Executive summary

Readers to Writers is an eight-month long project, conducted by Shropshire Bookfest, aimed at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin primary Schools. Drawing on the unique skills, experience, and insight of children's authors, who deliver special writing workshops to each class taking part, the project focuses on helping teachers support children in the classroom with their creative writing skills. Each pupil produces their own book which may be entered into a county wide creative writing competition. Teachers and pupils participate in a celebratory conference and event, benefitting from further workshops and professional development to promote creative writing pedagogies within the classroom.

Researchers from the University of Worcester undertook a 10-month long study exploring how pupils engaging in the Readers to Writers project perceive themselves as authors and the impact upon attitudes to creative writing. 301 pupils from Year 1 to Year 6 across 10 primary schools produced storyboards or graphic organisers detailing their journey as a writer during the period of the project. In addition, 12 teachers from these schools were interviewed as part of four focus groups to explore their perceptions of the project and the impact they felt it had on their pupils in school.

From the outset this project was framed using an interpretivist approach as the researchers sought to understand viewpoints from others concerning the Readers to Writers Bookfest Project. The result was the collection of qualitative data from both teachers and pupils which facilitated analysis and the drawing together of conclusions about an individual's view. In turn, this elicited overarching themes for further consideration:

1. Transformation – from pupil to author.
2. Context – what do teachers and pupils believe helped them to become authors.
3. Process – the writing experience and the finished product.

Summary of key findings

- **Pupils and teachers valued time** given to write creatively rather than as a mechanism for improving technical proficiency. However, it should be noted that, as a consequence of the project, technical proficiency improved in many cases.
- **Levels of engagement with the writing process increased** and pupils were more likely to choose to write for pleasure than prior to their participation in the project.
- **When pupils have the freedom to exercise authorial choice**, they are more likely to demonstrate a positive attitude to writing.
- **Pupils are more confident to take risks in their writing** when they have opportunities to write for pleasure.
- **Writing for pleasure leads to greater confidence, enjoyment and engagement** not only during the project but also beyond**.** All teachers responded positively on the impact on children's transcriptional and compositional skills.
- **Author visits are pivotal in inspiring children to write creatively.** The realisation that authors are 'real people' and face challenges themselves with the process is key. The visits and continued interaction support the writing process.
- **Pupils felt a strong sense of writer identity** when they were able to take ownership of the process and the end product. Support from family, friends, teachers, and the wider community contributed positively to this in most cases.
- **Organisation of the Readers to Writers project was a contributing factor** in the facilitation of the programme in schools with all teachers commenting positively on the support from colleagues at Bookfest and from the authors. This was perceived to be a key element in the **motivation** of pupils to write.

Recommendations

Based on pupil and teacher feedback, the following recommendations are suggested as a means to explore writing for pleasure and the associated benefits this may have on pupils' perceptions of themselves as writers.

Recommendations for Shropshire Bookfest:

1. **Increase Schools' Engagement in the Reader to Writer Projects:**
   - Highlight and advertise the positive impact of such initiatives on students' choice to write for pleasure.
   - Explore existing research engagement within the geographical region to foster further collaborations.
   - Further engage with national research active organisations within the realms of 'readers to writers'.
2. **Increase diversity of authors included in the project:**
   - Increase the ethnic representation and diversity of content in the children's literature on offer in order to positively "affect how children sees themselves, different lives and cultures and the world around them" (Book Trust, 2022)
   - Consider inviting authors from diverse backgrounds.
3. **Further strategic training opportunities for lead members of staff:**
   - Include additional workshops at the teacher conference to include some practical training on how to implement and develop the Bookfest Readers to Writers project in the first year.
4. **Offer continued professional development opportunities:**
   - Invite Bookfest teacher participants to be involved in the conference and offer workshops to support and showcase the impact of the project.

Recommendations for schools:

5. **Promote Creative Writing for Pleasure:**
   - Encourage schools to prioritise creative writing as an enjoyable activity rather than solely to improve technical writing skills.
   - Emphasise that improved technical proficiency can be a natural outcome of writing for pleasure.
6. **Foster Authorial Choice:**
   - Recommend granting pupils more freedom to exercise authorial choice in their writing.
   - Emphasise the link between authorial choice and pupils' positive attitudes towards writing.
7. **Create Opportunities for Risk-Taking:**
   - Encourage educators to provide opportunities for pupils to write for pleasure, allowing them to take risks in their writing.
   - Stress that risk-taking can lead to increased confidence in writing.
8. **Promote Long-Term Benefits:**
   - Highlight that writing for pleasure results in greater confidence, enjoyment, and engagement both during and beyond the project.
   - Emphasise the long-lasting positive effects on pupils' writing skills.
9. **Support Author Visits:**
   - Recommend incorporating author visits into school programs to inspire creative writing.
   - Highlight the importance of pupils realising that authors are 'real people' who face challenges, which can motivate and support the writing process.

10. **Encourage Ownership and Support:**
    - Encourage strategies that allow pupils to take ownership of their writing process and the end product.
    - Stress the importance of support from family, friends, teachers, and the wider community in building a strong writer identity.

Introduction

Background evidence

There is a growing interest in children writing for pleasure (Young and Ferguson, 2021) as evidence suggests that many pupils do not enjoy writing although high levels of enjoyment are linked to greater attainment for KS1 and KS2 pupils (Clark and Dugdale, 2009; Clark, 2012; Clark, Best, Picton, 2021). Enjoyment in writing for primary age school pupils has declined since 2017, falling from 49.2% to 34.5% in 2021 (Clark, Best, Picton, 2021). Cremin and Myhill found that children perceive writing to be skills driven and that handwriting, grammar and spelling are necessary to ensure pieces of writing are 'good' rather than an activity that is performed for pleasure or includes children's own interests (Cremin and Myhill, 2019).

Furthermore, a large-scale research project which surveyed 42,502 children and young people in the UK reported that 38.3% children and young people agreed that writing improved their mental health and wellbeing in a 2021 study conducted by the National Literacy Trust (NLT, 2021). Therefore, it seems appropriate and timely to explore pupils' perceptions of themselves as writers, their attitudes towards writing and what motivates writing for pleasure.

The National Curriculum Programmes of Study for Key Stages 1 and 2 predominantly emphasises the importance of transcriptional skills and whilst there is reference to 'considering how authors have developed characters and settings in what pupils have read, listened to or seen performed' (National Curriculum, 2014), this focuses on the use of grammatical devices rather than the creative process.

There is evidence to suggest that children who participate in a broad range of reading material are more likely to write competently across a range of genres. In addition, this leads to greater imaginative and creative flair in their language choices and written output (Taylor and Clarke, 2021).

Shropshire Bookfest is a small, flexible, local charity that develops and delivers creative, classroom-based activities for primary school children across the county. It is a successful writing project working with a range of (currently) 29 primary schools within Shropshire. The charity was keen to have further insight into the impact of their work with schools; in particular, the way in which this contributes to the quality of and engagement with the writing process for pupils of primary school age.

This report aims to explore how pupils engaging with the Shropshire Bookfest project perceive themselves as writers and whether this positively impacts their attitudes to writing.

The researchers considered the extent to which:
- the children see **themselves as writers**
- other **environmental factors**, including the **engagement with a real, live author,** influences attitudes to writing
- the **transformational process** was apparent to the children who participated

Findings from existing research and new research carried out for this study, indicate that when children are inspired to write and have the freedom to exercise authorial choice, they are more likely to demonstrate a positive attitude towards writing. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that their own perceptions of themselves as writers are more confident. The impact of the Shropshire Bookfest Readers to Writers project, according to teachers, was pivotal in this transformation and contributed widely to the enjoyment of writing for both teachers and pupils.

Intervention

Shropshire Bookfest offers continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers early in the academic year to support their teaching of writing in school. In Springtime, all participant schools will have a visiting, published author to work with the children. This includes conversations around impetus to write and strategies to use. The pupils are then guided through a creative writing process by their teachers which culminates in a complete 'book'. This is finally produced by the Bookfest team and re-presented to the children at the end of the project.

Research objectives

The researchers considered the extent to which:

- the children see **themselves as writers**
- how the **engagement with a real, live author** influences attitude to writing
- the importance of the knowledge that **every story written will have an audience** - a reader/judging panel - in the competition judging process influences attitudes to writing.

Ethical review

The ethical review was planned in accordance with the University of Worcester guidelines. Following submission, the researchers were granted confirmation of approval in March 2023. British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout.

The researchers gained informed consent by sending an information sheet and consent form to the Headteacher of all 29 schools who were participating in the Shropshire Bookfest this year. This included an initial gatekeeper consent from the Headteacher, plus Participant Information Sheets and consent forms for teachers and parents/carers.

As the activities undertaken in class formed part of the teaching and learning reflection on the pupils' work and involvement with Bookfest, this was seen as something which would be subsumed in 'normal' curriculum time. The reflection and evaluation for pupils was to be drawn from 'Creative Research Methods in Education' (Kara et al., 2021) and would form part of a literacy lesson in school time. However, consent was also required from parents/carers (including pupil assent) and teachers so that focus groups could take place and data could be gathered from pupils' work output in lessons.

Data protection

Confidentiality – participants would not be directly identified in the research findings. When researching pupils' and teachers' views, it is important to ensure confidentiality. This means taking measures to protect the privacy of all participants and ensuring their responses are

kept secure and confidential. All data is encrypted and stored on a password protected site. Indirect identification is possible for schools in the county who work with Bookfest and teachers within schools named colleagues for Bookfest communications. However, this indirect identity will remain anonymised and will not be shared with any third parties. The researcher leading the focus group talked through ethical considerations at the start of the Teams meeting. This covered confidentiality and safe, professional environments. Teachers were reassured that their presence (online) and contributions were private and would therefore be treated respectfully and reported anonymously.

Anonymity – The data from pupils (graphic organisers and storyboards) would be anonymous in terms of individual pupils but received as a pack from a particular primary school. Each written piece of work will have the name of the school, the child's initials and class. The pack of work was received as hard copies on collection by the researchers from Bookfest colleagues. This data was only accessible to the researchers and was kept securely.

Teachers were pseudonymised, and both researchers had access to the key, which would be kept on a password-protected site. In this way, if any participants wished to withdraw, their data could be identified and withdrawn. It is possible that colleagues within a local authority/county will know other teachers and the schools that they work in. As well as reminders of confidentiality, all participant teachers were reassured that they can have their views/comments redacted after the meeting if they felt worried or uncomfortable about any aspect of the reflective discussion. Their contributions and thoughts/perceptions would be removed from any observations or work undertaken by the researchers at this point.

Data storage - Data would be stored on a password protected site to which only the researchers have access in line with BERA guidelines.

Disposal - Data will be deleted from hard drives as well as encrypted data storage units.

Project team

Name: Suzanne Horton – Lead Researcher
Position: Director of Learning, Teaching and Quality, University of Worcester

Name: Louise Beattie - Researcher
Position: Secondary PGCE Partnership Team, University of Worcester

Methods

Recruitment

Schools who were involved in the current year's Bookfest Project were invited to participate in the project via email. Shropshire Bookfest is an open event advertised within the region. In the academic year 2022/23, there were 29 schools taking part in Bookfest and all were invited to participate. If the school agreed to take part in the research project, they identified which classes were undertaking the Bookfest work. In some schools this was only one class, in others, there were two or three across key stages. Subsequently, all pupils in these classes were invited to take part.

Headteachers were asked for gatekeeper consent to begin communications with each individual school. The researchers then began communication to outline the research project

and ask for the teacher's consent. Participant Information Sheets and Consent forms were sent and included details of the Focus Group ethics and the need for confidentiality during and after discussions about the teaching experience and pupil activities.

In addition, researchers sent a Participation Information Sheet for Parents and Carers with a Consent form to the school for distribution to parents. Once these were distributed, teachers were asked to monitor the return of these forms and to ensure that they pass on full details of those numbers of consent. Pupils whose parents did not consent would take part in the curriculum activity for that day, but their work would not be included in the collection of data for researchers.

Pupil assent was also obtained as part of the ethical procedures. Teachers read the guidelines for the activity to the class after the activity had taken place and asked them if they would like their work to be included in the project. They were asked to draw a smiley or sad face at the top of their work to indicate inclusion (smiley face) or exclusion (sad face) from the research. This ensured that pupils had a choice but were not made to make a visible choice in front of their peers. They were reassured that they could change their mind after the event, and this could be communicated to their class teacher who would inform the researchers of this change of mind and subsequent withdrawal of consent.

Data collection

The research planned to employ a creative research method with pupils in school as this would allow pupils a greater degree of freedom as participants in the research (Kara, et al, 2021) and it would encourage pupils to reflect upon their experiences of the writing project. Classes had the choice of activity to address the key questions above. These included: creating a storyboard, or constructing a graphic organiser, allowing pupils to document their reflections. The aim was to offer a more creative and accessible means of gathering data from primary school aged pupils. In addition, it would be more easily subsumed into current curriculum plans as a worthwhile reflective activity once the pupils had completed their pieces of writing as part of the Bookfest project. These pieces of work were collected by Bookfest staff from each school and handed over to the researchers.

Teachers who were involved with the project were invited to attend an online focus group via Teams to discuss their thoughts about the project and the impact upon the pupils in their class. A group interview allowed for more in-depth exploration of this as participants were able to add detail to answers based on the on-going discussion. It also reduced the impact on travel time for teachers. With permission and consent, these interviews were recorded to allow for more detailed analysis of teachers' perceptions and observations. The researchers took time at the start of each online focus group to emphasise the need for confidentiality within the confines of the group. It was explained that both researchers would be present online although one would be questioning and the other recording and making notes. In addition, the anonymous nature of their verbal submissions was reiterated, and it was explained that the researchers would analyse data into thematic strands related to the pupils' perceptions of themselves as writers.

Participants

There are 157 primary schools in Shropshire and 29 of these were taking part in the Bookfest project in the academic year 2022/23. 11 schools finally opted to take part in the research project, and these ranged from more rural schools in the county with three-year groups being taught in one class to 'normal' sized primary schools with 28-31 pupils in one

year group. There were two private schools participating and one of these was a girls' school. Few schools had lower socio-economic intakes of pupils and only one had significant numbers of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). One school's current Ofsted rating is Requires Improvement whilst the others were Good, with two Outstanding. One school withdrew from the research at an early stage (leaving 10 schools in total) due to the Y6 SATs and one class from one of the participating schools withdrew – also a Year 6 class.

Timeline

Figure 1: Timeline

Date	Activity
February 2023	Construction of data collection tools
February 2023	Application for ethical approval
February 2023	Ethical approval granted
March 2023	Letters to Headteachers/gatekeepers
March 2023	Communication with teachers, parents/carers, pupils for consent
April 2023	Creative, reflective activities undertaken in class
June 2023	Focus groups online with teachers
August 2023	Data analysis

Findings

Introduction

From the outset this project was framed using an interpretivist approach as the researchers sought to understand viewpoints from others concerning the Bookfest Project. The result was the collection of qualitative data from both teachers and pupils which facilitated analysis and the drawing together of conclusions about an individual's view. In turn, this elicited overarching themes for further consideration. At the core of this investigation, the researchers aimed to capture the pupil's journey as a writer by exploring responses to the following:
- Tell me the story of you as a writer
- What has helped you to become a writer?
- How do you feel about writing after writing your own book?

Qualitative research methods allowed for a more in-depth examination of the research question (Thomas, 2017). In so doing, the researchers constructed a set of three thematic areas and sub-sections within them. These will be explored in turn below.
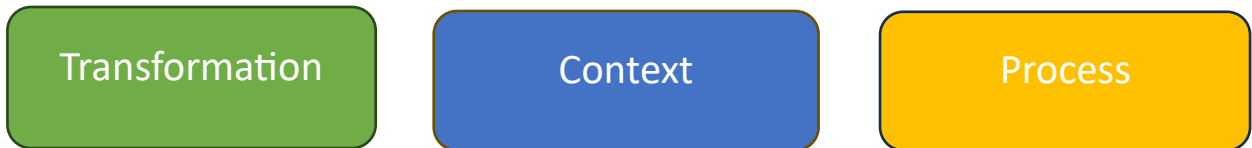
Transformation	Context	Process

Figure 2.
Thematic overview of data from Bookfest Project research

Theme 1: Transformation

Whilst enquiring about pupil perceptions of themselves as writers, the researchers were concurrently interested in teachers' observations. Given the dual role of pupils and teachers within the learning relationship (pastoral and academic), the data collected concerned not only the academic considerations of pupils' writing during and following the Bookfest project, but also the affective elements of this process. To that end, when considering how pupils 'transformed' as writers, it is significant that both teachers and pupils referred to emotional aspects of this process. We will consider these affective elements first.

Affective elements

When asked how they viewed themselves as a writer at the start of the project, pupils recorded a range of perceptions on their storyboard or graphic organiser. It was interesting to note that at this point these perceptions fell into two distinct groups. There were those pupils who clearly already enjoyed writing for pleasure and were able to articulate this easily in their storyboards or graphic organiser. Conversely, there were other pupils who used more negative language about themselves as writers and the feelings that creative writing elicited in them.

Positive responses

- It's fun!
- I use my imagination
- I have lots of ideas
- I feel calm when I write
- I can use my personality
- I love magic in fiction
- I like drawing stories
- I keep a diary every day
- I like writing on my computer

Negative responses

- I have rubbish ideas
- My brain freezes
- Sometimes it's hard
- I'm not into writing
- Before Bookfest I hated writing!
- I get really worried at the start of writing
- Clueless. At the start, I thought 'I can't do this!'
- I struggle for ideas
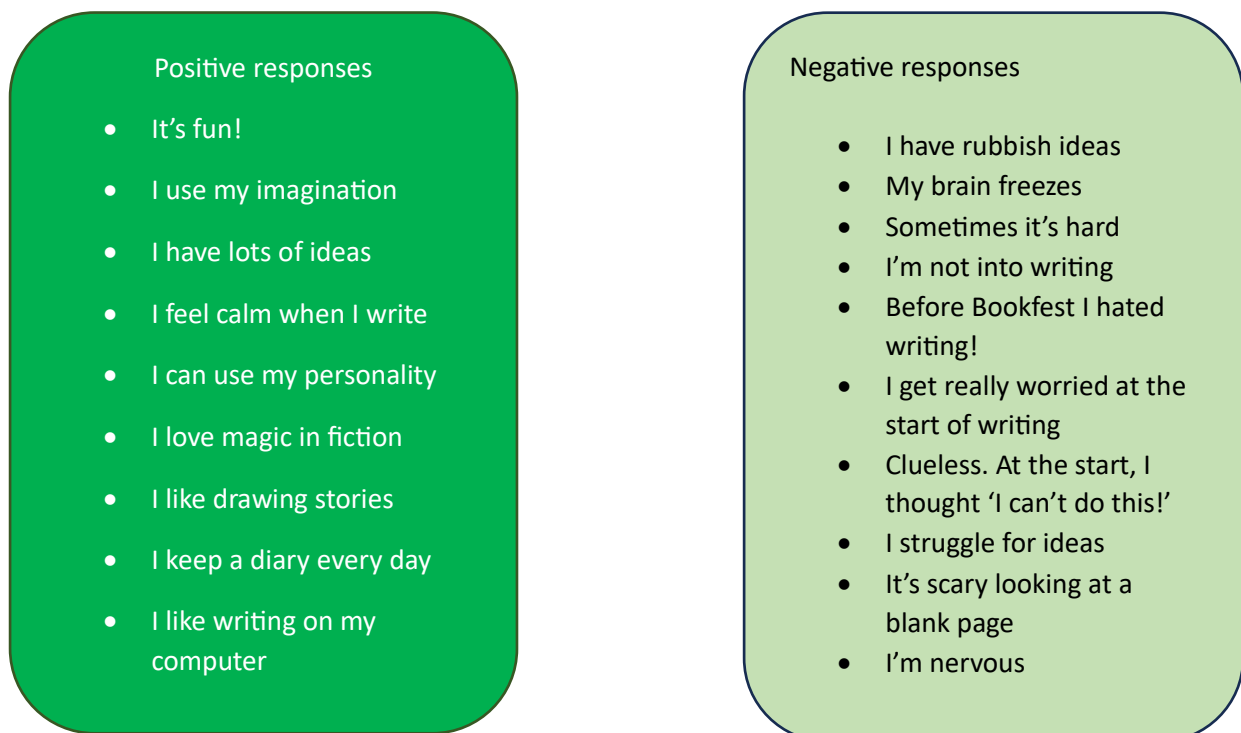- It's scary looking at a blank page
- I'm nervous

Figure 3: *Distinct categories of responses from pupils when questioned about their perceptions of themselves as a writer.*

Discussions with teachers affirmed some of the feelings articulated by the pupils in terms of the emotional response to the project although they tended to focus on the end result and made comparative comments. For example, teachers reported that it was the most they had ever seen their classes engaged with the writing process.
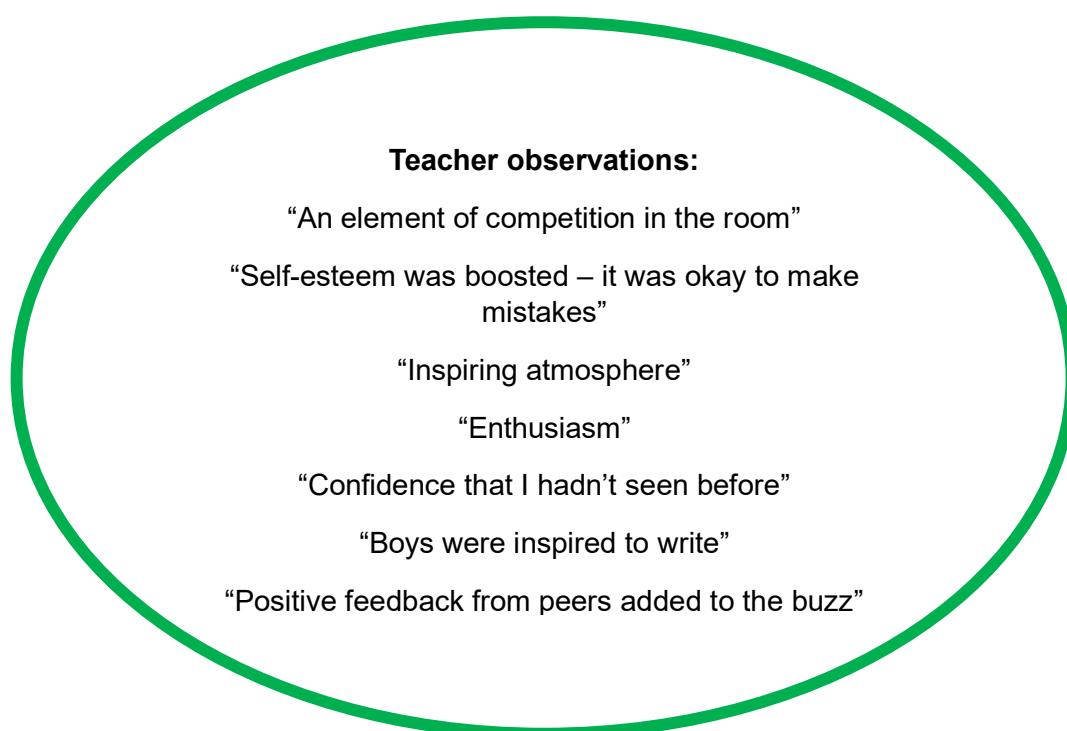
Teacher observations:

"An element of competition in the room"

"Self-esteem was boosted – it was okay to make mistakes"

"Inspiring atmosphere"

"Enthusiasm"

"Confidence that I hadn't seen before"

"Boys were inspired to write"

"Positive feedback from peers added to the buzz"

Figure 4: *Quotations from teacher interviews*

Aspects of the project that teachers emphasised were particularly worthy of note were:
- One schoolteacher said that the project "***broadened horizons***" for his pupils as it put them in an autonomous position and opened up different possibilities.
- Interestingly, a teacher from a school which has been involved with Bookfest for many years said that the project was a "***rite of passage"*** and that children looked forward to the year group in which it was their turn to take part.
- The structure and freedom of the project made the writing a truly **inclusive** experience; "*it bridges the chasm between real life and the literature [that] they read. It brings it to life*."

Competency

The other element of being a writer necessarily relates to the skills required to undertake a (creative) written task. Unsurprisingly, the children referred to this when describing themselves as a writer at the outset. Again, there is a clear correlation between the types of responses and the levels of confidence a child has because of their competency in this field. For example, those who expressed concern and a lack of enthusiasm at the start described themselves as 'struggling', 'nervous' or 'scared of the blank page' alongside 'not knowing how to start' or 'prefer[ing] drawing to writing'. Others made implicit reference to writer's block when they talked about previous creative writing and that this put them off doing it again.

Even those pupils who had expressed a degree of confidence and enthusiasm around writing at the outset of the project used comparative language to describe some of their skill set by the end of the process.

Competency related comments:

"I've got better at imagining"

"If it's wrong, I don't mind trying again"

"I pushed my limits in writing"

"I know how to structure a story better now"

"My handwriting improved because I really wanted it to look good"

Figure 5: *Quotations from pupils' storyboards*

Teachers' feedback during the focus group corroborated children's views of their competency levels and awareness of the writing process but was more specific in linking factors to this improvement:

- Having a 'real' author on site talking to the children about their writing process. Several teachers commented on the **drafting and editing process** which takes place and how after months or years of talking about this as a teacher, the impact of a published author saying the same thing had a noticeable effect on pupils taking this on board.
- Several teachers linked focused effort on 'producing a book' and an improvement in **handwriting and presentation** overall.
- An extended project gave a new **opportunity to 'greater depth'** readers and writers
- "They began writing for themselves…towards the end, when sharing their work, they realised they were also **writing for an audience**."
- Authors talking about their notebook promoted planning and **note taking of ideas**. For some pupils, this also led to annotation of notes and/or books they were reading.
- Understanding the **peer sharing process** and the benefits of this over a period of time.

In summary, the evidence suggests that the impact of the Shropshire Bookfest was overwhelmingly positive both in terms of the emotional impact on pupils' confidence and creativity and the effect on pupils' engagement with extended pieces of writing. Whilst there was no assessment in place to measure academic progress with writing, the views of teachers were that the process of producing a complete 'book' elicited learning behaviours throughout classes that implied engagement, enjoyment, commitment and investment.

Theme 2: Context

One of the aims of the research was to determine children's and teachers' perceptions as to what had helped them to become a writer. A key feature of the Bookfest project is the author visit together with a structured programme of events and support to promote writing for pleasure. Children were asked to complete a storyboard or graphic organiser showing their journey as a writer with the specific prompt: 'what has helped me to become a writer?' Storyboards from 301 of children in 10 schools were subsequently analysed to determine themes. In addition, teachers participating in the Bookfest project were posed the following questions as part of a focus group:

- How do you feel about the project supporting children to be writers? Have you any examples of this?
- How did the children react to the author visit? What difference do you think this might have made to the children and their writing experience?
- Are there any elements of the project that worked well to engage children? Why was this?

The importance of **context** emerged as an overarching theme. This incorporated the physical elements deemed important by teachers and children in their journey to produce their own book. Within this, three sub themes were identified: engagement of others (including author, parents, peers); discrete writing strategies; and environmental and organisational factors (Figure 6)

What helped me to become a writer?

Strategies
- Modelling
- Reading
- Planning and editing
- Talking
- Gaming

Support
- Author
- Bookfest colleagues
- Family and friends
- Encouragement
- Freedom

Environment
- Being outside
- Peace and quiet
- Non-judgmental
- Time

CONTEXT

Figure 6: *Diagram illustrating sub themes*

Support from individuals

All teachers interviewed were overwhelmingly positive about the impact of the project and felt that the author involvement had been pivotal in the success of the project. Written comments and drawings on storyboards together with extracts from teacher interviews demonstrate the significance of the author visits on children's perception as to what has helped them become a writer, as seen in Figure 7.
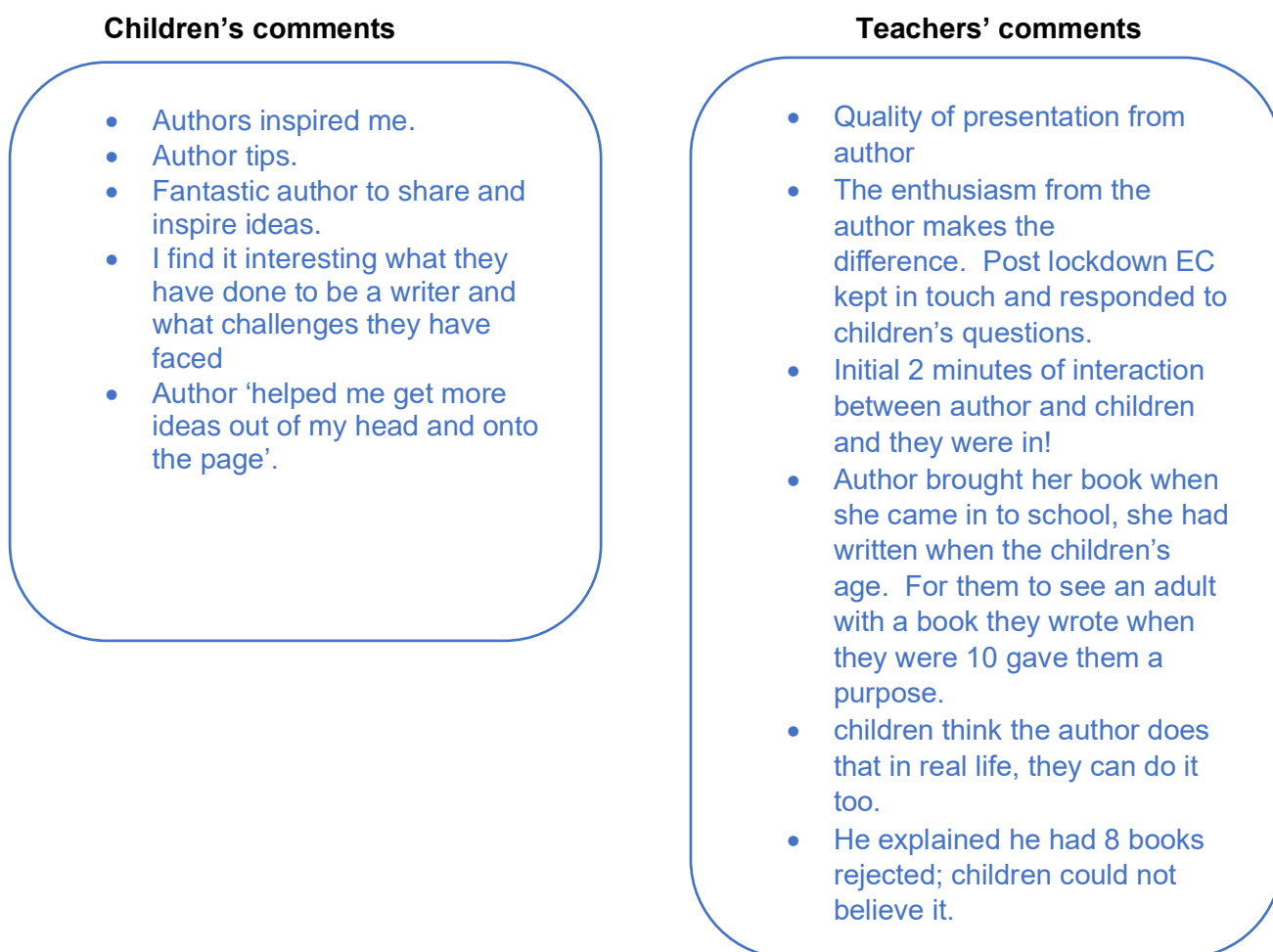
Children's comments

- Authors inspired me.
- Author tips.
- Fantastic author to share and inspire ideas.
- I find it interesting what they have done to be a writer and what challenges they have faced
- Author 'helped me get more ideas out of my head and onto the page'.

Teachers' comments

- Quality of presentation from author
- The enthusiasm from the author makes the difference. Post lockdown EC kept in touch and responded to children's questions.
- Initial 2 minutes of interaction between author and children and they were in!
- Author brought her book when she came in to school, she had written when the children's age. For them to see an adult with a book they wrote when they were 10 gave them a purpose.
- children think the author does that in real life, they can do it too.
- He explained he had 8 books rejected; children could not believe it.

Figure 7: *Comments from teachers and pupils on the significance of author visits.*

Positive comments suggest that regarding authors as 'real people' who faced challenges with their writing encouraged children to persevere with their own stories:

> 'It made me feel better knowing it took him (author) 14 drafts'.

> 'The author visit gives them confidence…it doesn't matter if you make mistakes…the story evolves, it is ok to make mistakes'.

Teachers noticed a number of changes in children's perception of themselves as writers. They were most likely to say they had seen increasing confidence, greater engagement, and excitement in the writing process. In some cases, those children who may have been reluctant to write in the past, were keen to share their authored books with friends and family. Teachers spoke of children benefitting from this continued interest in writing both at home and within the school environment.

Children's storyboards and graphic organisers indicate that the project had indeed introduced them to more books, specifically from their visiting author, with some indicating that they were engaging with other titles via the library or bookstores. Furthermore, teacher participants were able to provide specific examples of children engaging more widely with authors and topics.

However, when looking at the support of others in the writing process, it was clear to see that friends, family and Bookfest colleagues had also played an important part in children seeing themselves as writers/authors. Whilst the project does not specifically address engagement of wider family in supporting children in their writing, it is evident that friends and family have a key role in supporting children and that their input is valued by children with many of the storyboards alluding to friends and family as a factor helping them on their journey as a writer. This suggests that the project has moved beyond its impact on children in school and has influenced the wider school community where this engagement is evident. Children noted support from parents, grandparents, siblings and friends as helping them to be successful writers, ranging from supplying them with ideas to becoming characters in their authored books:

> 'Friends and family encouraged me to carry on when I wanted to give up'.

> 'My nan gave me an idea…we talked it through'.

> 'My best friend…I put her in every story I write'.

A quarter of the teachers commented upon the impact on children's self-esteem when books were showcased more widely as part of a celebration event where parents/carers were invited in.

'Parents, staff, children came…there was this sense that we…we can all write books'.

Therefore, raising the profile of writing within and beyond the school community may encourage further conversations and discussions which may well have impact on children's perceptions of themselves as writers in the longer term. However, further research in this area would be beneficial to determine the extent to which parent/carer engagement with the project leads to positive impact on attitudes to writing as parents/carers were not part of this study.

Bookfest colleagues support individual schools with the implementation of the project through regular visits, meetings and provision of resources. Children and teachers from every school acknowledged the benefits of this support. All teachers commented upon the excellent organisation and how the relationship that Bookfest colleagues build with the children ensures momentum. Many storyboards and graphic organisers referred to Bookfest colleagues helping them in their journey as a writer, either through a comment or a drawing.

> 'The relationship is another incentive for the children… they can't wait to see her again...it is the quality of the relationship and the drop in points and continuity that helps'.

> 'XXX from Bookfest…if enthusiasm waned…I would email and she would come in; her videos online…we watched every week…waiting for her episode'

Further analysis of the data demonstrated children's perceptions of the support they received from teachers. Rather than viewing the teacher as the adult making a judgment on their work, most comments from children focused on the value they placed on the encouragement, autonomy and freedom that they received from their teachers. There were

indicators that children worried less about the final product and instead commented upon how teachers had empowered them to complete their book.

'My teacher's enthusiasm…telling us…you are amazing!'

'having the freedom to write my own story'.

'being able to choose my own type of writing'.

Teachers also reflected on the opportunity for pupils to have the freedom to work outside the conventional curriculum structure which was received favourably by both parties. In response to the question around teacher perceptions as to why the project was successful, one teacher commented:

It was competitive…they had freedom, their own book…free to write. There were no success criteria and they weren't worried about including fronted adverbials. It was their story, their ideas'.

'I (the teacher) was there for support but…children were totally in control'.

This was echoed by a teacher in another school:

'It is about individuality, freedom, they can write what interested them. It captured reluctant writers… (there was an) authenticity about this rather than a more structured approach…the kids were right there…I could see the impact'.

The Environment

The environment also proved to be a key factor in engaging children as writers. The physical environment included outdoors, home, and areas which were perceived as being peaceful and quiet. However, the environment was considered to be much more than the physical spaces and included what may be termed as the writing ethos. This included being afforded time to write, and a non-judgmental space within which to write (see Figure 8). Children were most likely to reference peace, quiet, calm and stillness although this was not noted as significant by teacher participants which may have implications for how, when and where writing takes place within the school.

Ethos   **Physical**

I like to write in the holidays…when I have more time.
Having time – my imagination explodes out of me.
It was ok to make mistakes.
I'm free to do what I want in my writing.
I have no limits.
I was able to do the drawings first.

Going on walks gives me inspiration.
Writing under my bed…it is calm there.
Garden as the birds make calming sounds.
Sitting and lying down.
A quiet space…I understand more.

Figure 8: *Quotations from pupils on the writing environment.*

Bookfest allows children to have the freedom to write for pleasure about a topic that matters to them, often inspired by the world around them. Children are valued as individuals in this journey and as such have autonomy to work in ways that they perceive helps them. The impact of which is evident when we look at the transformational process that many of the child participants have experienced as explored in the section above. Part of this initiative is about listening to children's voices and understanding how they engage with the writing process. From analysis of the storyboards, it is evident that place and ethos are important from children's perspective and contributes to them becoming successful writers. All focus groups involved some discussion around how the Bookfest project facilitated that opportunity.

Whilst support and the writing environment were both identified as key areas of the research, more specific strategies were also outlined which both teachers and children perceived to be helpful in their writing journey. This was within the context of the Bookfest project and included such things as real-life author contributions and the production of an authored book. This was seen as different to the 'everyday' English lesson. Both children and teachers saw this project as sitting outside of normal classroom lessons and, as such, celebrated the level of freedom afforded to them when exploring the more technical aspects of writing with one teacher commenting that some of the more reluctant writers in the class:

'really took to it…saw verb choice as important…worthwhile rather than meeting a learning objective…they were doing it'.

'children could see the value of the editing process because that was what real-life authors have to do…there was a purpose rather than me just telling them it is important'.

Strategies

One of the storyboard questions for children was 'what has helped you as a writer'. Specific reference to strategies can be seen in Figure 9 and have been separated into author, child and teacher-initiated strategies.

Author

Story maps

Place/landscape maps

Editing

Writing for an audience

Child

Ideas from gaming (Sonic, Roblox, Minecraft)

Being read to

Looking at pictures

Art gallery

Teacher

Modelling

Talking

Planning

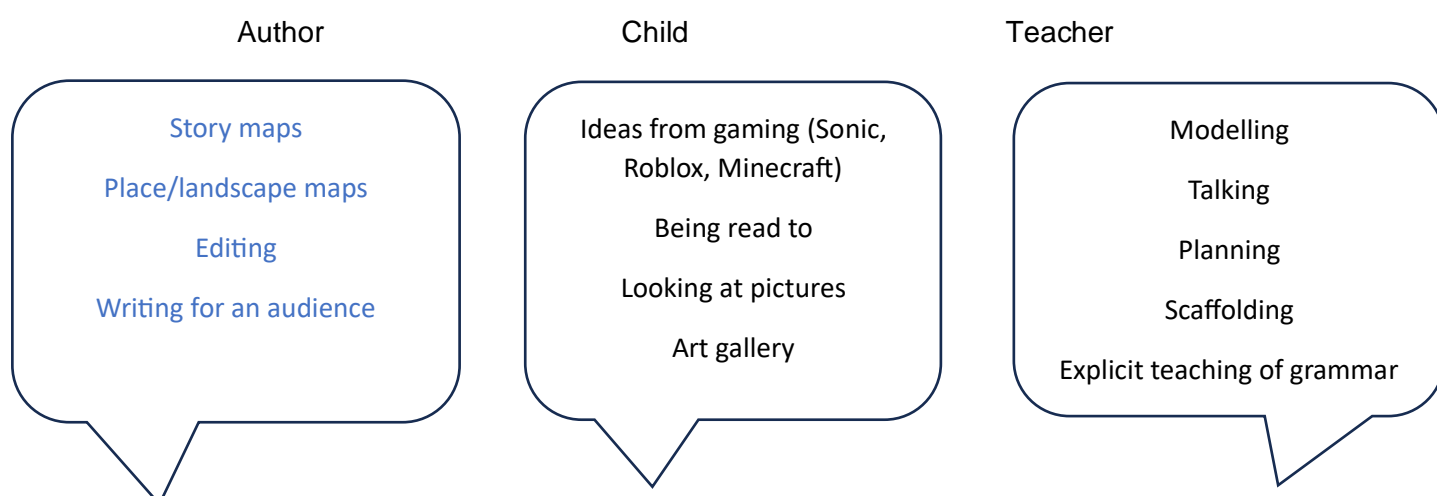Scaffolding

Explicit teaching of grammar

Figure 9: *Strategies identified by pupils categorised into author, child and teacher-initiated strategies.*

Whilst all of the above are strategies that would ordinarily form part of pedagogical practice, most teachers believed that children were more engaged because they were an integral part of the Bookfest community. Children benefitted from author involvement with all teachers attributing this to the authenticity that an author brings to this type of writing project.

> 'Hearing it from someone other than their teacher, someone who makes a living from this is somehow more powerful'.

Generally, teachers incorporated the Bookfest project into their curriculum planning which enabled them to meet National Curriculum objectives. There were differences in terms of timescales with some schools dedicating a term to the project and others exploring it over a 4–5-week period. Two of the teachers interviewed commented upon the inclusive nature of the project in terms of being able to adapt it to suit the differing needs of their pupils. The Bookfest packages of resources were seen as a positive addition and provided ideas around supporting pedagogy and integrating activities into curriculum planning.

All teachers articulated the benefits of the strategies implemented as part of the project and agreed that that these strategies were transferable and that they could evidence this in children's work once the Bookfest project had ended in the school. As one teacher commented:

> Story structuring (was) picked up by the children…knowing the end point and how characters are going to get there…they know the journey a story goes on.'

Thus, suggesting that the benefits around the technical aspects of writing, as well as attitudes to writing as outlined in the section 'Transformation', had a lasting impact.

'

Theme 3: Process

Empowerment and autonomy

An integral part of the project is around fostering a love of creative writing through empowering pupils to take control of their writing journey. Providing children with the agency to decide what and how they wish to write emerged as a key theme. When pupils responded to the storyboard prompt: what has helped you to become a writer, words such as 'freedom', 'imagination', 'choice' and 'control' were positively cited. It appears that children's motivation to write is increased when they have ownership over not only the content but also the process of writing. Having a choice of environment, writing implements, audience, subject matter and design featured prominently in storyboards and graphic organisers which has significant implications for class teachers wishing to promote writing for pleasure.

When questioned about what they had noticed regarding children's attitudes to writing, all teachers were very positive about the impact of the project in terms of empowering pupils **to be writers**. From the analysis of teacher interviews, this could be framed in two broad categories: the effect that they perceived it to have (the what?); and what it was that had made this difference (the how?) as seen in Figure 10.
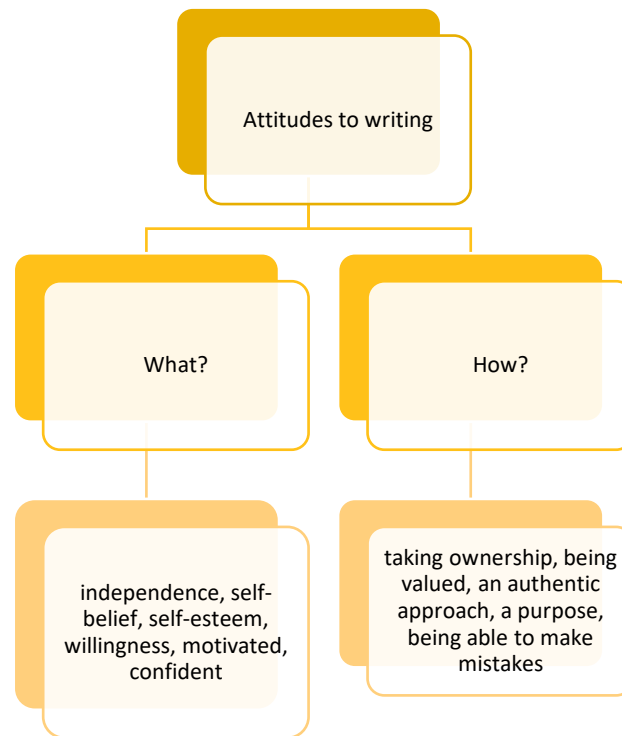
Figure 10: *Categorisation of attitudes to writing from teacher interviews.*

Importantly, because the project seemingly increased independence, confidence and self-esteem, children felt able to make mistakes, change direction and take risks with their writing. Pupil comments from storyboards serve to demonstrate this.

'If it's wrong, you can just try again'.
'I can choose what happens next'.
'There are no boundaries'.
'Authors make mistakes too'.

This is further supported by teacher comments during interviews.

'It doesn't matter if they make mistakes…they know this from authors'.
'[the story] evolves, it is ok to make mistakes'.
'[there is] a justification… they can make mistakes or change their mind'.

Having 'permission' to not always produce flawless work at first attempt suggests that they are more motivated to persevere and continue writing. As such, children are empowered to be writers and own this experience. The project itself facilitates high value writing within a low-risk environment. However, there is evidence from teacher focus groups that it is sometimes difficult for teachers to apply this 'hands off' approach with one teacher commenting:

'It is challenging as a teacher, you have to take a step back, it is their story…hard for us to manage as there are 30 completely individual stories…some remember what they have learnt in previous lessons…but it is not for us to say…it is for them to show creativity'.

One teacher articulated how they must remind themselves and colleagues that:

'Our role is not to be an editor…it is totally their work…planning…is totally their ownership, they edit each other's work and feedback'.

A theme that did emerge throughout teacher focus groups was how the input from a 'real life author' almost empowered children to make mistakes in their writing; they were seen as a necessary and valued part of the process.

'my class like to get things right straight away…it really helped having a real-life person explaining about continuous improvement, it [the book] is never completely finished.'

Mirroring the same professional behaviours as authors was seen to be a valuable part of the experience for pupils in empowering them to produce their own books. This emerged as a key strategy for sustained impact with many teachers agreeing that referring to author visits further motivated children in future writing projects.

The product

Children's motivation to write is increased when they have ownership over their writing processes and can publish their finished writing products (Young, 2019). From analysis of children's storyboards, having the opportunity to 'publish' their own book was perceived to be an integral part of the project with many children choosing to draw a picture of their own book with title and themselves as the author for the final part of their journey as a writer. This indicates that the end product significantly contributes to encouraging children to write for pleasure. Instances where children stated that they were proud to have a final product were frequent throughout their storyboards and graphic organisers as illustrated in Figure 11.

'I love writing actual books'

'sense of achievement with finished book'

'I liked it so much I wrote another book'

'I am an author'
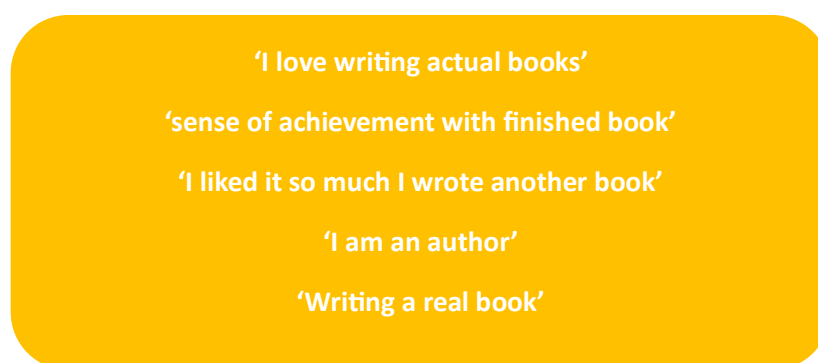
'Writing a real book'

Figure 11: *Quotations form pupils*

It is clear that teachers also value the final product and how this acts as a key motivator for pupils, particularly for those who were usually more reluctant to engage in the writing process. Some teachers cited particular examples of positive outcomes for pupils who participated in the project as outlined in Figure 12.

One little boy in my class, he had book in [his] hand. In y4 …not writing much at all. The Head was saying how amazed… at improvement. Even though competition is over, he is still adding to his Bookfest book.

One boy…although he enjoyed the book, what he got from it was he produced his own story …didn't finish but still had that inspiration

We had buddy readers…mine [pupils] couldn't wait to finish so they could share with buddy… sharing…giving feedback…reluctant writers couldn't wait to read their story
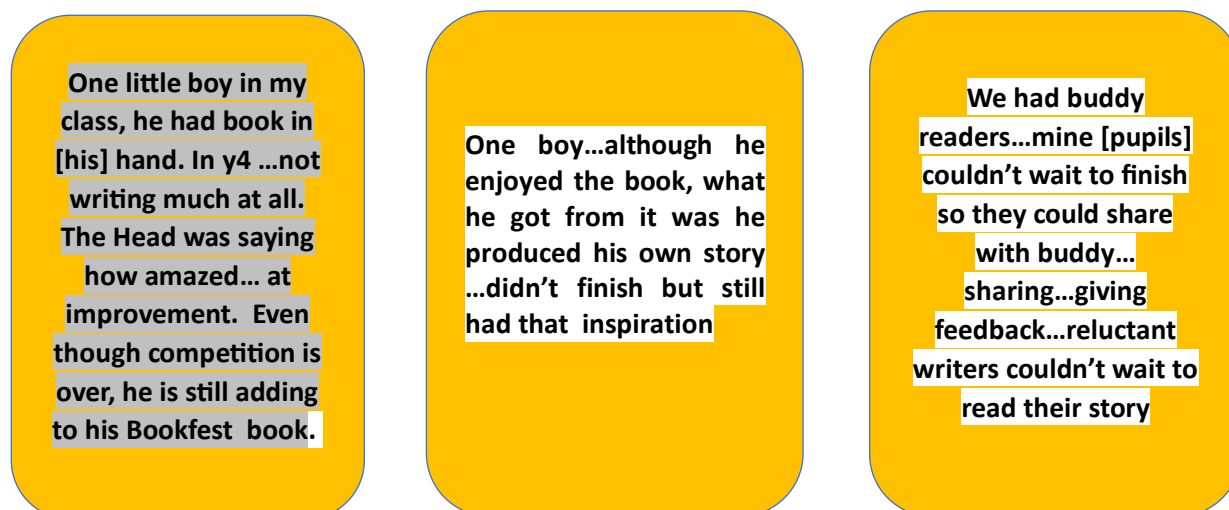
Figure 12: *Quotations from teachers*

Having a purpose and an audience as a focus was instrumental in motivating many pupils to write and, having a tangible end product, made this achievable. One teacher noted that there had been a difference in pupils' writing, with them

'writing for themselves at the start but towards the end they understood writing for an audience.'
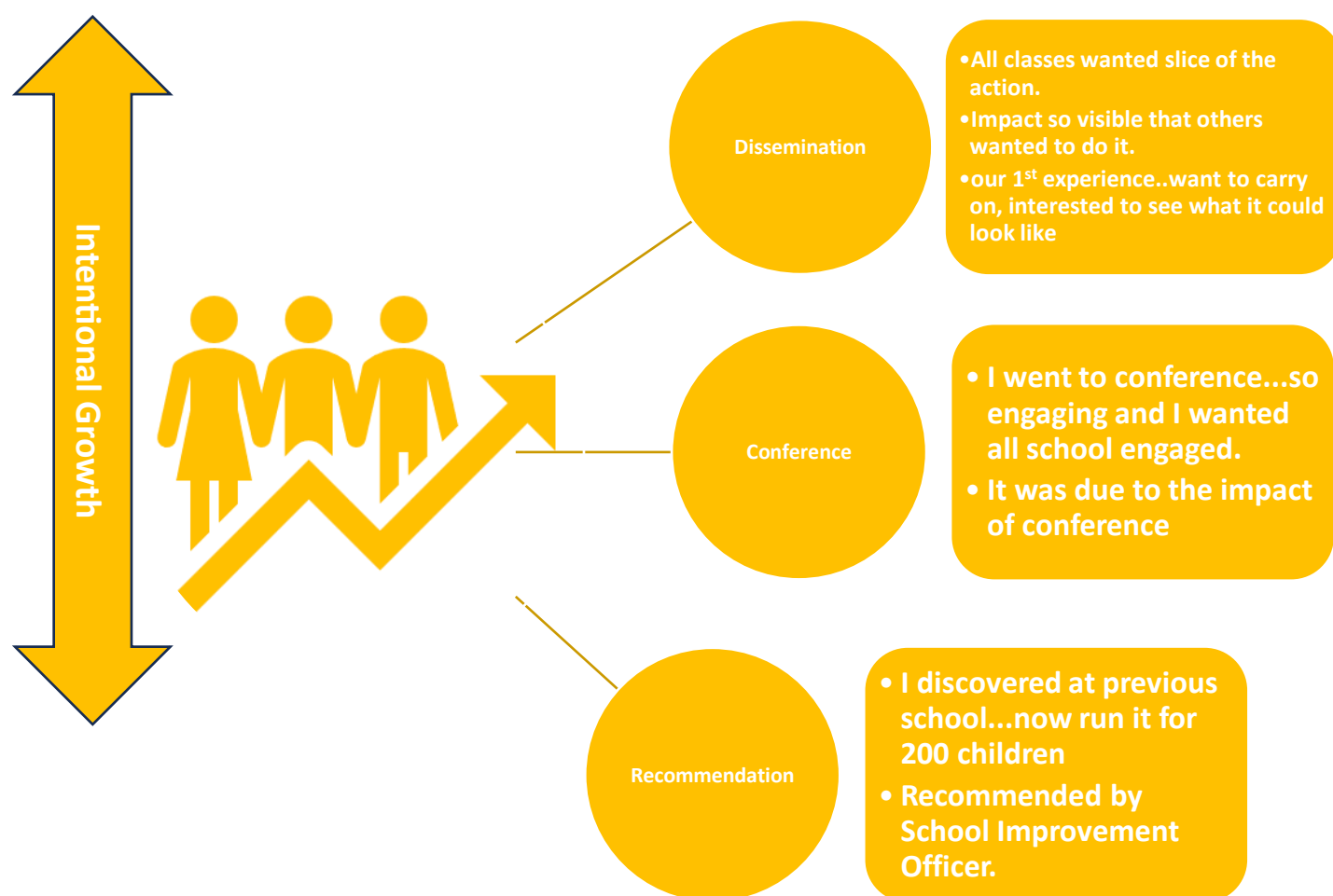
Although teachers and pupils did not specifically use the phrase 'a community of writers', it appears from the storyboards, graphic organisers and teacher comments that this had an impact on the motivation of pupils to write. As part of the project, pupils are engaged in writing workshops and are encouraged to share drafts of their books with friends, family and teachers to gather feedback. Recognising that they have produced a book adds to their perceptions of themselves as writers. Furthermore, fulfilling their goal of producing a book contributed positively to their writer satisfaction, increasing volition to write outside of the classroom for many children as recorded in storyboards and graphic organisers. A teacher described how one of the pupils in their class continued writing chapters for their book with their sibling at home, who had previously been involved with the project thus widening the concept of community of writers as initiated by the Bookfest project.

One teacher summed up the importance of the final product when they stated that

'our children had experience of writing a book not just a story.'

Momentum, pace and growth

The third sub theme that emerged from analysis of the data centred on growth of the project within and outside of schools (Figure 13). This fell into two broad categories: intentional growth and implicit growth, both of which were valued as key drivers for impact in terms of children's perceptions of themselves as writers. All teachers agreed on the benefits associated with the project and outlined ways in which they were planning to extend the project and why they felt it was important to do so. However, from analysis of storyboards the reach of the project appeared to be wider than simply the class involved.   There was an acknowledgement that the project was gathering momentum in relation to visibility amongst the wider community.
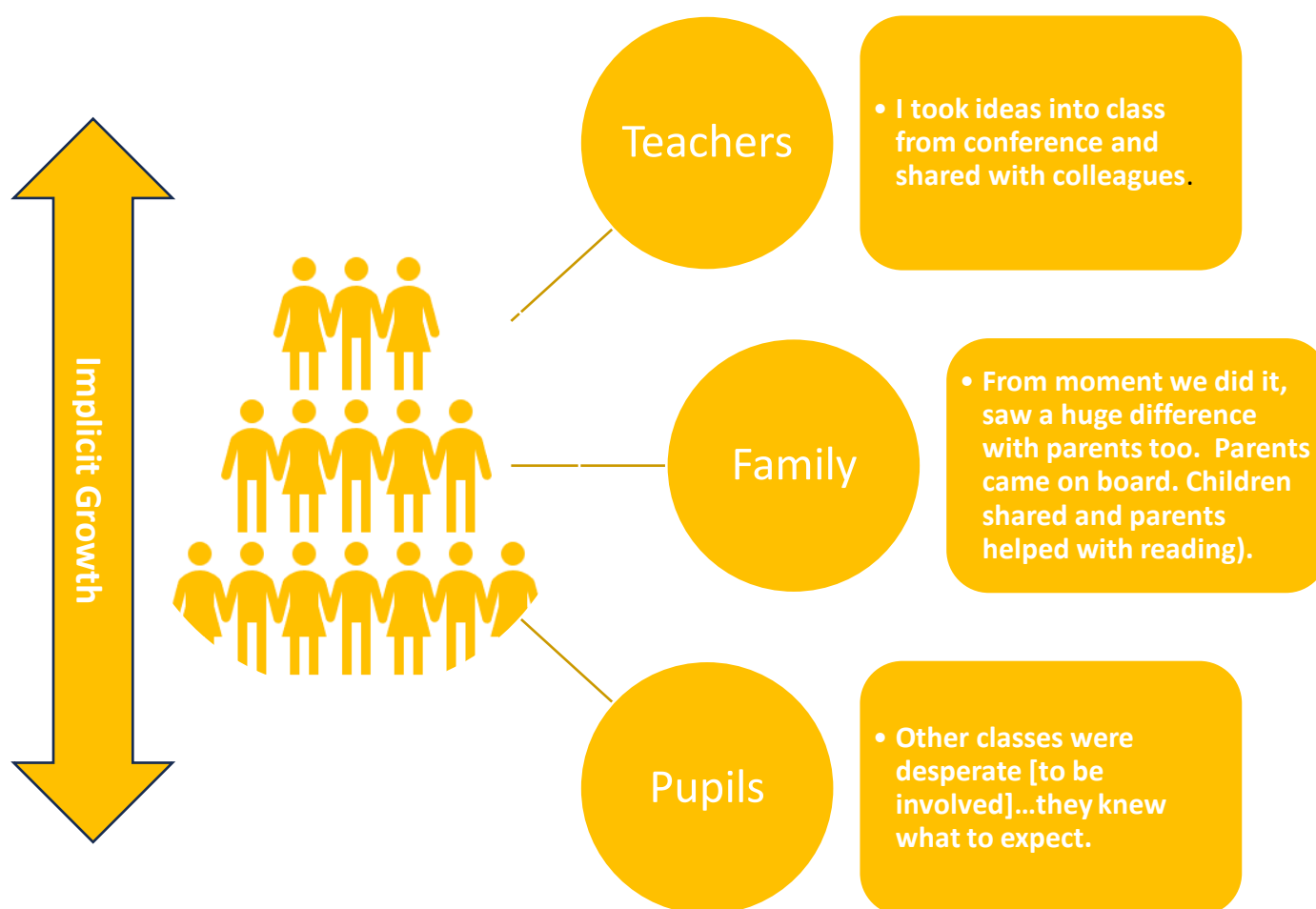

Intentional Growth

Dissemination
- All classes wanted slice of the action.
- Impact so visible that others wanted to do it.
- our 1st experience..want to carry on, interested to see what it could look like

Conference
- I went to conference...so engaging and I wanted all school engaged.
- It was due to the impact of conference

Recommendation
- I discovered at previous school...now run it for 200 children
- Recommended by School Improvement Officer.

Implicit Growth

Teachers

- **I took ideas into class from conference and shared with colleagues**.

Family

- **From moment we did it, saw a huge difference with parents too. Parents came on board. Children shared and parents helped with reading).**

Pupils

- **Other classes were desperate [to be involved]…they knew what to expect.**

Figure 13: *Diagram representing themes around momentum, pace and growth.*

Teachers involved in the project were enthusiastic about their participation and the positive impact they felt it had on children's enjoyment of and motivation to write. A large-scale UK study conducted in 2016 found that there was a positive correlation between children who enjoyed writing and subsequent attainment in writing (Clark, 2016) which only serves to reinforce the importance of projects which encourage writing for pleasure, such as Shropshire Bookfest. All teachers interviewed as part of the focus groups agreed that it was beneficial and were keen to promote the project more widely within their own school and in other schools across the county.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the overall findings of the Bookfest Readers to Writers project were that it has an overwhelmingly **positive response** from all school participants and most of the pupils involved. Additionally, this research provides evidence on the range of factors which contribute to the **positive impact** that this project has on children both in terms of their **engagement with the writing process** and **their feelings about it**. Whilst children themselves focus predominantly on their attitudes towards writing having developed, teachers suggested that this also had an impact on the **quality of their writing** and the **transferral** of this to other written tasks at a later date.

Undoubtedly, the **organisation** of the project, the **sets of books** provided and the **quality of the authors' involvement** with schools are high on the teachers' list of positive attributes of the project. However, many teachers developed on this theme and talked about the **support**

from Bookfest colleagues in motivating and supporting pupils as well as the conference and **ideas for teaching** that came from the project.

However, this evaluation report has **one golden thread** running throughout the presentation of the findings and that is the **voice of the children** who have been taken part in this project during the academic year of 2022 to 2023. Their voices have led to the sub themes of this report; namely, **transformation** (affective and academic), **context** (support from family, authors, the effect of the environment, practical strategies) and **process** (empowerment, autonomy, ownership of a product and self-growth). This, in itself, speaks volumes about the reasons why schools continue to sign up to Bookfest – the journey of young readers into young writers.

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