context of summative, “high-stakes” testing;

indeed, in England, national tests of writing at age 14 were abandoned in 2008 after a decade of appeals against results. Research from Australia shows that the introduction of state-wide standardised assessment criteria does not necessarily lead to standardised evaluations. Wyatt-Smith and Castleton (2004; 2005) report variation of judgment between teachers, and by the same teacher from one time period to another, as well as an expectation that the standard would vary from year to year. Teachers' "global" judgments of writing quality, drawing on published criteria, often conflicted with their "local" judgments, based on classroom experience and knowledge of individual students, confirming that evaluation is an emotional practice for teachers (Edgington, 2005; Steinberg, 2008) influenced by classroom interactions and relationships. Huot (2002) and Huot and Perry (2009) call for a re-focusing of research into writing assessment, to take better account of the discourse community of the classroom and to emphasise its instructional value.

FOCUS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

In light of the cited research, the study reported here focuses on the context of the secondary school writing classroom in which teachers make day-to-day judgments of writing quality as they read and respond to students' texts. It assumes writing to be a social and cultural activity, where the writer is a member of "a community of practice" (Sharples, 1999, p. 5), the conventions and emphases of which will play an important part in influencing the criteria used to evaluate writing. It views evaluation as a deeply social act, enmeshed in talk and other classroom interactions, with students and teachers working together as a "community of interpreters" (William, 1998, p. 6) to define writing quality, in order to improve writing performance. The study aims to shed light on such classroom interactions, examining teachers' judgments of writing by asking the following questions:

- How, and how consistently, do teachers conceptualise quality in writing?
- What is the match between teachers' constructs of quality in writing and national criteria for high-grade writing?

DEFINING THE STANDARD: NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Currently in England, attainment at age 14 is assessed by teachers and reported to parents with reference to Level-related descriptors for speaking and

listening, reading and writing. The statutory criteria for “exceptional performance” in writing are:

Pupils' writing is original, has shape and impact, shows control of a range of styles and maintains the interest of the reader throughout. Narratives use structure as well as vocabulary for a range of imaginative effects, and non-fiction is coherent, reasoned and persuasive, conveying complex perspectives. A variety of grammatical constructions and punctuation is used accurately, appropriately and with sensitivity. Paragraphs are well constructed and linked in order to clarify the organisation of the writing as a whole. (National Curriculum Attainment Target for Writing: Exceptional Performance: Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, 2007)

The difficulty of describing high-grade writing is immediately obvious. Quality in writing (both here and in public examinations at age 16) is characterised by terms such as *original*, *imaginative*, *sensitive*, *creative*, *confident*—features which are difficult to quantify and, some would argue, impossible to teach. Qualitative measures, such as impact and interest, are clearly dependent on the reader's personal tastes, but also beg questions about the audience and purpose for classroom and examination writing, much of which is produced for an imagined reader of an imaginary text. Compared with other sets of analytic criteria, such as those recently developed in New Zealand¹ (which provide descriptors for both “deep” and “surface” features in each of seven genres), the descriptor is thin, and the lack of specific terms weakens it as an instructional tool.

An additional difficulty for teachers is that the gold standard is not fixed. Constructs of writing quality change over time and are culturally contested (Purves, 1992). In England, past decades have seen changes to “the writing paradigms in which pupils, teachers and policy-makers operate” (DCSF, 2008, p. 6). Broadly speaking, educators have moved from valuing formal rhetorical grammar and correctness, to personal “voice” and expressiveness, to mastery of a range of written genres and multiplicity of voices, with a concomitant shift of emphasis from product to process, as seen in the conceptualization of writing as a series of “creative design” choices (Myhill, 2008; Sharples, 1999). Thus within an average English department, it is likely that teachers of different ages and backgrounds will hold different perspectives on writing quality, shaped by the writing paradigms that have been dominant during their training and practical experience. Moreover, revised versions of the National Curriculum bring subtle

GCSE Criteria for Grade A, 2000	GCSE Criteria for Grade A, 2010
<p>Candidates' writing has shape and assured control of a range of styles. Narratives use structure as well as vocabulary for a range of effects and non-fiction is coherent, logical and persuasive. A wide range of grammatical constructions is used accurately. Punctuation and spelling are correct; paragraphs are well constructed and linked to clarify the organisation of the writing as a whole.</p>	<p>Candidates' writing shows confident, assured control of a range of forms and styles appropriate to task and purpose. Texts engage and hold the reader's interest through logical argument, persuasive force or creative delight. Linguistic and structural features are used skilfully to sequence texts and achieve coherence. A wide range of accurate sentence structures ensures clarity; choices of vocabulary, punctuation and spelling are ambitious, imaginative and correct.</p>

Figure 1. Statutory assessment criteria for high-grade writing at GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) examination at age 16, published by the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator

changes to assessment criteria describing quality in writing, as shown in Figure 1. Recent criteria stress reader engagement, matching of form to purpose, and variety and accuracy of sentence constructions. Such changes reflect evolving views of text composition as well as political intent: the new government in the UK is currently reviewing the writing curriculum and has already signalled an emphasis on grammatical and technical accuracy from 2012.

METHOD

The study utilises a subset of qualitative data drawn from a three-year (2008-11) large-scale mixed-methods research project investigating the impact of contextualised grammar teaching on students' writing. Participants were one teacher and his or her Y8 class (12-13 year olds) in 31 mixed comprehensive schools in the south west of England and the West Midlands (32 schools were originally recruited but data from one was excluded due to low fidelity to the intervention). Over the course of an academic year, the intervention group taught schemes of work especially written by the research team, contextualising grammar instruction in detailed lesson plans and resources for three different writing genres: narrative fiction; argument and poetry. Teachers in the comparison group taught the same genres but from broad plans that allowed their own pedagogical decisions. For each school, the qualitative component involved three classroom observations; three post-observation interviews with each teacher; three post-observation interviews with one teacher-selected student from each class, and collation of writing samples arising from the schemes of work.

The semi-structured teacher interview schedules probed for pedagogical thinking about planning, learning and assessment, and for beliefs about writing and grammar teaching. Specific questions relating to writing quality and assessment were included in each of the three schedules. These were:

- Term 1: What do you think makes “good” writing? What do you think makes a good teacher of writing?
- Term 2: What criteria would you use to describe good writing? Do the assessment criteria for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 effectively capture good writing?²²
- Term 3: What are you looking for as indicators of quality in writing? Do you think assessment at each Key Stage rewards those qualities?

The close similarity of these questions was deliberate, in order to compare consistency of individual responses over time, while the subtle differences in emphasis allowed for broader, more nuanced responses.

Data were analysed using NVIVO software, with themes built through repeated sorting, codings and comparisons that characterise the grounded theory approach. To avoid fragmentation and decontextualisation, interview transcripts were read in their entirety several times before and during coding. Some a priori codes were used, derived from the research questions (e.g., *writing quality*) or from labels used in the interview schedules to prompt for pedagogical beliefs (e.g., *testing*). Other categories emerged during analysis, and in vivo coding (where participants' own words and phrases provide labels for catego-

ries) was used to capture the imagery employed by teachers when characterising good writing, and to locate patterns and themes within larger categories (see Appendix 1).

FINDINGS

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: TEACHERS' CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF QUALITY IN WRITING

Three main aspects of the findings are reported here, offering insights into the way that teachers respond to students' texts, the influence on judgment of non-textual features, and significant differences in teachers' conceptualisations of writing quality.

Reading as an Evaluative Act

Phelps argues that responding to students' writing is essentially about the ways in which we read student writing, or "the teacher's receptivity to the student text (and what lies beyond it)" (2000, p. 93). Huot and Perry (2009, p. 431) refer to reading as "an evaluative act," based on the premise that students' writing has intrinsic worth. Teachers in the study clearly positioned themselves as receptive readers of students' texts, as indicated by the following comments:

Writing isn't there to go in a cupboard; it's there to be read.

I'm always still surprised by some of the things kids write about and how creative they can be and do new things that you don't expect, and that's fantastic.

Responding to students' writing was evidently a central, valued classroom activity. Several referred to the "privilege" of reading students' work and used images of nurture, growth and empowerment to characterise teaching goals, for example: "Good writing is a piece of clay that you can mould and sculpt," "If they can write well, it gives them an extra bow and arrow when everyone else is still running around in a bearskin," "words are actually magic and have so much power and if you can convey that in your writing then you've won the world, haven't you?"

Descriptions and definitions of good writing were most frequently and strikingly related to the impact of the text on the reader, which was described

in physical, affective and intellectual terms. For example, good writing “gets the heart racing,” “makes you go weak at the knees,” “strikes a chord,” “speaks to the reader,” “makes you think,” “makes you look at the world in a different way.” In this respect, students’ texts were seen as entirely authentic: teachers often applied the same criteria for quality as they would for published authors.

Evaluation as a Contextual Act

Edgington (2005, p. 141) reports evaluation as a contextual more than a textual act, shaped by personal values and classroom relationships. Teachers’ descriptions of good writing and good teaching of writing echoed national assessment criteria (as one would expect, given their statutory nature), for example in use of the terms “interesting,” “engaging,” “imaginative,” “confident.” However, teachers added a large number of their own criteria which were frequently couched in affective rather than linguistic terms and related to classroom contexts—“the cultural and social part of the group” as one teacher put it. Thus good writing was seen as “enjoyable,” “memorable,” “believable,” and more prosaically, “something that doesn’t give me a headache;” “makes me forget I’m marking;” “doesn’t have too many funny errors in it.” Several teachers related quality to the “conscious thought,” “effort” and “enthusiasm” students had shown, which allowed them to personalise the standard, as this teacher explained:

My expectations are different for every child, so a delightful piece from Joe who’s a four minus is obviously completely different from what I would consider a delightful piece of work from Ellie who’s a Level 7.

Criteria were also personalised to teachers’ own tastes. One teacher rendered the GCSE criterion “creative delight” as “control and delight,” to better reflect her view of quality. Another repeatedly defined good writing as “justified.” She valued students’ deliberate design choices and their ability to explain them, considering these as “life skills,” of greater importance than the quality of the finished product.

Beyond general references to the use of “sentence variety” and “techniques” “for effect,” few teachers cited specific linguistic skills or textual features as hallmarks of quality in writing. One defined a good teacher as:

a person who teaches things explicitly and they don’t assume that person knows what a complex sentence is but they show those and they show the effects that they have.

More typically, qualities of a good teacher of writing were cited as “enthusiasm,” “inspiration,” “encouragement,” “motivation,” and the ability to provide a safe environment in which students could “take risks and experiment” to counter the fact that “writing is traumatic for some children.” There were many references to the teacher’s emotional responsibility as evaluator, for instance:

You have to really believe in their ability and that they know you’re there for them.

They need to see that I’m impressed with their writing and sort of create a sense that it’s worthwhile, what you’re doing.

Something really fundamental to me is that whatever a student says you have to give it credibility and worth in a classroom.

Variation Between Teachers

The coding of teacher interviews (93 in total) revealed a wide range of responses to the question of what constitutes good writing, as indicated in Appendix 1. Teachers themselves expected this, with one commenting: “You’re going to see thirty-two teachers and everyone is going to be completely different,” and several referencing the subjective nature of judgment, for example:

Some people would be blown away by one piece of writing and some people would hate the same piece of writing, so I think it is subjective and I think it depends on what you’re writing and who you’re writing for.

Even when concepts drew general agreement, responses were marked by difference in interpretation. “Creativity” was one of the labels used to investigate pedagogical beliefs, which may well have skewed its apparent importance for teachers: almost half the sample claimed that good writing was “all about creativity.” (Interestingly, the term was not mentioned at all by students when they were asked to define good writing). Nonetheless, the concept was understood in markedly different ways.

For some, creativity, alongside “originality” and “effective word choices” were allied to self-expression and personal growth, so that these teachers defined good writing in terms of the student’s individual, authentic voice. Others

viewed creativity in terms of precision and control, judging writing quality by its clarity of communication and clever use of techniques. Teachers disagreed over the relationship between creativity and technical accuracy, some seeing them as divorced: “the one time when we can throw neatness out of the window and spelling and we can fix it later,” others expressly yoking them together: “there are two ‘goods’ there, creativity and competence, by which I mean accuracy, accuracy.”

Teachers' conceptualisations of writing quality were marked by individual consistency over the course of an academic year; there was only one instance of contradiction, over the relative importance of spelling. Even though teachers' internal standards varied little, variation between teachers was very much in evidence. To explore this further, individual profiles were created, detailing statistical information and including all interview statements pertaining to writing quality and assessment. Analysis of these profiles revealed patterns to the variation which were strong enough to allow for the formation of six different constructs (shown in Table 1) labelled by the researcher according to their dominant features. Four teachers have been “counted twice” because there was a definite overlap—for two of them between “self-expression” and “technical accuracy” and for another two between “conscious crafting” and “fit for purpose,” which are in any case the closest categories.

These constructs helped to give shape to the observed variation in teachers' judgments of quality. Whether they can also help to explain that variation is another matter. A clear limitation of the study is that teachers were asked only to describe good writing; they were not asked to say where their ideas came from, so that the findings have not revealed a great deal about factors that influence teachers' subject philosophies or about the “somewhat indeterminate” process by which teachers make judgments (Lumley, 2002, p. 10). Details of gender, length of service and first degree subject were compared for teachers grouped within each of the six constructs but it was difficult to deduce any significant patterns, beyond the fact that a slightly higher proportion of teachers with a literature-based degree related writing quality to self-expression and emotional engagement or considered it to be instinctive. Moreover, six of the eight teachers in the whole sample who were in their first year of teaching; two of these thought that high-grade writing depended on flair and originality and doubted whether these could be taught. However, this view might be a reflection of a lack of confidence and experience in assessing writing more than an expression of philosophy.

One evident variation between teachers included how much they had to say on the subject of writing quality, as well as how they said it. Some teachers, during interview, and in social exchanges with the researcher, expressed

Table 1. Teachers' personal constructs of quality in writing

Researcher's label for construct <i>Good writing is...</i>	Number of teachers	Dominant features of the construct	Verbatim statements typical of the construct
Emotionally engaging	7	These teachers primarily judge writing by its impact on the reader and the reaction it provokes.	Excites and moves you Engages and delights If it pleases you then it's good Makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up
Self-expressive	7	These teachers primarily value writing that expresses the child's personal and distinctive individual voice, often drawn from the child's own experience.	They've put their own spin on it Personal voice coming through Imaginative writing that's a bit different Not just parroting what they've been taught
Consciously crafted	7	These teachers reward writing that has been deliberately designed and that shows conscious thought and effort.	They've thought about it and have taken pride in it Has thought and deliberation behind it Can justify and explain choices
Fit for purpose	6	These teachers reward writing that is well matched to its audience and purpose and which clearly fulfils its stated function.	It's about clarity of communication and whether or not it hits the purpose Varied techniques appropriate to task Meets the targets set for it
Technically accurate	4	These teachers think accuracy, or "the mechanics" are an essential aspect of good writing.	It's got to be really accurate to enhance the meaning Students can do incredibly creative, original work but if they're technically not there, they're never going to achieve A and A*
Instinctive	4	These teachers either think that quality in writing is too subjective or difficult to define, or that flair and originality are impossible to teach.	It depends on what you're writing and who you're writing for It's a matter of personal taste It's just an instinct How can you say one person's poem is better than another's?

Table 2. Teachers' personal constructs of quality in writing matched to responses to national assessment criteria in use at Key Stages 3 and 4

Personal construct of writing quality: <i>Good writing is ...</i>	Typical responses to assessment criteria
<p>Emotionally engaging (7)</p> <p>These teachers primarily judge writing by its impact on the reader and the reaction it provokes.</p>	<p>Criteria are too "restrictive," "prescriptive," "narrow," and "reductive."</p> <p>There is too much emphasis on accuracy and formulaic structures, "ticking boxes," "writing by rote," "following a recipe."</p> <p>Individuality and creativity are insufficiently rewarded.</p>
<p>Self-expressive (7)</p> <p>These teachers primarily value writing that expresses the child's personal and distinctive individual voice, often drawn from the child's own experience.</p>	<p>Judgment is subjective, a "matter of personal taste;" "teachers will judge each child's writing differently."</p> <p>Teachers should be able to reward individual effort and tailor criteria to the child.</p> <p>It's difficult to make the language of assessment criteria accessible for students.</p>
<p>Fit for purpose (6)</p> <p>These teachers reward writing that is well matched to its audience and purpose and which clearly fulfils its stated function.</p>	<p>Criteria adequately describe good writing.</p> <p>They are flexible enough to encourage creative responses.</p> <p>Criteria offer structure that may not have been there in the past.</p> <p>They rightly stress audience and purpose.</p>
<p>Instinctive (4)</p> <p>These teachers either think that quality in writing is too subjective or difficult to define, or that flair and originality are impossible to teach.</p>	<p>There will always be examples of unusual writing that don't fit the criteria.</p> <p>"Really good creative writing can't be taught."</p> <p>"What is wrong with gut instinct? It's usually pretty accurate"</p>

their views about good writing so strongly and in such detail that it amounted to a personal manifesto; others found the questions difficult to answer. This qualitative difference is difficult to show in a limited space but the following snippets from one teacher's profile will hopefully illustrate how, for some teachers at least, personal constructs of writing are central to their personality in the classroom:

Good writing is something that stimulates you, something you can relate to ... for me, good writing needs to jump out of a page ... good writing needs to be a little bit more imaginative, it needs to be a little bit more, the voice of a person isn't it, it's like you, it needs to be passionate ... it's a person isn't it, it's like a person, good writing is you, and how much you enjoy words and putting them together...

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: MATCH BETWEEN TEACHERS' CONSTRUCTS AND NATIONAL CRITERIA

Emerging from the analysis of individual profiles was a clear finding that many teachers experience tensions between their personal construct of writing quality and the construct of quality referenced by statutory criteria.

Only three teachers reported a close match between their own criteria and national criteria for high-grade writing. Fourteen reported a definite mismatch, while another 14 felt genuinely ambivalent, for a variety of reasons, summarised here:

- Criteria describe essential skills and qualities but are too narrow and prescriptive (5)
- It depends on the Key Stage and the exam board followed (4)
- Criteria guide judgments but there should be more room for professional instinct (2)
- Teachers felt too inexperienced to trust their judgments (2)
- There was uncertainty over how far accuracy should count (1)

The personal construct that most closely matched national criteria was “fit for purpose;” the constructs causing the most conflict with national criteria were “emotionally engaging,” “self-expressive,” and “instinctive.” Table 2 presents this finding in more detail.

Teachers who felt a mismatch expressed it in vehement terms, for example:

It's tick boxes and even in the creative writing bit they can write a fantastic piece of writing but unless they've got, you know, the range of sentences, the this, that and the other, they can't get the grade, and it's, it's horrible.

I shouldn't be having to cheat my way round the criteria in order to get them recognition for very original, passionate, Catch-22-esque writing.

Steinberg (2008) suggests that summative and formative assessment are governed by different emotional rules, leading to teachers' conflicted reactions to use of the same criteria for different purposes. There was certainly evidence of this, especially for teachers whose personal constructs of quality did not fit well with official criteria. These teachers viewed summative assessment as "askew with," "diametrically opposed to," "totally at odds with" their view of good writing. They felt that assessment narrowed and distorted the writing curriculum, creating "hurdles that we make them jump over," "a formula for writing," "tick box thinkers" and "a fear of going outside the box." Teachers' antipathy was to testing and examination tasks more than to actual criteria: as one teacher pointed out, "It's ridiculous to ask people to write about their day at the beach if they never go to a beach." However, it did indicate that some teachers think about writing assessment and writing instruction in different ways and that the two might not be compatible.

Teachers were also in conflict with each other about the usefulness of analytic criteria in describing writing quality and guiding the teaching of good writing, as the following opposing examples show:

<p>Do we really need to be so specific? We should be looking at how to inspire them through topics and ideas and feelings, little anecdotes about stuff or books about real experiences, not bloody "organising and presenting a whole text effectively."</p>	<p>If you follow the mark scheme then it's going to inform your teaching because you know exactly what you are looking for and unless you know what you're looking for you can't teach the kids what the examiner is looking for or what good writing is all about.</p>
<p>I think you could argue for a piece of writing to be an A* or an A grade and that's what I don't like about it, that it's so open to that interpretation.</p>	<p>The fact that there was so little to describe what A* was, actually that pleased me more than anything else, that there's something sort of almost intangible.</p>

One can imagine some lively department meetings if these four teachers worked

in the same school! Viewing pedagogical differences from the perspective of the match between teachers' personal constructs of quality and published criteria may help to explain such polarised views.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

This study found that teachers' conceptualisations of writing quality were internally consistent but that variation between teachers was marked. Teachers not only valued different qualities in writing, but experienced differing degrees of conflict and ambiguity when relating their personal construct of quality to the official, public construct. The findings support earlier views of teacher judgment as richly textured and complex, "a dynamic, process of drawing on and variously combining available indexes" (Wyatt-Smith & Castleton, 2005, p. 151) The model proposed by Wyatt-Smith, Castleton, Freebody & Cooksey (2003, p. 27) shows statutory criteria as one such index, but not necessarily the most influential; criteria may be over-ridden by contextual factors such as the knowledge of individual children and production history of the writing. It could be useful to see teachers' personal constructs of quality as an addition to this model.

A limitation of the present study is that teachers' stated beliefs have been analysed, rather than classroom enactments of these beliefs. The personal constructs derived from interview transcripts have not been taken back to participants for validity checking and are theoretical only. Nevertheless, in the classroom context where evaluation has a formative, instructional purpose, how students receive and take up teachers' judgments is of obvious importance in developing evaluative expertise (Sadler 2009). Parr (2011, p. 1) stresses the role of "shared repertoires" in a community of practice. These include tools and routines, "as a resource to create meaning in the joint pursuit of an enterprise." Teachers' own constructs of quality have the potential to be shared with students as an "external formulation" of the concept of quality, an expression of "local" knowledge perhaps more accessible than the "global" view of quality embodied in national criteria.

The fact that teachers in the study saw writing quality in subjective terms, as "a matter of personal taste" is not necessarily a problem. Teachers are not automata, and it could be argued that those with a strongly-felt, personal construct of quality in writing, and the ability to share it with students, are likely to be effective teachers of writing, at the very least conveying the message that writing matters. Thus a future direction of this research is to investigate how teachers share conceptualisations of writing quality with their students, framed

by the question: Are pedagogical practices and classroom discourse affected by personal constructs? Initial analysis of lesson observation data (Appendix 2) suggests that they may be.

NOTES

1. Ministry of Education and the University of Auckland (2004). Assessment tools for teaching and learning: Project asTTle
2. Key Stage 3 covers ages 11-14 and Key Stage 4 ages 14-16

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APPENDIX 1: TEACHER INTERVIEW CODING FRAMES

Themes	Definition	Number of Responses
Writing quality	Generic definitions and descriptions of good writing	135
Good fiction writing	Comments specific to quality in fiction writing	21
Good argument writing	Comments specific to quality in argument writing	13
Good poetry writing	Comments specific to quality in poetry writing	13
Good teacher of writing	Comments about the skills and qualities required in order to teach writing effectively	45
Assessing writing	General comments about the nature and use of assessment criteria to judge quality of writing	64
Key Stage 3 criteria	Comments specific to the nature and use of Key Stage 3 assessment criteria	28
Key Stage 4 criteria	Comments specific to the nature and use of Key Stage 4 (GCSE examination) criteria	32
Testing	Comments expressing opinions about formal summative testing of writing	39
Difficulties in making judgments	Comments relating to difficulties or tensions in evaluating the quality of students' writing	21
Using criteria with students	Comments relating to formative use of assessment criteria, including how well students understand them	15

In Vivo Coding (using participants' direct words)		Number of Responses
Images of good writing	Definitions and descriptions of good writing in the form of simile, metaphor or analogy	36
<p>Gets the blood pumping</p> <p>Gets the heart racing</p> <p>Just catches you</p> <p>Holds attention</p> <p>Speaks to the reader</p> <p>Needs to jump out of the page</p> <p>Knocked my socks off</p> <p>Touches your insides</p> <p>Makes me forget I'm marking</p> <p>Doesn't give me a headache</p>		

Images of good writing, continued	Definitions and descriptions of good writing in the form of simile, metaphor or analogy	
	<p>Something that would prize eight quid out of my purse to buy a book</p> <p>Makes you think</p> <p>Strikes a chord in you</p> <p>Hooks you in from the beginning</p> <p>Draws the reader into its world</p> <p>Pulls the reader into your world</p> <p>Has the X factor</p> <p>Has some sort of journey within it</p> <p>Has to be nurtured</p> <p>Makes the hairs at the back of your neck stand up</p> <p>Makes you go weak at the knees</p> <p>When they've put their own spin on it</p> <p>When you've got the mix just right that you have the reader licking their fingers to turn the page</p> <p>Where you can almost touch the reader's enthusiasm</p> <p>Drives towards its conclusion right the way through</p> <p>Uses all the tools in their armoury</p> <p>Gives them an extra bow and arrow when everyone else is still running around in a bearskin</p> <p>Arms them for the future</p> <p>Hits the purpose</p> <p>Needs to have a personality</p> <p>Has a voice</p> <p>Is like a person</p> <p>A piece of clay that you can mould and sculpt</p> <p>It's about you stamping your mark</p> <p>Makes you look at the world in a different way</p> <p>Provokes a reaction</p> <p>Provokes a response</p>	

In Vivo coding used to sort broad theme of Writing Quality (generic definitions and descriptions of good writing) into more specific categories		Number of Responses
Impact on reader	Effective word choices Affects the reader Engaging Interesting Grabs your attention Shows writer's enthusiasm Enjoyable Memorable Believable Convincing Has immediacy Inspirational Exciting Delightful Just pleases you	24 20 18 14 9 7 6 3 2 1 1 1 1 1 1
Creativity	Original Experiments All about creativity Own voice Imagination Flair Individual Natural Spontaneous Adventurous	20 16 15 8 8 7 5 5 2 1
Variety	Varied sentences Variety of techniques Variety of punctuation Varied vocabulary	7 6 3 3

In Vivo coding used to sort broad theme of Writing Quality (generic definitions and descriptions of good writing) into more specific categories		Number of Responses
Accurate	Technical accuracy	3
	Communicates clearly	10
	Fluent	5
	Competent	4
Controlled	Confident	14
	Consciously crafted	13
	Sense of purpose and audience	11
	Structured	11
	Control of sentence structure	11
	Shows effort	11
	Appropriate conventions	10
	Techniques	7
	Precision and control	4
	(Choices can be) justified	4
	Planned	3
Done independently	1	
Difficult to define	Too personal to say	2
	Just a feeling	2
	Matter of personal taste	1
	Depends on what you're writing	1
	Instinctive	1

APPENDIX 2: ANALYSIS OF LESSON OBSERVATION DATA

The data was drawn for two schools, investigating match between personal construct of writing quality and classroom practice.

Teacher 9: Dominant construct: Good writing is Emotionally Engaging

<p>Teacher values:</p> <p>Writing that provokes a strong emotional reaction in the reader</p> <p>Personal creativity (writes herself)</p> <p>Powerful choice of words and ideas that move and excite the reader</p> <p>Responses to assessment criteria:</p> <p>Recognises subjectivity of different readers' responses</p> <p>Thinks too much weighting given to accuracy over creativity (real writers have editors and proofreaders)</p> <p>Explicitly teaches to exam criteria (e.g., sentence variety) but is ambivalent about providing a formula</p>	<p>In the writing classroom:</p> <p>Expects all students' active participation—emphasis is on trying things out</p> <p>Motivates through own enthusiasm, especially about vocabulary choices</p> <p>Shares own writing as models and gives personal examples e.g., how she gathers ideas and plans her own poems and short stories</p> <p>Adapts project lesson plans by building in more time for discussion of students' writing</p> <p>Encourages students to be “critical friends”</p> <p>Strong emphasis on evaluating effects of word choices on the reader</p> <p>Actively promotes thinking about choices and meaning; probes for responses using questioning e.g. in the plenary</p>
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Teacher 21: Dominant construct: Good writing is Fit for Purpose

<p>Teacher values:</p> <p>Writing that communicates clearly to the reader</p> <p>Clever use of techniques</p> <p>How well the writing matches the conventions of the text type</p> <p>The extent to which writing fulfils its stated purpose</p> <p>Responses to assessment criteria:</p> <p>They reward the right things</p> <p>They encourage students to focus on audience and purpose and what makes a good piece of writing</p> <p>There is strong continuity between the Key Stages in terms of what is valued</p> <p>Assessment tasks can be too narrow</p>	<p>In the writing classroom:</p> <p>Explicitly positions students as real readers of texts, both published and their own:</p> <p>“what matters is how you respond to the writing” “I'm interested in your reactions to these charity adverts”</p> <p>Gives very clear explanations of the purpose of reading and writing tasks:</p> <p>“to help you see what persuasive techniques are used to get you to part with your money”</p> <p>“to make a judgment about which viewpoint is most effective”</p> <p>Doesn't over-direct students' responses—they often feed back to each other as pairs or in small groups and redraft in light of peer response</p> <p>Introduces linguistic terminology (e.g., through games and quizzes) and encourages students to use it when evaluating techniques</p>
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