

TEXTS THAT TEACH

Examining the efficacy of using texts as models

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Abstract

The classical rhetorical tradition advocated imitation as a tool for learning to be an effective orator, and thus foregrounded the pedagogical importance of using texts as models. More recent contemporary research has also flagged the value of using texts as models, enabling explicit attention to how texts work, and scaffolding students' learning about writing. Despite some empirical evidence which points to the efficacy of this approach there is little detailed evidence of how the use of texts as models plays out in classrooms or what pedagogical practices are most supportive of student learning. Drawing on a funded four-year study, including a qualitative longitudinal project following four cohorts of students over three school years, this paper attempts to redress this gap. Through a detailed analysis of episodes of teachers using texts as models, it argues that it is critical to understand the pedagogical actions of teachers using texts as models to avoid text models being a straitjacket, constraining learning about writing, rather than possibilities for creative emulation. We highlight the fundamental importance of establishing a link between linguistic choice and rhetorical purpose so that young writers are inducted into the craft of writing, and empowered to make their own authorial choices.

Keywords: metalinguistic understanding, writing, grammar, texts as models, imitation

1

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1. INTRODUCTION

The use of texts as models has a legacy in classical traditions of rhetoric, but has also been widely recommended as a pedagogical practice for the teaching of writing by both researchers and practitioners. Proponents of its benefits draw variously on: the learning to be gained from imitating great writers; the value of explicit teaching about choices writers have made; and the model text acting as a scaffold for later writing independence. Although there is empirical evidence for the efficacy of using texts as models (Graham & Perin 2007; Graham et al. 2016), close reading of these studies indicate that the focus specifically on text models is variable, and that few studies attempt to understand how the texts contribute to writer learning and increase writing competence. This paper draws on a longitudinal qualitative study investigating students' metalinguistic development in relation to writing, and it explores, through a detailed analysis of episodes of teachers using texts as models, how learning from models is manifested. The paper argues that it is critical to understand the pedagogical actions of teachers using texts as models to avoid text models being a straitjacket, constraining learning about writing, rather than possibilities for creative emulation. We highlight the fundamental importance of establishing a link between linguistic choice and rhetorical purpose so that young writers are inducted into the craft of writing, and empowered to make their own authorial choices.

2. THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

In looking at how students learn from texts as models, this paper builds on a pedagogical approach to the teaching of writing investigated through a cumulative series of studies conducted by the authors. This body of work has focused upon the place of explicit teaching of grammar in the writing curriculum, and has adopted a variety of methodological approaches for empirical inquiry. These have included randomised controlled trials (Myhill et al. 2012); quasi-experimental studies (Myhill et al. 2018; Myhill & Watson 2018; Pearson 2013); a corpus study (Myhill 2008); conceptual reviews (Myhill & Jones 2015; Myhill & Watson 2014); and a longitudinal qualitative study (Myhill, Lines & Jones, forthcoming). The outcomes of this research have indicated a positive impact on student attainment in writing in classrooms adopting this approach (see especially Myhill et al. 2012). However, the research has also foregrounded the differential ways in which teachers implement the pedagogical approach, particularly relating to the limitations of some teachers' grammatical knowledge (Myhill et al. 2013) and teacher confidence in managing dialogic talk about writing (Myhill & Newman 2016).

The pedagogical approach is fully theorised and emphasises the idea of grammar as choice, a way of making and shaping meaning in writing. From a linguistic perspective, this reflects Carter and McCarthy's distinction (2006: 7) between grammar as choice (how choices shape meaning), and the grammar of structure (the description of language and its grammatical parts). Although this emphasis on grammar as

choice has been touched on in second language learning (Larsen-Freeman 2002; 2003), it is a novel perspective in L1 classrooms, though there is growing interest in more productive teaching of the relationship between grammar and meaning (see for example, the Special Issue 2018, L1-Education: Empirical Research across Linguistic Regions in *L1-Educational Studies in Language and Literature*). It also draws heavily on Hallidayan thinking about functional grammar and the symbiotic relationship of form and meaning. Halliday's work has highlighted the idea of grammar as '*a resource for meaning-making*', and that '*text is a process of making meaning in context*' (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 3). It follows therefore that being a language user, and a writer, is a process of learning how to mean. Every move in the writing process requires choice, from choices about formats and fonts, or about content, or genre—but our interest has been principally on the language choices writers make, and how teachers can support learners in making language choices more purposefully and strategically.

The goal of this pedagogical approach is to heighten and deepen young writers' sensitivity to language choice and to develop their metalinguistic understanding about writing, and the repertoire of choices available to them. Through showing students how grammatical choices can alter communicative expression, their metalinguistic understanding moves beyond mere grammatical identification and use of grammatical metalanguage to the fostering of metalinguistic knowledge and understanding which is usable and purposeful in the context of developing as a writer. To ensure that the theoretical principles of the pedagogy inform teacher pedagogical planning and decision-making, we have devised four pedagogical principles (characterised by the acronym, *LEAD*) to support teachers' professional thinking:

- **LINKS**: make a link between the grammar being introduced and how it works in the writing being taught;
- **EXAMPLES**: explain the grammar through examples, not lengthy explanations;
- **AUTHENTICITY**: use examples from authentic texts to link writers to the broader community of writers;
- **DISCUSSION**: build in exploratory dialogic discussion about grammar and its effects

This article focuses particularly on the use of authentic texts, and how, through looking at the language choices made by published writers, students as novice writers are connected to a community of writers, and to texts that teach. Through using authentic texts as models, students explore how the grammatical choices published writers make subtly shape meaning. Take, for example, Roald Dahl's description of Matilda's father in *Matilda*:

Mr Wormwood was a small ratty-looking man whose front teeth stuck out underneath a thin ratty moustache. (Dahl 1988:23)

The choice of the noun phrase, '*a small ratty-looking man*' is not mere description: it sets the reader up to infer what kind of man he is, drawing on our cultural antipathy to rats. A very different inference cue would have been set up by altering the noun

phrase to ‘*a cuddly bear-like man*’. And the issue of choice is not simply about lexical grammatical choices, but also about syntactical grammatical choices. Consider the two sentences below. The first is taken from Michael Morpurgo’s children’s novel, *Arthur, High King of Britain*, and is describing the moment when the sword, Excalibur, rises from the lake, whilst the second models a possible alternative:

And, to my amazement, up out of the lake came a shining sword, a hand holding it, and an arm in a white silk sleeve. (Morpurgo 1994:40)

And, a shining sword, a hand holding it, and an arm in a white silk sleeve came up out of the lake, to my amazement. (our version)

The two sentences have different syntactical structures: the first begins with two adverbials and the long subject is at the end of the sentence after the verb; the second is the more usual syntax of English with the subject first, then the verb, followed by the two adverbials. This syntactical difference expresses the same plot moment in two subtly different ways. The first version foregrounds the amazement of the viewer and grammatically creates a visual impression, first of the lake, then of the rising (coming) of the sword, then the hand holding it, and finally the arm. In the second, the reader’s attention is drawn first to the description of the sword, then to the lake that it rises from, and lastly to the viewer’s amazement. The subject verb inversion in the first delays the detail of the sword, perhaps emphasising the wonder of the moment, whereas the initial subject position of the sword in the second relates the plot moment more directly. The point here is not that one sentence is better than the other but that the two sentences represent different syntactical choices, each of which portrays the plot event differently.

It is the principle of using authentic texts to develop this kind of thinking which this article addresses—specifically how teachers use these texts as models for learning, and how this plays out in writers’ own writing and thinking about language choices. In our studies, pedagogical attention is focused specifically on the author’s language choices, examining how authentic texts can act as scaffolds for the development of grammatical metalinguistic understanding which supports informed decision-making in writing. The article will consider the different ways in which teachers used the texts and how children responded to them, outlining both the possibilities and the challenges of this approach.

3. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The idea of using published texts as learning models for writers is not itself new, with a long history dating back to the classical tradition of *imitatio*, and a more recent history, grounded in constructivist learning theory and the idea of scaffolding writing through the use of texts as models. These different, but potentially complementary frames of reference for using authentic texts to teach writing are further explicated below.

3.1 Classical 'imitatio' as a learning tool

The principle of imitation is deeply rooted in the rhetorical tradition, tracing its origins back to Plato and Aristotle, and later to Cicero, and most particularly to Quintilian. For Plato and Aristotle, the idea of *imitatio*, or *mimesis* as it is in Greek, is more of a philosophical debate about the relationship between art and life, and how art can or cannot represent reality and truth. Mimesis is seen as a natural human instinct as a way to learn and to understand the nature of reality (Worth 2000: 335), and it 'involves actively doing something, and this enables us to open new possibilities of the world and to transform our lives' (Tsuji 2010: 129). But both Cicero and Quintilian are more pedagogically oriented and develop imitation as a central tenet in learning to be an effective communicator. Cicero, in his *Rhetorica ad Herennium* ([trans Caplan] 1994), argues that Art, Imitation, and Exercise are the three methods by which a learner develops mastery of rhetoric and rhetorical knowledge; and, likewise, Quintilian, in *The Orator's Education*, outlines how rhetorical learning derives from 'reading and hearing the best models' which involves learning 'not only the words for things but which words are best in each place' (Quintilian [trans Russell] 2001: 157). The use of 'exemplary texts as models for the production of new texts' (Terrill 2016: 158) was at the heart of the principle of *imitatio*, so that novice orators could learn from the expertise of acclaimed orators.

In modern English, the word 'imitation' has acquired rather negative connotations, and is dominantly associated with unthinking reproduction or copying of an original. Halliwell notes that the word has become '*too narrow and predominantly pejorative—typically implying a limited aim of copying, superficial replication, or counterfeiting*' (Halliwell 2002: 152). Yet this is not what the classicists were promoting in their rhetorical pedagogy. Aristotle saw *mimesis* (imitation) not as reproduction of original models but as '*something more creative*' and transformative (Tsuji 2010: 128), where the original acts as a model for inventive re-creation. There is little doubt that both Cicero and Quintilian saw the use of texts as models for learning, not for mere copying. Terrill maintains that for Quintilian, '*the goal of imitatio in a rhetorical paideia is not the preservation of previous knowledge but the invention of new expression*' (Terrill 2016:160) and he outlines that Quintilian's imitation is characterised by two stages, analysis and genesis whereby '*students analyze, or are led by their teacher in an analysis of, a model text that possesses some attributes worthy of emulation, and then are assigned the task of generating a text of their own that possesses these same attributes*' (Terrill 2016: 158). Vickers (1989: 77) argues that one purpose of classical imitation is enabling a learner to develop their own voice.

However, despite this emphasis on creative re-invention through the use of texts as models, it is not always evident that imitation leads to invention, rather than reproduction. In the rhetorical tradition, imitation is achieved through *progymnasmata*, detailed language exercises whereby students deliberately practise different types of rhetorical devices in a systematic way, but this appears to focus more on the imitation of a particular pattern or device, rather than consideration of how that

pattern or device is creating meaning. The potential for classical imitation to be reduced to rather hollow imitative practices is evident in Terrill's claim that central to an imitative pedagogy are '*paraphrase, translation, and memorization*' (2016: 164), which stands rather in contrast to his claim, noted above that imitation is about the invention of new expression. A similar tension is evident in Geist's (2005) advocacy of stylistic imitation: on the one hand, he argues for an integral relationship between form and meaning where '*the writer works on both meaning and expression, in connection with each other, trying to match the structures for the two lines of production*' (2005: 178), but elsewhere he notes that '*in imitation, form is separated from content, and the focus is on form*' (2005: 173). Thus the classical view of imitation adopts pedagogical practices that may be seen as creating an over-reliance on reproducing textual characteristics and on over-emphasis on the authority of the text.

There are contemporary advocates of the place of the classical notion of imitation, and the use of the progymnasmata, in the contemporary classroom (for example, Minock 1995; Geist 2005; Enos 2016; Fleming 2016; Matthiesen 2016). In general, these authors offer limited re-framing of classical imitation for the contemporary classroom, and tend to make well-reasoned arguments about its sustained applicability. Matthiesen, however, inverts the dominant emphasis on imitation as a teacher-driven strategy to one which focuses on student-driven imitation and which '*seeks to strengthen the rhetorical agency of the individual student*' (Matthiesen 2016: 209). She makes an argument for five dimensions which characterise student-driven imitation: paying attention to fascination; identifying qualities worth imitating; carrying out critical reflection; considering acceptance; and exploring ways of interaction. Relevant to the focus of this article, she also notes that the teacher '*can act as an example by presenting a written product he or she as a reader is fascinated by and as a writer would like to learn from or be inspired by*' (2016: 222). However, there is no empirical evidence of the efficacy of such approaches.

3.2 *Scaffolding writing through texts as metalinguistic models*

Whilst the classical principle of imitation focuses on the authority of the text, constructivist theories position the use of texts as models as a form of scaffolding. The concept of scaffolding as a learning strategy derives largely from Vygotsky (1986) and his view of learning and cognitive development as a social communicative process in which learning through interaction and with assistance is a normal human process. Specifically, Vygotsky argued that the limits of a person's learning or problem-solving ability can be expanded if another person provides the right kind of cognitive support, or cognitive apprenticeship (Collins et al. 1989) into a particular aspect of learning. The genesis of the term 'scaffolding' in an instructional context is generally attributed to Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), and describes the active, constructive support of a knowledgeable other in a learning event. There are several key features of scaffolding: firstly, scaffolding is the '*temporary, but essential, nature of the mentor's assistance as the learner advances in knowledge and understanding*' (Maybin,

Mercer & Stierer 1992), and the level of support should be gradually withdrawn to foster independence. Secondly, the scaffolding reduces *'the degree of freedom in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring'* and reduces the learner's scope for failure (Mercer 2000). Effective scaffolding draws on the greater expertise of the knowledgeable other who lends *'their mental capacities to learners in order to support and shape learning'* (Goodwin 2001). Modelling has been advocated as a scaffolding strategy (Wood, Bruner & Ross 1976; Eggen & Kauchak 2001; Haston 2007), although close reading of the literature on modelling in writing indicates that it is inconsistently interpreted, sometimes as the teacher modelling a particular aspect of writing and at other times, referring to texts acting as models.

The use of texts as models for writing is identified by Graham and Perin (2007) as one of eleven effective instructional approaches in their meta-analysis of writing instruction practices. They argue for the efficacy of the study of models *'which provide students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing'* (Graham and Perin 2007: 5). More recently, guidance to teachers on effective practice in teaching writing (Graham et al. 2017) has as one of its three over-arching recommendations that teachers should integrate reading and writing to emphasise key writing features, and one practice within this is using *'exemplar texts'* (2016: 33). Teachers are advised to analyse exemplar texts to highlight the genre features (2016: 36) and to use *'texts that clearly illustrate specific features of effective writing for students'* (2016: 58).

Approaching the use of texts as models from a very different theoretical perspective, Rose and Martin (2012) draw on Systemic Functional Linguistics to make similar recommendations that writing needs explicit instructions using texts as models. Martin (2009) outlines the teaching and learning cycle used to teach genre, involving a deconstruction stage *'where models of the target genre are presented'*; joint construction, where teachers and students compose a text in the modelled genre together; and individual construction, where students write independently (2009: 15). In England, *The National Literacy Strategy* (DCSF 2009) which was in place from 1997-2010, drew on research to inform its recommendations that teachers model both the process of writing and through using texts, following an instructional sequence of shared writing, guided writing and independent writing.

In tandem with research suggesting the efficacy of using texts as models is a substantial body of 'advocacy literature', professional and commercial publications which promote teaching with texts. Martha Kolln has long been an advocate of the constructive place of grammar in the teaching of writing (Kolln 1982; Kolln & Hancock 2005), and in her grammar textbook (Kolln & Gray 2016) she makes some use of text extracts as models, though this is not her primary focus. There is, however, a swathe of publications, predominantly from the US, which specifically address the use of texts as models, using the term 'mentor texts' to describe them. These include, for example, Pytash & Morgan 2014; Marchetti & O'Dell 2015; Shubitz 2015;

Ruday 2015; Culham 2016; Dorfman & Capelli 2017; and Wagstaff 2017. These authors make strong claims about '*the power that teaching children to lean in closely and investigate the ideas, the craft, and the language of mentor texts*' can bring (Dorfman & Capelli 2017, ix), and how they make it possible for young writers to '*sit beside the author and study how the text is constructed and how it communicates*' (Culham 2016: 30).

Neither the classical nor more current articulations of the value of texts as models consider how explicit attention to the choices writers make might develop metalinguistic understanding; instead they tend to focus on cognitive attention to the features of the text and the structures they use. Yet there is a strong argument that the value of texts as models is less that they offer models for imitation but that they open up metalinguistic awareness of the repertoire of possibilities of language choices. Halliday et al. argue that '*becoming literate means reflecting consciously on your language*' (Halliday et al. 2012: 138) and by implication being enabled to make more conscious choices in crafting written text. Gombert, who argues that metalinguistic understanding is '*cognition about language*' (1992: 9), suggests that writing demands a '*higher level of abstraction and elaboration*' because of the absence of an immediate reader, and that therefore '*metalinguistic development thus appears to be of primary importance in the acquisition of writing*' (Gombert 1992: 151/152). At the same time, metalinguistic understanding about language choices enables students to participate in the socially determined communities of practice within which writing is situated. We have argued that the nature of the teacher's orchestration of classroom talk about metalinguistic choices in writing is a way of scaffolding their capacity to think metalinguistically about their own writing (Myhill & Newman 2016). We would argue further that the educational saliency of texts as models is located in their potency in stimulating metalinguistic thinking about the relationship between linguistic choices and the meanings they create.

However, common to both the classical rhetorical view of imitation and more recent recommendations of the efficacy of the use of text models in writing instruction is a relative lack of empirical evidence which robustly evaluates the approach, and very little which examines how this instructional strategy is implemented and how it transfers into writing. Indeed, although using texts as models is part of the Graham et al. (2016) recommendations, the report only judges the strength of the empirical evidence to be moderate and a close look at the studies which constitute this evidence indicate that few of these studies were focussing specifically on determining the impact on writing of using texts as models. For example, the Hubner et al. (2010) study evaluated the efficacy of writing journals in supporting self-regulation; the Lesaux et al. (2014) study evaluated the efficacy of an intervention teaching academic vocabulary to linguistically diverse learners; and the Fong et al. (2015) study considered the benefits of a teaching approach developing group discussion and critical thinking around texts. None of the eight studies cited have any reference to text models, or synonyms, in their title.

4. METHODOLOGY

The data reported in this article attempts to address this lacuna in the research to explore how authentic texts are used to teach writing and metalinguistic thinking about writing. The article draws on data from a four-year study, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, which sought to understand how young writers' metalinguistic understanding developed and if/how it transferred into writing. The research questions are outlined below:

Principal research question:

What is the relationship between metalinguistic understanding, and development in writing?

Subsidiary research questions:

- 1) How does grammar knowledge develop?
- 2) How do young writers talk about their grammar choices?
- 3) What is the relationship between what learners know about language choices in writing and the choices they make in their own writing?
- 4) What is the role of classroom practices in shaping metalinguistic development?
- 5) What is the role of grammar in the writing classroom?

This paper reports principally on data which relates to question 4.

The study involved a three-year longitudinal empirical study, following four cohorts of students in four schools over three school years. Two of the cohorts followed students over the last three years of primary schooling (aged 9-11; $n = 57$) and the other two cohorts followed students over the first three years of secondary schooling (aged 12-14; $n = 52$). In the English educational system, this meant that the teachers changed each year as the cohorts moved through school, and also that children were moved into different classes as they progressed. So, in the final year of the study, the student sample was distributed across 10 classes compared with 4 in the first year. Each year the teachers attended three Continuing Professional Days with the research team to co-plan teaching which reflected the pedagogical approach outlined earlier, and to reflect on their teaching post hoc.

The data collection (see Table 1) comprised lesson observations to determine the nature of the pedagogical practices used and students' response to them; these lessons were both audio and video recorded, with an audio recorder on the teacher's desk and a video recorder placed to capture the whole class. Interviews, in the form of 'writing conversations', were conducted with a sub-sample of six focus children in each cohort, using their own writing as a stimulus for discussing writing choices and decisions made, and what they felt they had learned about the writing. A baseline

writing test was administered at the study start and repeated again at the end; this was a former national test of writing which used a prompt about a moving statue to stimulate a narrative. The data was not used statistically to compare performance, but it was used to conduct a linguistic analysis of writing at the beginning and end of the study. In addition, students' writing samples linked to the teaching units were collected throughout the study.

Table 1: A summary of the data collection

	PRIMARY			SECONDARY			TOTAL
	Year 4 (age 9)	Year 5 (age 10)	Year 6 (age 11)	Year 7 (age 12)	Year 8 (age 13)	Year 9 (age 14)	
Lesson Observations	11	18	22	14	13	34	
			51			61	112
Student Interviews	33	30	28	36	31	29	
			91			96	187
Student Writing Samples	34	32	26	29	32	26	
			92			87	179
Baseline writing test	18	16	15	18	15	16	
			49			49	98

This article reports on the lesson observation data. A systematic analysis of the observations was undertaken to identify all episodes in these lessons which represented examples of teachers' using texts as models. This resulted in the identification of 27 episodes of text modelling. Each of the 27 text modelling episodes was analysed qualitatively using the five thematic strands below, and drawing on the interview data and writing samples, where available:

- The clarity of the learning focus for the text being used
- How the teacher connects grammatical choice with meaning in the model text
- How the teacher orchestrates metalinguistic discussion about the text
- Evidence of learning transfer into the students' writing (where available)
- Evidence of metalinguistic understanding in interviews.

5. FINDINGS

In order to portray the data robustly, a detailed analysis of five episodes will be presented below as vignettes. The vignette as a research tool is sometimes used as a data collection method (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Finch 1987), but also as a way of

reporting data. Erickson sees vignettes as vivid portrayals of classroom practice which are ‘richly descriptive’ (Erickson 1986: 150): they are synoptic and interpretive abstractions of the data. Jacobsen (2013) also uses vignettes synoptically ‘on the basis of analysis and interpretation of the patterns in the data material as a whole, comprising interviews, observations, and surveys’ (Jacobsen 2013: 41). Drawing on these reporting methods, we use vignettes to bring together the data from lesson observations, student interviews and student writing samples to present focused portrayals of how teachers; use of text as models was realised in students’ own writing and in their talk about that writing. The vignettes presented have been chosen because they represent the full range of ways in which model texts were used and a range of responses. The student writing examples are all extracts, rather than whole pieces, chosen because they reveal something significant about the impact of the model text on their writing. In the presentations below, students’ spelling errors have been corrected but breakdowns in coherence have been retained.

5.1 Vignette 1

Model Text	Martin Luther King’s <i>I Have a Dream</i> Speech
Writing Type	Persuasive writing
Learning Focus	Unclear
Age group	10-year olds

In this teaching unit, the students have been developing understanding of Greek society as part of a cross-curricular project, and their final writing task is to write a speech in the style of Martin Luther King but from the perspective of a Greek citizen. Students have been allocated characters representing different hierarchical levels and roles in Greek society. In this episode, the precise *learning focus* is unclear as they compare the King version of the speech with the teacher’s version. The teacher emphasises that they are looking at ‘*persuasive techniques*’ but the *metalinguistic discussion* of the texts is very broad-ranging, sometimes looking at the topical organisation of paragraphs, and ‘*things that make it flow*’, with no clear articulation of what linguistic or content choice help flow. The teacher does draw out explicitly the consistent use of pronouns (*I* and *we*) in the model text but she does not develop how that *grammatical choice* of first-person pronouns achieves a rhetorical effect. She also talks about repetition in the speech with a lead question, *Why do we want to be repeating ourselves in this kind of writing?* but the discussion is limited to fairly superficial identification of where repetition occurs, not what effect it secures.

The students’ final pieces of writing show a strong relationship between the text model and their own versions, as exemplified in the two extracts in Table 2, although as the learning focus was unclear it is hard to comment on *learning transfer*. The model text was present at the time the students wrote their own piece.

Table 2: The model text and two student texts in response (Vignette 1)

<p>MODEL TEXT</p> <p>Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. But not only that; let freedom ring from the Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.</p> <p>Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.</p> <p>And when this happens, and when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"</p>	
<p>EDDIE</p> <p><i>Let money rain from every miserable stand in the city! Let money rain from the dusty streets of Agora! But not only that: let money rain on us all from the grassy mountains of Sparta, let money rain from the wealthy to the poor! To the slaves and traders! From every part of Greece to Athens, let money rain on us all, so let everyone be rich Zeus almighty.</i></p> <p><i>Let money rain from every sparkling beach on the coast of Crete, summit of Olympus and snow capped peak in the nation will be able to speed up the day when every-one, rich, poor, experienced or slaves or traders, will be able to come together and cheer, "Profits rising at last! Money raining at last! Thank Zeus Almighty, we are rich at last!"</i></p>	<p>HARRY</p> <p><i>So let money rise up and flow through out the whole of Greece, any man who is in slavery and any hard working Black Smith. Let money rise up over the hill tops and in workshops. When we let money rise up, we let it rise up to every Black smith, Nave and every one who wants to be treated equally in this country, we will be able to love that day when all of the citizens will treat us equally then all of the slaves and black smiths can come together and cheer "Free at last Thank Zeus almighty free at last, free at last!"</i></p>

In both pieces, there is imitation of grammatical structures, particularly the repeated imperative clause (*Let money rain!*), but also imitation of the noun phrases describing where this is occurring (e.g. *the grassy mountains of Sparta*), and the very direct imitation of the final sentence. Both students use appropriate nouns relevant to the Greek context (*citizens; blacksmith; slaves*). Eddie imitates the rhythm of the model (*the day when every-one, rich, poor, experienced or slaves or traders, will be able to come together and cheer*). Both students do make a reasonable argument for justice, although Harry's is a little less coherent in establishing how money will free slaves. To that extent, one might argue that these are successful re-creations of the original. But one might also argue that they are so dependent on the model text, that the 'transformations' made are very limited to semantic substitutions, and the imitation is operating at a very surface level.

In his writing conversation, Harry shows very little *metalinguistic understanding* and his comments refer mostly to the subject matter of the speech, to 'try and make

people pay more for blacksmiths'. He is aware that he has used repetition, citing '*let money rise*', but he cannot describe its effect, and throughout the writing conversation he returns to noting his need to work on handwriting and punctuation. Eddie is also aware he has been '*repeating things*' and knows where he has done so, but also cannot explain its purpose. There is little sense that Eddie is developing the capacity to think about and evaluate his choices in writing: his points reflect very closely the emphasis of the lessons on repetition, but the learning does not appear to be his own, merely echoing what the teacher has said.

5.2 Vignette 2

Model Text	Jackie Morris – <i>The Snow Leopard</i>
Writing Type	Fictional narrative: creation myth
Learning Focus	how a pattern of three co-ordinated clauses (with comma and 'and') can describe a sequence of actions in a narrative event and create rhythm
Age group	11-year olds

The model text for this teaching sequence was a Himalayan creation myth, a spiritual story of protection and reincarnation. In this episode the teacher drew out from the text two sentences with three co-ordinated clauses, using the comma (asyndetic) to join the first two and the conjunction 'and' (syndetic) to join the third. The *learning focus* was clearly directed towards this 'pattern of three' and the teacher gave the students clauses from the text on strips of card for them to experiment with different ways of joining them. There was a substantial amount of *metalinguistic discussion* in the episode, though some of this focused more on grammatical identification (for example, *What do you call a word that describes a noun?* and *What would you call that sort of sentence where you've got two joined?*). However, the students' attention is firmly focused on clauses and the different rhythm created by different clause patterns. To connect their thinking about the relationship between *grammatical choice* and its effect, she converts one of the model sentences into discrete clauses:

- Teacher: 'The young snow leopard heard the whisper'. 'She also began a new song'.
What's the difference? What's that what would be...?
- Student: That it flows better.
- Teacher: Yes, it flows much better doesn't it absolutely and that's what we're going to be looking at today with using our conjunctions.

She explicitly discusses the three-clause pattern with asyndetic and syndetic co-ordination, and uses comments from the students to build their understanding of how this pattern creates a particular textual rhythm: '*So those are the three things that the leopard did. So we've got three things there. Three different events. Right and we could have written them all out separately but as Kai said that makes it sound all very bitty and disjointed doesn't it*'. She reiterates the idea that with this co-ordination pattern '*we get that extra flow*', and she links the idea of flow to the meaning the narrative story is evoking at that point:

It's gentle—so we've got gentle, calm, feeling—it talks about peace and spirituality and protecting and keeping the place safe and we've got songs and lullabies and that whole feeling is just like gentle breeze and a gentle way.

And throughout she emphasizes that as writers they have the right to choose—'You don't have to have them joined with an 'and'. You don't have to have them as separate sentences. It's your matter of choice'.

The final writing task in this teaching sequence was to write a creation narrative about a rainforest animal: each student chose their own and researched its characteristics and habitat. When they wrote their stories the model text was present, and there was strong evidence of *learning transfer* of this pattern into many of the students' writing (see Table 3).

Table 3: The model text and two student texts in response (Vignette 2)

SENTENCES FROM THE MODEL TEXT	
And the cat stirred, rose and leapt up to the high wild mountains with the Child clinging tight on her back.	
And back in the mountains, the young Snow Leopard looked up at the stars mirrored in her blue cat's eyes, heard the whisper – and began a new song	
IZZY	HARRY
<i>Golden Lion Tamarin forced the trees to form a cunning cage to protect the heart of the forest; the magical, black diamond. She wrapped the trees in loving leaves, crowded creatures onto the tropical trees and gave the plants the sun and water they needed.</i>	<i>At first peak of light, over the ever green mountain, the bald eagle raced to create the wind, soared through the secret forest to awaken all animals and squawked over the green ocean canopy to make the mystical mist.</i>

In the writing conversations, Izzy demonstrated her metalinguistic understanding of the pattern of three, and how it can operate at different levels, and she is able to identify in her own writing where she has used this pattern: 'you can put like three words like adjectives or adverbs and then you can do it as three subjects like "She wrapped the trees in loving leaves, crowded creatures onto the tropical trees and gave the plants the sun they need" ... we were taught how to do power of three like three words in Year 5, then we were taught how to do more harder versions like clauses, three clauses. However, she is much less assured in her articulation of the effect of her linguistic choice, focussing rather more on her semantic choices: 'It shows how like peaceful and loving the monkey is so I put like how she wrapped the trees, it's sort of like when you feel ill, you like just wrapping yourself in your duvet'. Harry, on the other hand, simply points out one of his sentences with the three-clause pattern without using grammatical metalanguage, and can make no comment on the effect of this choice.

5.3 Vignette 3

Model Text	<i>Wuthering Heights</i> by Emily Bronte
Writing Type	Historical fictional narrative
Learning Focus	How Bronte uses first person voice with personal pronouns to allow the reader to see events through the character's eyes
Age group	13-year olds

This episode is located within a teaching unit on historical fiction, linking students' reading of prose extracts (from *Great Expectations* and *Wuthering Heights*) and poetry by Wilfred Owen to a writing outcome: a piece of narrative writing authentic to either Victorian times or the First World War. Through the teaching scheme, the teacher made purposeful connections between *grammatical choice* and meanings, for example, through looking at how noun phrases can describe settings and characters to create authentic detail; how adverbial phrases and clauses add layers of detail; and experimenting with the position of non-finite clauses, for example, to foreground actions. In this episode, there is a *clear learning focus* on the use of first-person voice and the particular narrative perspective this establishes. The teacher supports a close reading of the model text—when Cathy's ghost appears at the window of Lockwood's chamber—by setting up an activity whereby pairs of students use a card with a large hole in it to focus their *metalinguistic attention* to different points in the text. She directs their thinking to the impact on the reader of a first-person narrator, explicitly linking this *grammatical choice* with its narrative effect, and elicits from students comments such as '*it makes it feel like it's happening to you*' and '*making it sound like you're in the room*'. They also discussed how referring to Cathy's ghost as 'it', not 'her' made the narrative more frightening, dehumanising the figure. Rose, the writer of the text further below contributes to this discussion by commenting that '*when you do it in first person you can have more emotive language because when you do it in third it's like he looks scared, but in first you can describe how you feel*'. The teacher synthesises their metalinguistic discussion to draw out her learning focus and to remind them of the choices available to them: '*So it's emphasis on emotions and experiencing it with him. When you do your writing, I'm going to let you choose whether you want to write it in first person or third. That's going to be your decision.*'

Rose chooses to use first-person voice for her Victorian narrative and there is evidence of *learning transfer* in her management of voice. The extract reproduced in Table 4 is the opening of her story and here she quickly establishes an emotional connection with the reader, inviting them to see things from her point of view and empathise with her experiences.

Table 4: The model text and one student's response (Vignette 3)

MODEL TEXT
<p>This time, I remembered I was lying in the oak closet, and I heard distinctly the gusty wind, and the driving of the snow; I heard, also, the fir bough repeat its teasing sound, and ascribed it to the right cause: but it annoyed me so much, that I resolved to silence it, if possible; and, I thought, I rose and endeavoured to unhasp the casement. The hook was soldered into the staple: a circumstance observed by me when awake, but forgotten. 'I must stop it, nevertheless!' I muttered, knocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch; instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, 'Let me in—let me in!'</p>
ROSE
<p><i>A distant noise woke me. I could recognise that voice anywhere, that is the voice that screams, sighs and complains to me. Miss Flannigan. She'd been the head mistress at the orphanage since I arrived there. She's been hurling vituperation at me since I was four; eight years later and she still is. Still screaming "Harry!" every minute of the day. Eight years later and I'm still dreaming of getting out of this prison.</i></p> <p><i>I get up, with reluctance, and start my chores before making my way to lessons. As I'm stuck in an orphanage I can't go to a normal school, or even a dame school. We get three hours per day of education. My first lesson is arithmetic, a personal best for me. The day progresses slowly and by the time I'm in bed, I'm already on the verge of sleep...</i></p> <p><i>I wake with a start a few hours later, the clock reads 01:14. I am sick of the orphanage; I am sick of Miss Flannigan; I need to get out of this dump.</i></p>

In her writing conversation interview, Rose did not refer to her choice of first-person voice, but she does reveal *metalinguistic understanding* of how she has used authentic nouns and nouns phrases to establish the Victorian setting: '*I've used like cobbled floor and like peelers instead of using police. And like dame school, that was only in Victorian schools.*' This had been the learning focus of previous lessons in the teaching sequence.

5.4 Vignette 4

Model Text	<i>Hurricane</i> by David Weisner
Writing Type	Fictional adventure narrative
Learning Focus	The use of variety sentence lengths when narrating
Age group	11-year olds

This teaching unit addressed writing an adventure narrative: over the sequence of lessons, the grammar focus was on manipulating different lengths and types to shape an interesting, exciting narrative episode. This included varying the way sen-

tences started and the position of clauses within a sentence. There was also an emphasis on securing boundary punctuation. In this episode, the grammatical *learning focus* is clear—sentence variety—but the purpose of encouraging sentence variety is not referred to.

To support the students in understanding one possibility for varying sentences, the teacher shows the class two sentence sequences from the model text in which a long sentence is sandwiched by two short sentences, and tries to open up *metalinguistic discussion* about the writer's choice. However, his opening invitation—*Think about the type of sentences used in these paragraphs. What effect do they have?*—is too general for students to know how to respond, and so the answers offered range from an explanation of the grammar to responses to the narrative content of the sentences:

- They are three clauses.
- It makes you want to read more.
- The first one is trying to make you feel scary.
- The first one is more descriptive. And it's got a 'suddenly' in it. Telling you what's creaking—giving you more detail.
- The first one has more tension.

In response to this, the teacher states that *What we've started to do is to look at the way sentences are put together for effect*—even though at this point he has not made any clear link between the *grammatical choice* of varied sentences and what purpose they might serve in the text. He then asks *Why did the writer choose that massive sentence of 21 words and follow it with a sentence of 6 words?* focussing rather literally on the length and brevity of two sentences and does not refer at all to the target pattern of a long sentence between two shorter ones. He deviates from the discussion about the writer's choice to check the students' understanding of the clause structure of the sentence, and gets confused himself when the students muddle verbs with nouns and adjectives (*creaks; roaring; coming*). The students are then invited to directly imitate the sentence pattern with two short sentences given to them, and the long one for them to create (see Table 5).

Table 5: Sentences from the model text and three student texts in response (Vignette 4)

SENTENCE FROM THE MODEL TEXT

They had supper by the fireplace that evening. It felt safe with everybody together, even though there were creaks and groans and even great roaring sounds coming from outside. The hurricane was in full force.

EMILY

The storm was ferocious. The walls felt like they were about to fall down but obviously they weren't going to fall down. They were scared.

ELLA

The storm was ferocious. A vast twirling hurricane was on his way to their fascinating village. They were scared.

EMMA

The storm was ferocious. They gathered round the burning fire, feeling lost. The wind got louder, louder and louder. The trees rattled. Faces were dropped, mouths open. It suddenly all stopped. They were scared.

Although all three students imitate the pattern to some extent, Emily does it most closely, and Emma appears to be experimenting more with varying sentence length more generally. In their own final narratives for this unit, the evidence of *learning transfer* is varied (see Table 6). Ella does not seem to have shaped the length of her sentences in any meaningful way. Emma, however, does have very effective variety with a single word sentence to emphasise the stillness of the leopard, and longer sentences with more descriptive detail. It is possible that the lesson's focus on varying sentence length has had an impact, and that this is an example of a creative imitation, moving away from direct imitation to her own transformation of the pattern. Emily offers a direct imitation of the short-long-short sentence pattern, and the two short sentences do intensify the sense of the fear at seeing the pirates.

Table 6: Three student texts in response to the model text (Vignette 5)

EMMA

David fearlessly led the expedition into the very heart of the jungle, stalking the mighty leopard. The leopard was a fierce looking animal. He strutted forward, with his claws out, his eyes darkened. He turned red, like fire. He stopped. Still. His head switched, side to side. What was going on? The leopard fearfully stretched out his body. He suddenly stopped again, this time not daring to move at all. Creaks, rustles.

ELLA

It was late that night and David was worrying about the captain. He had not come out of his office all day! He started to walk up and down the deck frantically when he stopped and saw millions of pirates running towards the medical bay. David was confused so he stopped one of the pirates and asked him
'Where are you all off to?'

EMILY

It was pirates.
They were captured by the famous vicious pirates (with wimpy names) Carrot, Muffin, strawberry, orange and grape. They were terrified. The captain of the ship was called Strawberry (he had the wimpiest name.)

In the writing conversations, both Emma and Emily show some metalinguistic understanding regarding their choices. Emily knows she has been taught about '*using the short sentence and then a long sentence and a short sentence*' and identifies where

she does this in her writing but says nothing about its effect, whereas Emma explains that her choice of a series of short sentence was *'to make it sound more tense'*.

6. DISCUSSION

The vignettes presented here trace the complex ways in which teachers' use of authentic texts as models plays out in students' writing and in their metalinguistic thinking about writing. In particular, they illustrate how imitation as a scaffolding strategy can be both enabling and constraining, depending on how it is managed by the teacher. This complexity is discussed in more detail below.

6.1 How the teacher connects grammatical choice with meaning in the model text

The data analysis, represented in the four vignettes, indicates that the teachers vary in assurance in linking grammar with meaning, with some teachers (e.g. vignettes 1 and 4) focusing more on the grammar than its purpose in the text. This can lead to more dependent imitation of the model text, rather than independent invention. Although the classical rhetoricians argue that imitation is not *'slavish duplication'* but *'a fundamental component of invention'* (Terrill 2016: 160), if there is no consideration of what a text choice might be achieving, then learning writers are not enabled to consider the relationship of grammatical choice with meaning. Our own pedagogical approach, informing this study, emphasises this grammar-meaning relationship and encourages teachers to shift students *'from 'the what' of labelling to 'the how' of analysis and then to 'the why' of interpretation'* (Macken-Horarik 2016: 5). Where teachers connect particular grammatical constructions in a text with writer's authorial intentions or with potential effects on the reader, young writers are more likely to appropriate those choices effectively into their own writing, as in vignettes 2 and 3, and to understand the possibilities for crafting their own writing.

6.2 The clarity of the learning focus for the text being used

One way to realise the above goal of making a link for learners between attention to grammar and its rhetorical purpose is to ensure the learning focus for a modelling episode is clear. The teachers in our study were sometimes unclear about what they wanted students to learn from the model text (as in vignette 1), or were clear about the grammar focus but more uncertain about its purpose (as in vignette 4). On the other hand, when the teacher draws out from the text model a clear learning focus, children are more likely to embed it naturalistically in their writing (as in vignettes 2 and 3). If the use of texts as models is to be successful as a scaffolding strategy, then it is critical that teachers are themselves in full command of the learning purpose of the modelling if they are to effectively *'support and shape learning'* (Goodwin 2001).

6.3 *How the teacher orchestrates metalinguistic discussion about the text*

The way the teacher manages metalinguistic talk about a model text is strongly inter-related with the clarity of the learning focus and the establishing of a link between the grammatical choice and its rhetorical purpose, as discussed above. However, it is also linked to teachers' linguistic subject knowledge. Concerns about the quality of teachers' knowledge of grammar have been well-documented (Cajkler & Hislam 2002; Harper & Rennie 2009; Myhill et al. 2013), but this study signals that it is not simply grammatical knowledge which is important but, crucially, also teachers' knowledge of how texts work, drawing on linguistic perspectives as well as literary insights. The teacher of vignette 4 was in his first year of teaching and by his own admission struggled with his grammatical subject knowledge. This became apparent in his lack of confidence in leading language-based discussion and explaining grammar points. However, it is not only a matter of subject knowledge. A teacher's capacity to convert teaching input into learning gain draws heavily on his or her skills in leading dialogic metalinguistic discussion which opens up reflective thinking about grammatical choices (for more discussion of this, see Myhill & Newman 2016; Myhill et al. 2016). A tendency observed in many of the modelling episodes was a deviation into mini-grammar lessons, as in vignettes 2 and 4, rather than scaffolding learners' thinking about choice to secure later independence.

6.4 *Evidence of metalinguistic understanding*

The writing conversation interviews demonstrate the complexity of metalinguistic understanding in relation to writing. All students were able to engage to some extent in metalinguistic discussion, but for some it was a more limited repetition of lesson content, often echoing back the teacher's words (as in Eddie's case in vignette 1). Other students were able to talk about specific linguistic choices without using the grammatical metalanguage (e.g. Rose in vignette 3), whilst others could more directly name their choices (e.g. Izzy in vignette 2). Harry, in vignette 2, presented an example found elsewhere in the episodes analysed: he had used the grammatical structure discussed in the lesson in his own writing and knew that this was the focus of the learning, but did not identify that he had used it. For some students, explicit metalinguistic understanding may *follow* appropriation of a structure into writing, rather than precede it. Gombert argues that, with expertise, metaprocesses become automated, no longer needing conscious management, '*but it is always possible to draw automated metalinguistic process back into conscious control for monitoring or reflection*' (Gombert 1992: 186). These interviews may reflect students at different developmental points in the interplay of automation and conscious control.

6.5 Evidence of learning transfer into the students' writing

Although, overall, this study indicates that many students do transfer their learning into their writing, the analysis here indicates that this occurs in various ways and in differing degrees. There are some learners where no transfer is evident (e.g. Ella in vignette 4), and others where the learning has been appropriated effectively into the writing (e.g. Izzy and Harry in vignette 2, Rose in vignette 3), and possibly creatively adapted (e.g. Emma in vignette 3). When the model text is present during writing, however, children tend to be over-dependent and write texts which are largely imitative in a superficial way (e.g. in vignette 1). This kind of surface-level imitation is also evident in the guidance for teachers offered by Graham et al. (2016). They show a student's re-writing of the Prologue of Shakespeare's *'Romeo and Juliet'* (Graham et al. (2016: 40) which has similar patterns of substitution and mimicry evident in vignette 1. It seems that the presence of the model text may foster a less thoughtful appropriation into writing, because attention is directed towards close imitation rather than metalinguistic understanding of the possibilities of particular choices.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Proponents of the classical tradition of *'imitatio'* maintain that it is *'related not only to the reproduction of original models but also to something more creative, to poiesis or transformation'* (Tsuji 2010: 128), whilst more contemporary research argues for the benefit of using model texts *'that clearly illustrate specific features of effective writing for students'* (Graham et al. 2016: 58). At the same time, the professional *'advocacy literature'* on the use of mentor texts present the approach uncritically as a solution for writing problems. Our analysis, however, presents a more complex picture.

Text models can both scaffold student learning, supporting them in experimenting with new ways of writing, and can act as a straitjacket, stifling invention and authentic learning about writing. Where the teaching focus is too strongly directed to the text itself, rather than what the writer may have been trying to achieve, the text model may be constraining, leading to more banal imitation, and limited learning about being a writer. In contrast, where teachers use the text with clarity of learning purpose, *'with a view to imitating the underlying patterns and themes used by a writer, but also thinking about what can be learned about writing'* (Corbett 2012:9), students are more likely to be enabled to appropriate learning into their own writing with greater independence.

There is also a fundamental tension, in using texts as models, between the authority of the model text and the autonomy of the writer, a tension which can play out as either reductivist imitation or constructive re-creation. We would argue that this tension can be mediated when teachers bring form and meaning together, and when teachers can articulate confidently how form shapes meaning, both through well-planned activities and through metalinguistic discussion. When linguistic choice

and rhetorical purpose are brought together, the craft of writing is made visible to young writers and they are enabled to engage in their own purposeful authorial decision-making. Historically and more recently, the empirical and pedagogical focus may have been too much on the texts as models, and not enough on the learning environment in which it is taught: it is not texts that teach, but teachers who teach.

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