REF2021

Institution: University of Winchester

Unit of Assessment: UoA27 English Language and Literature

Title of case study: Wordtamer: using creativity to boost literacy

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2020

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s): Judy Waite	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2004 - present

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Waite's *Wordtamer* project embeds new strategies within literacy-in-education, demonstrating positive engagement with writing, whilst establishing ongoing values linked to assessed criteria.

- **Impact on primary and secondary education**:
  Wordtamer resources have impacted on students across a range of abilities, ages and geo-demographic areas. For example, low performing primary-age pupils engaged in a pilot research study improved performance, moving up between one-two sub-levels on the National Curriculum Literacy scale in only six weeks.

- **Impact on teacher training**:
  Student teachers have engaged with associated theory and practice which, for example, helped one participant to '… create new ideas and inspired me to incorporate my ideas into my teaching.' [**5.7**]

- **Impact nationally and internationally**:
  Wordtamer is being used in a UK outreach programme for GCSE students and has received reviews and responses from across the world, including China and the USA.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

i Multi-Platform Project

Wordtamer was initiated by Judy Waite (Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing (2004-) and children's author (1998-)) in response to the Ofsted (2009) report *English at the Crossroads* which identified concerns around falling standards in literacy, pinpointing a lack of creativity in schools. Subsequent research, commencing in 2014, evolved a suite of teacher and student resources including www.wordtamer.co.uk, an 80,000-word monograph, and a series of creative-writing workshops.

Initial action-research demonstrated the teaching of English was most successful when interactive, offering kinaesthetic learning experiences. However, many schools were restricted by demands for performance and attainment tests; assessment focused on grammar, punctuation and deconstruction. There was minimal acknowledgement of, or value attached to, creative content. Teachers themselves, burdened by constant assessment, were restricted creatively, and were often uncertain how the creative elements, which provide the energy and passion within writing, could be introduced.

Waite placed initial focus on the Ofsted (2009) identification of white lower-class males at primary level: the lowest attainers related to both reading and writing. Ofsted further identified a

need for blended learning to be developed. Waite evolved an interactive creative writing website as a free schools' resource, linking ICT with creativity and literacy **[3.1]**. Waite's subsequent research led to a suite of *Wordtamer* resources for teachers and students.

ii   Action Research: Creative Workshops in Schools
In 2014 Waite engaged in six weeks of school-based action-research at Year 5 primary level, incorporating creative approaches to literacy for an identified low performing group of eight pupils scoring levels two-three on the National Curriculum Literacy scale. Waite melded existing research located within schools/literacy disciplines with original, bespoke approaches. Within this six-week pilot impact was clearly identified as pupil scores rose between one-two sub-levels within the measured grading system in terms of their assessed written outputs **[3.2]**.

In 2016 Waite extended this research, working with four primary schools (120 pupils), focusing on the development of resources that could be utilised within education and building in aspects related to literacy and creative writing. Approaches also applied wider potentials for enhanced creative thinking skills, stimulating imagination whilst evolving confidence alongside application and rigour. Waite scrutinised pupil work with participating teachers: the most successful sessions employed a mix of visual, aural, kinaesthetic and written material, and templates were designed that offered value not only to pupil engagement with literacy and writing, but extended their potential to be utilised as cross-curricular tools connecting philosophy, citizenship, geography and history. In evolving this research, Waite developed an 80,000-word academic monograph that demonstrated the value of this research for creativity, creative thinking and literacy **[3.3].**

iii   Wordtaming: Widening the Scope
In 2018 Waite explored underpinning creative techniques within a wider range of cross-curricular approaches, working with ten identified Year 5 pupils on projects that connected literacy with science and futuristic A.I. related-technologies. The research demonstrated that by engaging reluctant writers with other subject areas, pupils 'forgot' they were engaged in literacy and became connected to the wider scope of the project **[3.4].** Pupils wrote with enhanced confidence, developing stories that demonstrated craft and creative thinking skills, whilst broadening ideas to link with social, environmental and political issues **[5.4].**

Developing and implementing these methodologies raised awareness that writing embraces depth of thinking and empathy **[3.3]**. The research was disseminated by Waite at eight international conferences between 2014-2019, to relevant groups of between 12-25 delegates each time: for example, `Maps of the Mind' was delivered at the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA) conference in Sheffield (2019). This resulted in Waite evolving and adapting materials in collaboration with conference delegates **[5.7]**, **[5.8]**, **[5.9]**.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1   Waite, J. (2015) Wordtaming, the Funfair of Ideas and Creative Writing for the New Generation of Learners. *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing.* Volume 12 Issue 1, 35-44. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2014.959975

3.2   Waite, J. (2014) Blank in the Mind. *Writing in Education*. Issue 64, pp.15-21.* Submitted in REF2.

3.3   Waite, J. (2017) *Wordtamer*. Abingdon: Routledge.

3.4   Waite, J. (2018) Writing Rules in Tomorrow's Schools. *Writing in Education.* Issue 76, pp.47-52.

3.5   Waite, J. (2015) The Funfair of Ideas: Creative Writing Projects in Practice for KS2 Classroom Activities. *51st UKLA International Conference* (Nottingham).

* 3.2 Assessed as 2* in the institutional external review process.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Waite's *Wordtamer* project began with the development of a website that enables IT and keyboard skills to develop alongside story ideas. Initially intended for identified low-achieving pupils at KS2, the website gained recognition as having value for those teaching literacies at all age-groups and levels, teachers of English as a Foreign Language and teachers working within educational establishments outside of the UK: 'Word Tamer is a neat site for learning the process of developing characters, settings, and plots in creative writing…' **[5.1]** and 'I'd like to say, I LOVE your Wordtamer website, and use it frequently in my English classes… Thank you for the wonderful writing resource! My kids all love it, and I find it extremely useful in teaching English' **[5.2].**

i. Impact on Primary and Secondary Education
The themes were developed as a series of interactive installations for the pilot project with eight reluctant Year 5 pupils in Locks Heath junior school, Hampshire. Pupils identified that they struggled to find ideas and never considered their writing 'good enough' **[3.2].** The impact of this research was identifiable as, based on school official Standard Attainment Tasks (SATs) figures provided by Locks Heath, pupils were seen to have gained 'between I and 1.5 levels'. Pupils also expressed new connections with writing: 'I want to be a writer when I grow up… I am no longer blank in the mind.' **[3.2]**

One of the installations evolved was a funfair mirror maze, wherein pupils role-played characters. This installation was adapted for a workshop/paper - `The Funfair of Ideas: Creative Writing Projects in Practice for KS2 Classroom Activities' - delivered to 24 delegates at the UKLA conference (Nottingham, 2015) **[3.5],** and resulting in a commission for the 2017 academic monograph *Wordtamer* **[3.3].**

The pilot was extended to a wider cohort in 2017-18, focusing on (approx.) 50 pupils in additional primary and secondary schools, ensuring the study reached a wider range relating to age and ability. These included 20 Year 5 pupils at Redlands primary school, Hampshire **[5.3]** and ten Year 5 pupils at Elson junior school, Hampshire **[5.4].** Outcomes resulted in a further publication **[3.4]** and dissemination at the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) conference **[5.5].**

Waite next demonstrated *Wordtamer* during a 2019 (initial) six-week project with thirty Year 8 pupils at Amery Hill secondary school in Alton, Hampshire. An initial survey highlighted core areas that pupils struggled with. The majority specifically expressed a dislike of writing and identified reasons including `I don't have many ideas'; 'I find it difficult to concentrate', and 'I feel worried when I have to write a story'. These comments echoed responses Waite had observed in the pilot 2014 KS2 research, demonstrating similar issues at KS3. Before the *Wordtamer* lessons 88% of pupils did not find it easy to think of ideas for stories and 60% could not see the value of writing stories to real life **[5.6].**

Waite's aim was to re-engage pupils with fiction, through establishing its relevance, increasing pupil confidence, and advancing the skills necessary for developing ideas and crafting stories. Overall, the aim was to underpin the relevance and importance of stories in society.

Waite introduced a specific *Wordtamer* model as a whole group activity **[3.3, pp.194-198].** The taught content explored space, aliens and the potential for alternative life forms. Alongside the core activity Waite embedded aspects of visual and purposeful thinking **[3.3, pp.67-71],** craft skills **[3.3 pp.75-130]** and discussions related to the value of writing **[3.3 pp.11-13].** The concluding outcomes identified that the weekly sessions helped pupils create ideas and gain confidence. Many confirmed that '…I really enjoyed creating and writing my story. I thought my ideas and the story I developed were exciting.' Pupils further expressed a new perceived relevance related to writing creatively, reporting how aspects such as purposeful thinking and visualisation techniques **[3.3, pp.67-71]** made significant difference to their concentration.

The research was described as 'a truly worthwhile experience for our pupils' and the school continued to use *Wordtamer* beyond the research with the whole Year 8 cohort for their independent novel writing projects: 'Your wonderful book…so useful during our novel writing SoW. Thank you so much....' **[5.6]**.

ii. Impact on Teacher Training
In March 2019 Waite extended the scope of *Wordtamer*, presenting methodologies to the Department of Early-Childhood Studies at the University of East London (UEL). As well as connecting with specialists in the previously unresearched (by Waite) KS1 learning and teaching arena, East London offered an area demographically different to Hampshire. Here, in collaboration with a Senior Lecturer, Waite identified how trainee teachers expressed a 'fear of the blank page' and 'lack of ideas' as an impediment in their own writing, which impacted on their teaching approaches. A lecture, followed by an interactive session, explored the ways in which approximately 20 student teachers might utilise *Wordtamer* material. Subsequent student statements confirmed impact on confidence related to writing and teaching, and the UEL Senior Lecturer embedded the techniques in ongoing UEL student projects. The Senior Lecturer expressed how cross-curricular activities were especially useful, endorsing the approaches that are central to *Wordtamer* content and intention **[5.7]**.

iii. Impact Nationally and Internationally
In March 2020, University of Gloucestershire academics **[5.8, 5.9]** incorporated *Wordtamer* activities into an outreach project with groups of 10-20 KS2 pupils, emailing 'We have used your material for the first time…in an outreach event at a local primary school…reception was very positive… we will use the material more going forward...' **[5.9]**. These techniques were rolled out nationally initially via a University of Gloucestershire blog for all sixth form pupils, connecting *Wordtamer* with GCSE level KS4 pupils. Written outputs were published alongside University of Gloucestershire student work: https://uniofglos.blog/creativewriting/student-stories/ [accessed 20/03.2020].

Wordtamer UK booksales are in excess of 170, and demonstrate a further international reach, with sales in USA, Australia, Taiwan, Singapore, China, Egypt, and Bahrain **[5.10]**. Additionally, Waite is evolving the project with Routledge, reworking activities from *Wordtamer* and creating online resources relevant to the current Covid-19-related shift towards online teaching**.**

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 Online testimonial, `Free Technology for Teachers' blog, first posted January 2014 [accessed 19 November 2020]
https://www.freetech4teachers.com/2014/01/word-tamer-interactive-journey-in.html

5.2 Written testimonial from primary school teacher and teacher of English as a foreign language specialist, Dulwich College, China. Sample pages from, and link to, *Wordtamer* website: www.wordtamer.co.uk

5.3   Written testimonial from a teacher at a Hampshire primary school, plus portfolio which includes: *Wordtamer* monograph scanned pp.31-33 demonstrating pupil research outcomes; Facebook screenshot of teacher response to initial sessions; *Wordtamer* scanned pp. 198-210 demonstrating activity evolved from this research - 'Endangered Species: Welcome to my World'; *Wordtamer* scanned pp. 44-45 demonstrating additional research outcomes;.*Wordtamer* scanned pp. 52-157 evidencing activity evolved from this additional research - 'Under the Sea'.

5.4   Written testimonial from Family Link Worker, at a Hampshire junior school, plus portfolio which includes: powerpoint sample supporting workshop delivered at UKLA International Conference, Cardiff, 2018; peer-reviewed article published in NAWE *Writing in Education* Issue 76 `Writing Rules in Tomorrow's Schools', pp 47-52, outlining research and outcomes from [5.4]; *Wordtamer* sample pages `Our Head Teacher's Brain is Missing' pp. 143-151, evolved from [5.4]; screenshots of email regarding UKLA conference proposal outlining research development of `Our Head Teacher's Brain is Missing', seminar and workshop selected for presentation in July 2020 (postponed due to Covid-19 and rescheduled as online conference July 2021).

5.5   NAWE Conference 2018 file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/York%202018%20(5).pdf peer-reviewed article published in NAWE *Writing in Education* Issue 76 `Writing Rules in Tomorrow's Schools', pp 47-52, outlining research and outcomes of [5.4].

5.6   Written testimonial from the Head of English at a Hampshire secondary school, plus portfolio which includes: scanned samples of initial pupil paper feedback/questionnaires that set up premise for research project; scanned samples of pupil paper evaluations after completion of research project; graphic representation of percentage response drawn from pupil paper evaluations (before and after); powerpoint outlining week 1 set up and activity, evolved from *Wordtamer* monograph 'A is for Alien' pp.194-198 and 'Virtual Reality' pp.162-168; extracts from chapter `Plot, What's the Point?' pp. 103-104; powerpoint outlining week 6 concluding material and summing up of research; signed scans of original ethics letter to parents and pupils; screenshots of original emails between Waite and colleague outlining dates and premise relating to proposed research criteria; scanned samples of UKLA conference 2019 delegate paper evaluations and feedback for session 'Maps of the Mind', presentation and workshop which evolved directly from Amery Hill research.

5.7 Screenshots of email dialogue with a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies, UEL, plus portfolio which includes: screenshots of initial emails, setting up and preparation for ongoing UEL session; scanned paper evaluations of initial session and evaluation of session by trainee teacher/students; screenshots of email response relating to impact and ongoing usage of materials presented.

5.8   Written testimonial from a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing, University of Gloucestershire; powerpoint sample for 2019 conference session `Maps of the Mind'.

5.9   Written testimonial from a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing, University of Gloucestershire, plus portfolio which includes: sample adapted powerpoint and script supplied by Dicks and evolved from Andrejevic-Bullock [5.8] as conference delegate; screenshot of University of Gloucestershire blog utilising materials adapted from `Maps of the Mind' and aspects of *Wordtamer* monograph, pp. 194-198 and pp. 162-168.

5.10   *Wordtamer* monograph sales verified by a Social Media and Marketing Specialist, Routledge Books, Taylor and Francis, Abingdon.