Marie Charles *and* Bill Boyle

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marie Charles is a teacher, formative assessment researcher, consultant and author whose work demonstrates that she believes passionately in the learner (rather than measurement or grading) being at the centre of the education process – a belief that she carries into her classroom practice.

Professor Bill Boyle has until recently held the positions of chair of Educational Assessment and was Director of the Centre for Formative Assessment Studies (CFAS) in the Manchester Institute of Education at the University of Manchester, UK. CFAS is the oldest research centre (founded 1988) in the UK for supporting teachers, teacher trainers, schools and policy makers in using formative teaching, learning and assessment and is involved in supporting the development of formative assessment in the UK and in many countries around the globe. Professor Boyle and his co-author, Marie Charles, publish their research work in academic and practitioner journals, present at international conferences and workshops, and design and support developments in formative teaching, learning and assessment. Currently, they are working with colleagues in Pakistan, Russia, Armenia, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the USA on understanding and using formative strategies for more effective teaching and learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The principal theme of this book is an exploration of the process of developing young readers and writers through non-traditional means. To achieve this, we set out to demonstrate, illustrate and critique approaches to teaching through the use of multiliteracies (which we have exemplified through fiction, expository/instructions, poetry, recount) and multimodalities (similarly through reading, writing, speaking, listening, performing, illustrating). Our aim was to present material which in the first instance would interest the reader/practitioner and hopefully provoke reflection and support the trainee/current teacher/researcher in understanding how to address and 'scaffold' the complex needs of a learner with depth and breadth. A commissioned report on behalf of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment by Kennedy et al. (2012) built on a broad conceptualisation of the early work of Debes and recognises the importance of multiple modes and multiple representations in literacy. It also defines literacy from a semiotic position to include linguistic and non-linguistic forms of communication (Kennedy et al. 2012, p. 54).

We started from the premise (in both our teaching and our research) that as formative thinkers and practitioners we recognise the importance of formative assessment in the process of effective teaching and learning, and our aim is to build practitioners' understanding and capacity to use formative assessment in that process. Despite the strategies, myths and gimmicks that have been practised in its name, formative assessment is a simple concept. To borrow a quotation from Philippe Perrenoud: 'Any assessment that helps a pupil to learn and develop is formative' (1991, p. 80). It is important that teachers realise that an adjustment to their teaching is required, and that they know and understand how formative assessment helps the pupil to learn and how feedback from assessment supports that learning process.

In our understanding of the literature, a teacher's main role is to try to understand and support the learner on his/her journey to becoming an autonomous literate individual. Three key issues have emerged in our practical work and research – complexity, content knowledge and individual progression – and these three issues need application in the classroom situation to the 'real world' of the young learner seeking automaticity. For example, this can be achieved

by introducing a multimodal aspect to the act of teaching, such as understanding how socio-dramatic play can support the emergent writer or how young communicators can support each other in narrative construction. Our philosophy is that teaching and learning demonstrate a mutually co-dependent and equal partnership between teacher and learner and that progress in learning depends to a large extent on the authentic involvement of the pupil in the learning process. Within the domain of writing development, we recognise and deconstruct for the reader the complexity of this process, that is, easing the cognitive load. This can be achieved by reducing the current unrealistic learning outcomes (expectations) caused by applying a 'one-size-fits-all' generalisation across a heterogeneous (classroom cohort) group to bring about a homogeneous learning outcome. How can these aims be achieved?

By supporting teachers to develop the understanding and use of various strategies (such as eliciting evidence, analysis and action) (Coffey et al., 2011) we intend that trainees/teachers will see the need to become more effective in identifying and using evidence to provide meaningful, relevant and progressive activities matched to individual learning interests and needs.

We saw the need for this book based on our classroom research (Boyle & Charles 2010a), which was based on observations and interviews with a representative national sample of primary school teachers and which produced evidence of limited training in, and understanding of, learning steps, learning trajectories (Heritage 2011) and progressions, especially within the domain of early literacy. We anticipated supporting formative teaching for deeper learning through the use in the book of concrete examples illustrated by case studies and step-by-step commentary. For example, the often quoted but mainly misunderstood concept of 'scaffolding' is addressed through modelling for the teacher on how to 'scaffold' a child struggling with the alphabet to write a decodable sentence independently through semiotics, pictures and other signs. Similarly, 'scaffolding' is a required strategy for the child who is regarded as able but requires support to develop more higher-order skills, and modelling of alternative experiences and strategies for deeper, richer learning is needed for the groups of children who 'get by' through disappearing into the 'acceptable level' category of the current measurement model.

We have tried to exemplify issues such as how to scaffold for the range of children's needs within the different language demands of the genres of poetry, narrative, expository texts, fantasy and recount. One example illustrates the developmental process for the child progressing from a first-person account and connecting back to her reading material and making those transferable connections to what she has written. The primacy of the processes of multimodality and multiliteracies in emerging literacy development are established. For example, themes such as the value to the learner of oral rehearsal leading to growth in aspects of literacy, are never de-contextualised and are always presented in an embedded, realistic way to the reader or learner. The book excludes a focus on product, outcomes, that is scores, levels, percentages,

etc., but focuses on 'how' the child becomes a competent user of language, moving towards the goal of self-regulated learning and hence the journey to becoming a lifelong learner.

Children and their learning interests are at the centre of this book just as they have to be at the centre of all schools' language development programmes. The book focuses on the core pedagogical issues, such as the integration of teaching, learning and assessment; the crucial teacher-centred vs child-centred debate; didactic (transmission model) teaching vs formative (transactional learner-centred) teaching; homogeneity vs heterogeneity; and the pressures on learner-centred teaching of an accountability policy agenda.

We address major issues for successful language development and rich teaching pedagogy. These include the integration of modes of language development; immersion in types/modes of story, rhyme; teacher understanding of the importance of lessening the cognitive load and the implications of overloading 'working memory' for the learner, interest levels, motivation and commitment; relevance for the learner; in short, the importance of supporting the learner's affective domain and balancing the importance given to tests of cognition (understanding the triangulation and integration of cognitive, affective, conative domains on effective learning); and finally being sensitive to micro but vital developmental concerns for the young learner such as physicality (e.g. motor control, pencil grip, pacing, task completion, etc.).

We are singularly aware of the pressures teachers face in developing creativity and creative experiences for children while competing for space against current accountability and 'topical' political agendas for example phonics groups/testing, but we hope that the book will cause thinking, a period of reflection and possibly some changes in practice.

The principal theme of this book is an exploration of the process of developing young readers and writers through non-traditional means. We explore approaches to teaching through the use of multiliteracies (fiction, expository/instructions, poetry, recount) and multimodalities (reading, writing, speaking, listening, performing, illustrating). Our aim is to offer material which will support the reader in understanding how to 'scaffold' the complex needs of a learner. We believe that the teacher's main role is to try to understand and support the learner on his/her journey to becoming an autonomous literate individual.

The linking of teaching, learning and assessment as integrated concepts within a framework of multiliteracies and multimodalities

Let us look at definitions of multiliteracies and multimodalities (Kress 2003) and their relationships with formative teaching, learning and assessment. In a multimodal approach, communication occurs through different but synchronous

modes: language, print, images, graphics, movement, gesture, music and sound (Kress 2003). In terms of multiliteracies: 'literacy pedagogy must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multi-media technologies and is a complex social, cultural and creative activity' (Nilsson 2010 p. 12) Formative assessment is a dynamic process of evidence elicitation, analysis and action which involves knowing what the learning goals are, eliciting evidence of pupil learning status relative to the goals, and taking action accordingly. Formative teachers are constantly attuned and responsive to pupils' learning progress.

Literacy theorists and researchers (Bruning & Horn 2000; Chapman & Turner 2003; Graves 1983; King-Sears 2005; Troia & Graham 2003) evidence that the child is central to this process; the learner is viewed as a unique learner. Basic but fundamental questions are: how can you develop an individual without a full understanding of that individual's starting point? Do I understand where the child is in his/her learning continuum? How can I move this child on? The Cox and Kingman reports of 1988 debated the 'distinction between what teachers need to know and what they should actually impart to their pupils' (Frater 2004, p. 78). Frater's case study of a struggling writer ('Dean') pinpoints the problem: 'the National Curriculum [has not] told me what is best actually to do; it has told me only where "Dean", with the teacher's help, needs to arrive' (p. 79). Frater (2004) finds that explicit instruction of English grammar is not appropriate. In theory, repetitive drilling which is often the mode of traditional grammar instruction, enables students to transfer the definitions memorised and the correct tenses circled on worksheets to their own writing. However, students usually fail when they are asked to transfer the rules of grammar recently learned from a unit to their own writing. Frater (2004) surveyed two schools in the United Kingdom (one at KS2 and the other at KS3/4) that were 'unusually effective in teaching writing' and conducted a case study of a low-achieving Year 7 writer (referred to as 'Dean'). In this case study Frater examines England's National Curriculum (specifically the National Strategies for Grammar for Writing, 2000 edition). Frater notes Dean's 'weak spellings, frequent failures with stops and caps, his faulty manuscript, distinctions between upper and lower case …' (2004, p. 78). Additionally Frater (2004) finds that Dean's sentence patterns need attention and Dean makes little use of subordination, classifiers and modifiers. Based on his research, Frater (2004) argues that 'purposeful, text-level teaching, reading in particular, and the creation of real relationships, offer more secure ways of promoting progress in writing' (p. 78). After the National Literacy Strategy, DfEE's (2001) advice on developing early writing was not only outcomes oriented but was not supported by a solid research base (Dunsmuir & Blatchford 2004, p. 462).

Frater's (2004) case study illustrates that to achieve this 'movement' of the learner it is fundamental that the teacher understands the development phase model of the writing process which includes spelling and composition

(Education Department Western Australia 1997; Gentry 1982; Graves 1983). For example, Fresch's (2007) research, based on 355 teacher responses, highlighted the disparity between participants' current practices and theoretical beliefs about spelling instruction – for example, 72 per cent of teachers use one common spelling list for the entire class (p. 310). If teachers understood the developmental nature of the writing process then they would be implementing Flower's et al. (1986) assertion that 'the way people actually write is not adequately described by a model which suggests movement through discrete stages in a linear fashion' (in Yarrow & Topping 2001, p. 263). Instead, Flower's et al. (1986) metaphor of 'writers as switchboard operators juggling a number of different demands on their attention and various constraints on their behaviour' (in Yarrow & Topping 2001, p. 263) captures a learning model which although pedagogically sound has been made redundant by generations of teachers who follow the outcomes-oriented demands imposed by the National Strategies and Standards agenda. Current research (Alexander 2008; Boyle & Charles 2008, 2009; Burkard 2004; Eke & Lee 2004; Jolliffe 2004; Myhill 2006) evidences that the pedagogical model in classrooms today is based around one objective which does not seek to embrace the complexity that Flower describes and the individual learning requirements of a class. Graves (1983) analysed teachers and children at work as writers and in his work he described writing 'as a complex process rather than a single event, with great emphasis placed upon "rehearsal" for writing … day dreaming, sketching, doodling, making lists, outlining, reading, conversing, thinking about the product, ego boosting [i.e. thinking about the effect the writing will have on the readers, as well as the writer]' (p. 221). Both Flower (1989) and Graves (1983) understand and describe the necessary complexity of the writing process, a process which cannot be reduced to one objective because of the range of entry points of learners to the emergent writing process and the extent of conceptual understandings across the range. This provides further reinforcement of Martin, Segraves, Thacker and Young's (2005) adage that 'learning is a messy process' (p. 235). A major issue is to support the teacher who verbalises 'How do I help? What kind of help does the learner need?' For Sperling (1990):

> the teacher has to be involved with the [children] in small groups. Involvement in these small groups allows the teachers to ascertain where the [children] are in the writing ZPD [Zone of Proximal Development]. With the knowledge of the [children's] ZPD the teacher can provide the proper scaffolding to simplify the less needed cognitive tasks, allowing more cognitive energy for the writing strategy at hand. (In Vanderburg 2006, p. 389)

A four-month research study of 19 five- and six-year-olds was based on the development of writing workshops and mini lessons. It introduced the young learners to writing rough drafts, revising and editing through peer conferencing. Over the course of the project, the researchers reported

increased motivation, enjoyment ('when are we going to publish another newspaper?'), more productive collaborative working and the development of qualitative evaluative questions by the learners. However, the limitations of small class size and no control group reduced the generalisability of the findings (Jasmine & Weiner 2007, p. 136). In contrast, the National Writing Project in England (1985–8) did not produce such rich outcomes despite its larger scale, better resourcing and multiplicity of published outcomes. Lambirth and Goouch (2006) in their critique of the project reported 'a strait-jacket of stylised conventional structure … imposed on the writing of a whole class so that individual learning by personal engagement with the experience is actually inhibited' (p. 147).

Martin et al.'s project (2005) involving three teachers and 63 first-grade pupils was guided by one research question: 'what do teachers and their [children] in first grade classrooms learn about writing when the writing process is added to the daily classroom instructional program?' (p. 240). The purpose of the research was to examine what the teachers and pupils learned about writing as the writing process was implemented in their classrooms throughout the school year. The teachers found that they had to examine their own beliefs and then to modify their pedagogy to accommodate the pupils' learning needs. Their findings included: 'first graders can and do want to write; learning is a messy process and empowerment is important for all' (Martin et al. 2005, p. 242). Specifically, one teacher 'discovered that the children in her classroom could use the different steps of the writing process … reflecting how the children's writing developed over time with guidance' (p. 242). These developments included 'becoming excited about using more colourful words … amazed because it had more detail' (we note that not using correct terminology could confuse children, for example when using labels such as 'colourful words'). And finally this study revealed that 'teachers can change their views about how and when pupils learn to write, but they [have] to be willing to make organisational and instructional changes' (p. 246). Most recently, in 2007 the DCSF recognised the importance of these 'organisational and instructional changes', that is, in this case a move away from the dominance of whole-class teaching. The DCSF introduced a guidance paper 'Improving writing with a focus on guided writing'. However, the main thrust of the guidance was identified as a means to focus on improving measured performance standards in writing, expressed in line 1 of the introduction as 'improving standards of writing at the end of Key Stage 2 is a national priority' (DCSF 2007a, p. 5). The guidance does, however, define and promote the use of guided writing as a supportive structure for developing writing for each individual, that is, 'the teacher is able to observe and respond to the needs of individuals within the group' (p. 6). However, if the development of the learner as an autonomous writer (Boyle & Charles 2009; Paris & Paris 2001; Zimmerman 2000) requires the pupil to be involved in the construction of their own learning, the guidance falls short in that it is didactic, highly

structured and teacher-centred, that is, the 'teacher provides opening' (p. 22), 'the teacher constructs an imaginary situation' (p. 18), 'the teacher introduces the lesson objectives' (p. 32). The pupil is clearly seen in a fixed subordinate role, as evidenced by the guidance's instructions on setting up writing opportunities (p. 18), and the pedagogical model suggested echoes Alexander's (2004) 'closed recitation script'. The guidance (DCSF 2007a) fails to recognise the complexity and level of demand required for one to emerge as a proficient writer; it does not acknowledge the 'individualisation of the learning trajectory' (Perrenoud 1998, p. 98). The guidance rather follows the model of linear stepped progression to becoming a writer which was critiqued by Flower (1989) in her 'metaphor of the writer as a switchboard operator, juggling a number of different demands' (in Yarrow & Topping 2002, p. 263). Is this because the complexity inherent in pedagogy, as outlined by Flower (the requirement to 'juggle') and Perrenoud (the need to differentiate your teaching and learning programmes), may cause a 'perceived crisis in teachers' professional skills, routine and organisation' (Perrenoud 1998, p. 98). Has the summative agenda of the last twenty years reduced the capacity of the teacher so that 'juggling' and differentiating is now beyond them? In short, has the teacher been reduced to the technician who has been trained to deliver the whole-class menu but cannot diverge in his/her pedagogy to meet the learning needs of the individuals in their classrooms?

Outline of chapters

In Chapter 1 we illustrate how a young learner's writing needs were identified through evidence, elicitation and analysis (Coffey et al. 2011). The action agreed upon consequent to that analysis recognised that writing is a complex problem-solving activity which requires socio-dramatic play as the framework for structuring the child's development. Chapter 2 uses a case study to investigate the integration of major aspects of writing development such as collaboration, the importance of peer interactions through social learning and the fusion of illustrations, talk and writing to assist communication. The collaboration of the two girls as writers is tracked through four teaching interventions in which the girls chose the genre and writing aspects with equal status through this multimodal approach. Chapter 3's case study focuses on the reception and production of language and the judicious use of multimodal strategies (audio recorder, visual stills of fairytale scenes and props) and peer collaboration in supporting one boy's storytelling skills using the genre of fairytales. Chapter 4 focuses on a group of 'beginning readers' and the strategies being used by their teacher to deepen their understandings of the text being read aloud to the children and which the children read aloud themselves. The dominant strategy is the multimodal use of paintings and penned illustrations to create and author their own books. Chapter 5 details a case study in which