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Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkonnet.wordpress.com>

Attack! 61 I went to a wonderful course on writing

Dear Kelvin

Brilliant poke at the way we are pressured to teach language, I thought I was a lone voice bleating in the wilderness. I liken it to putting the ducks in a row and shooting them but actually shooting the fairground ducks is way more fun. The joy of teaching language had almost gone for me because of this trend but I actually did go on a really fantastic writing course last year organised by Vicky Sefton about writers notebooks, mentor texts, and getting class passionate about writing. Even I was inspired to begin a notebook and my class loved it.

Thanks for your post it helps!

Now what do I find in my notes from that wonderful course? The speaker said he looked at writing as if a reading recovery model. An excellent analogy for the teaching of writing don't you think?

The model to follow, he said, is to introduce progressively new aspects of, for example, **Recount:** in y. 3 there may be eight things to focus on; at y. 4 there may be ten things – the learning is progressive.

There is a process to follow in writing: for example, start with macro group, then move on to micro groups.

The absolute base text is to put a teddy bear on the chair, then the children need to be able to describe and write about the teddy bear from a number of perspectives – UNLESS THEY CAN DO THAT THEY CAN'T MOVE ON.

The first thing in any good piece of writing is that there are two sets of demands – content and literacy demands, both have equal value (that is good to know).

How can I organise these to meet the social purpose – to classify and describe for an information report.

Information report

In an aircraft example, he said, we varied the perspective: position, number, shape, appearance. For children with learning difficulties we could focus on the same perspective for each paragraph, for example, position. In this professional development, we aren't learning about aircraft, we are learning about the structure of an information report. Whole language was once taught in by whole language in a whole in Australia – we have moved on from that.

Macro then micro, then describe the micro groups. We then choose another perspective (that hasn't already been used) in the paragraph. When children first start with this we could use the same four perspectives, one in each paragraph. As children become more experienced we can vary the perspectives for each paragraph.

They will write a lot of information reports in their lives so this will stay with them forever.

You will find girls are happier to go on a learning journey with you (they can put up with nearly anything). Boys are only there for a short time and there is no going back for them. When you do have boys' attention, they are good on the content and want to go on about that, but don't tolerate that for a minute, direct them to write the number sentence, the position sentence, and so on.

To cover all the things that need to be covered step-by-step, other curriculum areas will need to be given less time, this is often art and drama.

Frontloading: tell them before the start what they need to do to be successful, tell them to listen carefully and follow instructions, the satisfaction from this will more than compensate for some initial scratchiness. Frontloading should be seen as a key step in discovery learning.

Remember – macro to micro.

In the template, the macro and the three micro sentences are above the dotted line – the linking sentence is below the dotted line.

Remember written in the passive (this is quite easy to explain to children) and no personal and personal pronouns – they could lose their jobs over that.

Most information reports don't have conclusions.

Descriptions

Start by describing yourself. Move on to describing an object. Then to a literacy item, for example, the Big Bad Wolf.

Next move on to **Recounts**, when the descriptions are linked together.

From here you can move on to simple **Information reports** (which should be the focus of children's writing).

Response text

Are things good or are they bad?

Good examples: 'The apple is yummy' or 'The apple is yucky' indicating a very good choice of words.

Response text is usually not suitable for younger children.

This is an active voice text, use personal pronouns.

Television is full of things to be judged. They could be viewed as something like book reviews (a much loved form of children's writing). Judgement words need to be put into judgement sentences (an important point to get across).

The linking sentence secret is to start with the word 'overall'. The second paragraph will be basic recall.

Concluding statements give the text cohesion.

Expositions

The best way to start a good argument is with good connectives such as firstly, and so on. Don't start arguing too quickly.

The first sentence makes the reader think you are an expert so write in the passive to eventually move to the active. For that you need modal verbs and adverbs.

Remember an important idea is to inspire children to write away from the style of children to that of adults.

Take a big thing and break it into smaller parts.

At the conclusion move to high modal words.

And there we have writing for the 21st century. Be direct with the children, if a point is considered good enough to be useful for their writing – frontload it. And remember, the children learn nothing, discover nothing, in the actual process of writing – sentences and ideas must be generated in the children's heads, repeated orally many times, so they know exactly what they are going to write before they put pen to paper, or fingers to keys. With this approach, boys aside, the class will be a ferment of excitement.

Responses to *I went to a wonderful course on writing* Bruce Hammonds says:

I thought for a minute 'you must be joking – you can't be serious' and when I got to the end I realised you were. Are there people going around developing such formulaic and un-creative ideas with teachers? [Dear Bruce: yes there are.]

Worse still do teachers actually use them? I thought we had got past this genre writing for the teacher stuff. What is wrong with letting students write about their felt experiences or things that interest and concern them in their own lives?

Surely language is about voice, choice and one's own identity.

