Abstract
This paper analyses data from the Community of Writers project, which saw 15 final year undergraduate trainee teachers teach creative writing and write creatively in a primary school for a period of 10 weeks. Taking as its starting point the research-informed understanding that effective teaching of writing involves the teacher writing for their class (Dombey 2013), this paper explores the impact of the project upon both trainees’ perceptions of their identities as writers and their creative writing pedagogies. Engaging in theoretical discussions as co-researchers, a paradox emerges in the trainees’ reflections: on the one hand, the trainees perceive their unstructured teaching of creative writing as being threatened by neoliberalism; on the other hand, discourse analysis of their reflections reveals that they are often dependent upon neoliberalism’s structured approaches when it comes to actually writing both with their class and outside of the class. This is conceptualised as resulting from both the trainees’ own neoliberal education and the low-status “positional identities” (Holland, Lachicotte and Cain, 1998) afforded to them as writers by societal discourse, as demonstrated by Foucault’s “author principle” (2001, p.214). The implications are wide reaching and involve an ideological shift in the nature of the relationship between government and education.

Key words
Creative writing, identity, neoliberalism, teacher training, primary school, discourse analysis

Approx. word count: 6000
“Just because I’m not a published author does not mean that I’m not a writer”:

Primary Trainee Teachers’ Identities as Creative Writers

Introduction

From Bernstein’s perspective (2000), the teaching of writing historically oscillates between two ends of a spectrum: at one end there is “weak framing”, a child-centered approach which values pupil voice and choice in writing; at the other end there is “strong framing”, a curriculum-driven approach which leads to teacher-directed writing. Given the requirements of the new national curriculum for English, which includes both prescriptive detailing of the spelling, punctuation and grammar pupils need to master by the end of each year of primary schooling, as well as the accompanying mandatory national testing, there is an argument to be made that at the moment writing pedagogy is oscillating back towards the neoliberal “strong framing” previously articulated by the non-statutory guidance of the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998). As Cremin and Myhill indicate (2012, p.1), testing means both an increasing focus upon technical rather than compositional aspects of writing as well as a pedagogical approach, underpinned by genre theory (Martin, Christie and Rothery 1987), which sees texts as discrete, commodified and predictable types governed by rules which teachers are to transmit and pupils are to learn.

The obvious danger is that government policy in the form of the NC leads to strongly framed pedagogy in which writing becomes formulaic and product-driven, as the act of writing becomes divorced from the writer. In stark contrast to this threat, a recent review of global writing pedagogy indicates a consensus amongst educationalists that “weaker framing” through writing for a real purpose and laying bare the process of writing constitute the most effective approaches (Dombey 2013). This is in part a continuation of the ideas of Graves (1983) who advocated a process
approach which saw pupils choosing their own topics and genres for writing with teachers “conferencing” with individual pupils to scaffold writing.

The review also highlights the effectiveness of the teacher taking on the identity of the writer within the classroom in order to model the writing process. Indeed, recent action research projects like Writing is Primary have outlined the benefits of teachers writing as they develop both an understanding of the idiosyncratic nature of the writing process and the ways in which this can inform their pedagogical practice (Ings 2009). Similarly, a research project which formed and explored the nature of teacher writing groups (Smith and Wrigley 2012) outlined how quickly teachers’ attitudes towards writing can be changed for the better through collective engagement in writing and how the teachers’ insight into the process leads to a productive empathy with their class. Indeed, it is this notion of positioning pupils and teachers equally as writers in the classroom that clearly resonates with Bernstein’s notion of weak framing and that informs Cremin and Myhill’s advocacy of a writing “community” (2012).

The Community of Writers Research Project

In light of this tension between policy and research, the way in which creative writing is approached in school becomes even more crucial as a strongly framed, product-driven, technical approach jeopardises the creative and compositional aspects of writing such texts. The Community of Writers (CoW) research project sought to prioritise the notion of trainee teachers adopting the identity of the writer by engaging them in personal creative writing pieces through the setting up of supportive writing groups like Smith and Wrigley’s (op. cit.). The project also sought to encourage the trainees to reflect critically upon the writing process in order to inform their classroom pedagogy.
CoW was a small-scale project sponsored by St. Mary’s Horsforth Teaching School, which involved a partnership between my institution and a local two-form entry coeducational comprehensive primary school. In school, I worked with 15 final year undergraduate trainee teachers who had different levels of experience and expertise in writing but who had all elected to specialise in my level 6 module, Creative Writing. Over a 10-week period, I led one hour morning sessions in school where we (the trainees and myself) discussed our writing in groups and where we engaged with theory and research in order to think about the writing process and its relationship with effective creative writing pedagogy. Following my input, the trainees then spent the rest of the morning working in groups of 2 or 3, teaching creative writing to pupils in years 2, 3, 5 and 6. The end of the project saw all of our community’s writing (the pupils’, the trainees’ and my own) published on an external facing website.

During my sessions with the trainees, I was keen for them to develop a critical and theoretical understanding of creative writing. In line with the above discussion around weak framing, we considered the Vygotskian (1986) model of learning through interaction and collaboration and the need, therefore, to allow for child-centred stimuli, discussion and engagement with drama to “generate” ideas for writing (Andrews 2008).

In contrast to this position, I was also keen to challenge the simplistic notion that “creativity” is spontaneous and that, therefore, creative writing should be taught solely through a weakly framed pedagogy. We looked at Weisberg’s research (1998), which makes a good argument for apprenticeship (the learning of the craft of writing) as the necessary precursor to creative achievement. One study Weisberg undertakes is to look at a range of poets and measure the time it takes for them to become considered significant to the literary canon (Weisberg quantifies this achievement as
the poet having been included in a prestigious anthology). The study reveals that it is only after a considerable amount of writing time that poets achieve this kind of quality work. The implications for creative writing pedagogy are clear and in tension with a weakly framed pedagogy – in line with T.S. Eliot’s emphasis on the importance of “tradition” (1997), the craft and technique of authors should be studied and then applied over a period of time for a writer to make progress.

Wyse, Jones, Bradford and Wolpert (2013) describe the pedagogical approaches linked to strong and weak framing as “closed” and “open” respectively. Perhaps erroneously, they position creative writing towards the “open” end of the spectrum but consideration of Weisberg’s findings imply that creative writing should also be taught through some “closed” approaches and in my discussions with the trainees around the nature of originality I sought to provide some theoretical underpinning to this position.

Accordingly, we looked at two spheres of literary criticism - structuralism and post-modernism – and considered their pedagogical implications. For structuralism, we discussed Aristotle’s analysis of the Greek tragedy (1996) and the pattern of the hero who unwittingly causes their own downfall. We also discussed Propp (1968) who, in studying the Russian folktale, identified a limited range of story lines and character functions at play. Pedagogically, we critically discussed strategies to develop characters and plots with pupils, like the use of profile and story mountains.

For post-modernism, we considered the idea that all the stories that could have been written have already been written and that what the writer ultimately produces, therefore, are copies or “simulacra” (Baudrillard 2001). Pedagogically, we considered the adoption the “read-analyse-write” approach adopted by the Primary National Strategy for Literacy (2003) and the ways in which the “write” stage could
be structured through the use of tightly controlled and differentiated learning objectives and success criteria.

As I wanted to develop this critical enquiry approach with the trainees, I positioned them from the outset not as participants per se but also as co-researchers. Indeed, this positioning, I felt, was strengthened by the egalitarian ethos and weak framing that permeated the CoW project, whereby each and every one of us was a writer. Accordingly, as practitioner researchers, the trainees kept detailed research journals which they submitted for assessment at the end of the Creative Writing module. The journal included theoretically informed reflections upon their own writing, their teaching and pupils’ writing as well as a final draft of their own creative writing piece. Obviously, the fact that this data was also assessed shaped the way it was collected and presented: on the one hand, it could be argued that using assessment as data would mean that trainees would present their reflections in a more positive light, but I do not feel this was the case as I continually stressed the importance of criticality to them; on the other hand, it could be argued that the use of assessment as data would ensure that trainees would fully enter into their roles of co-researchers as the level 6 assessment taxonomy requires “synthesis”, “research-informed criticality” and “theoretical understanding”.

As I also wanted them to think about their reflections in relation to their identities as trainee teachers and writers, I wanted them to consider their current perceptions of their previous experiences of writing and with this in mind I required students to undertake more structured journal entries at the beginning and end of the project. This allowed me to pose them particular questions around previous writing experiences and their own self-perceptions as writers as a result of CoW.

Due to my conceptualisation of identity (outlined below) I also positioned the trainees as participants. Once they had completed and submitted their journal
reflections, as well as valuing the content of what they had to say as my co-
researchers, I also analysed how they phrased their reflections, using discourse
analysis to think about the ways in which they constructed their identities throughout
the CoW project. In this sense, the trainees’ identities were multiple and complex:
both writers and trainee teachers; and co-researchers and participants.

Conceptualising Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom

In line with my previous work on identity construction in the classroom (Dobson
2014; 2015), I draw upon Holland, Lachicotte and Cain’s concept of “figured worlds”
(1998) as a way of thinking about identity. More nuanced than Bourdieu’s “habitus”
and “field” (Grenfell and Kelly 2001), “figured worlds” are context-specific cultural
constructs which assign individuals discoursal “positional identities” to perform.
Amongst the examples of “figured worlds” outlined by Holland, Lachicotte and Cain
are Alcoholics Anonymous and the ironically named Campus Romance: the former
perceived as a context in which alcoholics assume positional identities where they tell
stories which devalue their pasts; the latter a context were females always lose as they
are either labelled as “frigid” or “easy” depending upon their responses to male
students’ advances.

The power at play in figured worlds and the positioning involved in
participation means that figured worlds should not be thought of as pre-existent,
discrete entities. Rather, participation is seen as always already refiguring, albeit
imperceptibly, of the nature of those figured worlds. Whilst the macro powers of
gender and neoliberalism can be seen at work in the structuring of individual
performances in the literacy classroom (Dobson 2014), those individual performances
will always already contain the potential for agency and, therefore, the refiguring of
worlds.
The underpinning reason for this potential for agency is that language (discourse) is the medium for the assignment, negotiation and performance of identities. Building upon the work of Saussure (2001) who identified the arbitrary relationship between the signifier (word) and signified (concept) in language, Derrida (2001) established the concept of “différance” as the operating principle for discourse whereby it is not only the signifiers that can change in relation to signifieds but it is also the signifieds themselves that are subject to contextual and historical change.

What this implies is that, in communication, meaning is always already deferred and that, in this instance, identity through language is never fixed or stable – signifieds shift depending upon perspective, context and history.

Having said this, an individual’s agency to refigure worlds and reposition identities is not only held in check by the bounding of macro powers such as the aforementioned neoliberalism and patriarchy, but is also restricted by the nature of discourse itself and what Foucault terms its “internal procedures” (2001, p210). Interestingly enough, one such internal procedure that Foucault identifies is the “author principle” (ibid), which positions readers of texts as being in awe of the author who is perceived to be the originator of that text. It is a discourse, then, which gives power to the author and obfuscates any ideas around post-modern “simulacra” (Baudrillard, op. cit.) or reader response theory, which sees the reader and not the writer as central to the meaning-making process (e.g. Barthes 1992).

In line with this and as indicated in the previous section, I also position my co-researchers as participants by using discourse analysis to analyse their critical reflections. The signifiers the trainees adopt at different stages of the project can go some way to indicate how they negotiate their dual identities of trainee teachers and writers in the primary classroom in relation to policy and the internal procedures of discourse.
This relationship between a teacher identity positioned by neoliberalism and a writer identity in the primary classroom has elsewhere been depicted as a dynamic of “struggle” (Cremin and Baker, 2010). Here, of course, I focus on the identities of trainee teachers rather than qualified teachers – trainee teachers who, because they are not yet qualified, are often positioned with low status in the classroom. Indeed, what becomes particularly interesting is the extent to which their lower status positional identities as teachers would play out compared to Cremin and Baker’s teachers’ “struggle”.

Another key difference between my research project and that of Cremin and Baker is to do with the ways in which we conceptualise identity. For Cremin and Baker, identity is seen as being negotiated across both intrapersonal and interpersonal axes. Whilst I do see identity as having a contemporary interpersonal dimension as well as a past intrapersonal dimension, I see both of these axes as figuring of trainee teachers’ participations in worlds through discourse. For the purpose of simplicity, I am calling these figured worlds Teaching and Writing. In the figured world of Teaching, the trainees are taking on the role of teachers who teach creative writing in a primary classroom. In the figured world of Writing, the trainees are writers who are developing their own creative writing pieces outside and, at times, inside the primary classroom.

A final difference between my project and that of Cremin and Baker is the epistemological approach to understanding intrapersonal factors. For Cremin and Baker, the past experiences of their participants become a means of understanding their current behaviour; for me, my co-researchers’ evocation of past experiences are seen as being symptomatic of the present and, therefore, their participation in figured worlds. In this sense, my stance is post-modern as the co-researchers' pasts are always already mediated by their present participation (Lather 1991).
Neoliberalism and the Figured World of Writing

By the end of the 10-week project, each of the 15 trainees had completed a piece of creative writing. The nature and genre of this piece of writing I left to them – about two thirds of the trainees chose to develop pieces of writing that they had been working on with their class; the rest wrote pieces that were separate from their teaching and aimed at an older audience. These pieces of writing were started at various points in the project and underwent a redrafting process similar to that undertaken by pupils in their classes. Trainees formed their own writing groups and each group gave feedback on each member’s first draft. At a later stage I too became a member of these groups, providing feedback on each piece of work and asking for feedback on my own writing.

An obvious drawback to my participation here and the reason why I delayed my participation until towards the end of the module, was to do with my own positional identity within the writing groups – a positional identity that was heightened by the fact that I would ultimately assess the trainees’ creative writing and reflections in the form of an assignment. This meant, of course, that I had to be careful not to dominate writing group discussions, allowing others to feedback first. Despite this, there was still clear evidence in the trainees’ reflections upon redrafting that my feedback had held a higher status than that of the trainees' peers. For example, in Jane’s (I use pseudonyms for trainee names) reflection she titles her redrafting: “Changes after second draft and meeting with the subject specialist”. Not only had she given me the high status position of “specialist” in the figured world of Writing, but she had also only taken on board my feedback.

Another difficulty that some trainees experienced was around how to give feedback on each others' creative writing and, by extension, how their piece of creative writing would ultimately be assessed by me. In line with the school’s
assessment policy and our discussions on the need to adopt some closed approaches in their teaching of creative writing, all trainees had used success criteria in their planning and teaching as the key way of asking pupils to feed back on each others' work. Due to the fact, however, that I had given the trainees more freedom than they had given their classes in the choice of their creative writing piece, I was keen not to use success criteria as the basis for feedback in the writing groups. I was equally sensitive to the idea that criteria-based feedback was not always specific enough to the piece of writing under discussion and I really wanted the trainees to immerse themselves in the reading of their peers’ work and respond accordingly. In line with the open approach to feedback that I was adopting, I also wrote assessment criteria for the assessment of the creative writing component of the module with deliberately vague phrases like “good stylistic control” and “excellent stylistic control”. This vagueness unsettled some trainees as on several occasions I was asked, “What are you looking for in our writing?”

Despite most trainees being unsettled by the openness of assessment in the figured world of Writing, they were more than able to critically reflect upon the problems of adopting closed assessment practices in the figured world of Teaching. Jessica, working with a year 6 class on science fiction, particularly felt that her pedagogy had relied too heavily on success criteria to guide pupils in their writing and feedback. Indeed, one of Jessica’s targets for her future teaching of creative writing was to rely less on “success criteria” to allow for “more individual engagement in writing”. For Joshua, working with a year 2 class, the use of success criteria had limited pupil choice and meant that “most of the children came up with the same story ideas”.

More broadly, all trainees in their critical reflections were able to recognise the ways in which they were positioned by a neoliberal education system which
directed them towards closed rather than open approaches in the figured world of Teaching. In her reflection, Carly equates creativity with self expression and it is interesting the way she switches from talking about her own practice to the practice of “teachers” in general: “I enjoy teaching writing as it gives children a chance to express themselves – however from a teaching perspective, I feel the curriculum stifles the opportunities teachers have to allow children to write creatively.” In part, this distancing between “I” and “teachers” could be explained as symptomatic of Carly’s position as a trainee teacher who is yet to become qualified, but it also could be read as a way of Carly stating the individuality of her perceived teacher identity. Either way, it is revealing how the “curriculum” occupies the subject position in the second clause and how the teachers are passively acted upon by the use of the transitive verb “stifle”.

For Andrew rather than the curriculum per se, it is more explicitly the associated testing that presents the threat: “I think it is difficult to set targets for your own teaching of writing as so many school-based targets are based on pupil achievement and NC levels. However, what is more important to me than levels is a lifelong enthusiasm for learning and an enthusiasm for creativity.” Similar to Carly, Andrew finds a way of distancing his practice from the clutches of the neoliberal education system and, through the use of the adverbial “however”, he rather more idealistically suggests that he will remain impervious to its limitations throughout his teaching career.

In terms of the trainees’ neoliberal critique in the figured world of Teaching, the only apparent blind spot in their reflections relates to their written feedback on pupils’ writing. Again in line with the school assessment policy, trainees gave feedback relating to the extent to which success criteria had been met. The problems arose, however, when pupils appeared to have met all of the success criteria. For
example, Melissa, working with a year 2 class, gives positive feedback on one pupil’s use of description (the success criterion for that piece of writing) and goes on to set the target of using “full stops and capital letters”. This fallback position of setting targets of a technical rather than compositional nature was one adopted by many of the trainees, and it indicates the extent to which the prior delineation of success criteria as a closed approach can serve to blind the assessor to other aspects of the compositional process, thus limiting the quality of both teacher feedback and subsequent pupil redrafting.

This aside, all of the trainees’ reflections generally demonstrate a keen critical awareness of the usefulness but also limitations of closed assessment approaches in the figured world of Teaching. The question then becomes: why were the trainees less able to critically reflect upon my adoption of open assessment approaches in the figured world of Writing? One way of explaining this apparent paradox is perhaps to do with the ways in which the trainees themselves have been educated both in school and university. None of my undergraduate co-researchers were mature students and all were in their early twenties at the time of CoW. It can and has been argued (Rowland 2006) that the unease at the removal of success criteria when it came to their own writing was to do with a deep-rooted dependency that had been built up through their own commodified, neoliberal educational experiences.

Thinking back to Cremin and Baker (op. cit.) and the “struggle” they identify between teacher and writer identities in the classroom, a key difference emerges here around the very nature of that “struggle”. Whilst for the qualified teachers in their study the struggle seems to be caused by participation in the figured world of Writing opening up a freedom which is at odds with the restrictions put in place in the neoliberal figured world of Teaching, for many of the trainee teachers in my study the freedom opened up by participation in the figured Writing becomes itself the cause of
the struggle. When viewed as products of a neoliberal education system, the trainees are able to meet the demands of level 6 University work by reflecting upon that system in the figured world of Teaching, but at the same time they are in the paradoxical position of being unwittingly dependent upon the system when it comes to the figured world of Writing.

I say most trainees, as this dependency on the commodification of learning in the figured world of Writing was certainly less apparent in the reflections of some trainees. Indeed, this was particularly the case for those trainees who separated the figured worlds of Teaching and Writing by writing and ultimately submitting pieces that had nothing whatsoever to do with their classroom teaching. Interestingly, this separation of the figured worlds of Teaching and Writing tended to remove the act of writing from the bounding structures of neoliberalism, as the act of writing was viewed in a quite different light. One trainee, Jennifer, wrote a moving story about a parent dying from cancer and reflected upon the importance of “personal engagement” and how she would now turn her story into a “novel”. Another trainee, Andrew, wrote an interesting story about an obsessive boy who is able to bend time. Andrew felt his writing piece had taken “a more personal tone” than the writing he had undertaken with his class and he reflects that, “I accidentally based the main character on my 10 year old self”.

**Becoming a Writer in the figured world of Writing**

All trainees were asked about whether they saw themselves as writers both before and after the CoW project. With all 15 trainees there was a definite positive shift in perception as a result of their participation in the figured world of Writing and trainees felt that this gave them agency and was beneficial to their teaching of writing. In this sense, participation in the figured world of Writing appears to have a direct
correlation with participation in the figured world of Teaching and, as I discuss below, a future project should consider this agency in relation to pupils’ writing development.

Some of the changes in perception were quite extreme and seemed to involve the trainees repositioning themselves intrapersonally in relation to their perceptions of themselves as writers when they had been pupils at school. At the start of the project, both Lizzie and Lily were clearly uncomfortable with using the signifier “writer” to describe themselves. For Lizzie, this discomfort was explained by remembering being “moved down a set” in English. It appears that the egalitarian ethos of CoW had enabled Lizzie to synthesise this traumatic event with a new perception of herself as a “writer”. For Lily, who initially professed to “dread” writing with her class, the CoW project similarly allowed her to adopt the signifier “writer” by adding valuable writing experiences to a memory of writing at school which was remembered as being otherwise blank: “I don’t really remember writing at school. It clearly didn’t have an impact on me.”

Whilst Lizzie and Lily now professed to embrace the signifier “writer”, other trainees were more guarded in the way they used language to position themselves in the figured world of writing at the end of CoW. James, for example, was comfortable with applying the signifier “writer” to himself but interestingly made a distinction between “writer” and “author”: “Just because I am not a published author does not mean to say that I’m not a writer”. The tone is defensive, as if he is responding directly to a societal discourse – the shadow of Foucault’s “author principle” (op. cit.) – which he perceives as seeking to exclude him from taking the positional identity of “writer” within the figured world of Writing. James’ trade-off in this internal dialogue is to apply the signifier “writer” to himself but not to allow himself the
signifier “author” (that signifier being the exclusive property of those writers who are published).

A similar tension is found in the way in which Jessica, the strongest writer in the group, talked about herself. Different from Jennifer and Andrew who prefaced personal experiences as central to the creative writing process, Jessica focused her creative writing piece around science fiction, a genre in which she professed to have little interest. Despite this lack of interest, the resulting piece of writing was highly sophisticated and, I believe, publishable. Nevertheless, at the end of CoW, Jessica is only comfortable with applying the signifier “writer” to herself within the context of “we are all writers”. Unlike Joseph, Jessica does not make the distinction between the signifiers “writer” and “author” and despite the stylistic excellence of her writing, she affords herself a low positional identity: “To describe myself as a writer seems as though I am comparing myself to a published author and I’m not sure I would feel confident about using that title.” As with James, the “author principle” (Foucault op. cit.) appears to be operating to exclude Jessica from this discourse.

Crucially the shadow of the “author principle” also appeared as a limiting factor in the figured world of Teaching as trainees tended to perceive the identity of “writer” as someone who occupies a high status positional identity and who writes with competence and mastery at all times. This played out in the ways in which the trainees shared their own writing with their classes. In the sessions with myself, I had modeled shared writing which had involved me taking the group’s ideas and talking through the process of writing an unprepared piece of writing. Indeed, this process approach is, as mentioned earlier, deemed to be the most effective way of teaching writing (Dombey, op. cit.). It was, however, being unprepared and responsive in writing with their classes that the trainees found most challenging. All trainees reflected on the way they tended to pre-prepare pieces of texts, particularly towards
the beginning of CoW and here Jessica describes the way she would share writing as
pre-prepared WAGOLLS (What a Good One Looks Like) with her class:

“I didn’t feel confident enough to write in front of the children
without having prepared anything. Because of this, the texts I shared
were often used as WAGOLLS and represented a polished end
product. By doing this, even though the children could see what an
effective piece of writing looked like, they couldn’t witness the
thinking behind it and, as a result, perhaps didn’t see me on the same
level as them.”

The pressure that trainees felt to perform with writerly confidence with their
classes as a result of the author principle also underpins Andrew’s reflection about the
teacher as a role model for writing:

“I think if you can place the role of an author on a pedestal as a
strong creative force who is not only proficient writer, but is also
someone who is able to fully transport the reader to new fantastical
worlds, then you have a role that children want to step into. If the
teacher themselves is a writer, the role model becomes more tangible
and real, providing a strong motivation to write; a strong motivation
for children to become authors themselves.”

It is precisely this, the feeling the trainees had that they should be “role models” who
hold literally elevated positional identities in the classroom - “on a pedestal” which is
similar to Jessica’s not being “on the same level as them” - that acts as a barrier to a
more process based approach.

In this way the author principle made trainees feel as if their writing for the
pupils should be perfect and, despite being able to see the benefits of the process
approach, this meant that in their writing with the pupils the trainees tended to use
pre-prepared product texts. As a result of this, Andrew and many of the other trainees noted how pupils tended to imitate their writing rather than the compositional process: “There was a lot of tokenistic language that children seemed to have included to fulfil the success criteria”.

**Recommendations**

Whilst the consensus amongst educationalists remains that a process-based approach which sees the teacher writing with their class (Dombey op. cit.) is the most effective way of teaching writing in school, this project highlights two key barriers that can limit teacher agency and, therefore, the effectiveness of this approach. Firstly, whilst being able to reflect critically upon closed and open approaches to the teaching of creative writing within the neoliberal figured world of Teaching, the trainee teachers in CoW were paradoxically dependent upon the closed assessment approaches of neoliberalism when participating in the figured world of Writing. Secondly, whilst by the end of CoW all of the trainees expressed a greater ease with identifying themselves as “writers”, societal discourse seemed to problematise this identification with some trainees. In the figured world of Teaching, this low positional identity manifested itself in a need to pre-prepare writing to share with the class – a product-driven approach which often led to pupil imitation of content rather than process.

If we want trainee teachers (and teachers) in the figured world of Teaching to lay bare the process of writing in writing texts with their class, the implications must be two-fold: fundamentally, the education system, both at compulsory and higher levels, needs to be repositioned in relation to the neoliberalism which compromises independence and builds up a dependence upon closed assessment approaches; more immediately, ideologically driven projects like CoW, which seek to disrupt esoteric discourses like the “author principle” through promoting theoretically informed
critical reflection, need to be more widely embraced by schools working in partnership with higher education institutions (HEIs).

The first recommendation is certainly the more complex and difficult to achieve, involving as it does a global ideological shift in terms of the relationship between governments and educational establishments. The second recommendation underlines the importance of HEIs continuing to take a role in teacher training in the face of the school-led training agenda currently prioritised by the National College for Teaching and Leadership.

In terms of CoW, my next research step, as indicated above, is to consider the relationship between trainee teachers’ participation in the figured world of Writing and their pupils’ writing development. Methodologically, this would necessitate trainee teachers working with classes over a more intensive period and gaining observational feedback data from the host teachers.
Reference List


