

Key Points for Authors and Illustrators

Background

For over 50 years, Read NZ Te Pou Muramura (Read NZ) has run the Writers in Schools programme, which aims to inspire children and teenagers to develop a love of reading and writing by bringing a writer or illustrator into their classroom.

Point and Associates evaluated the Writers in Schools programme drawing on feedback from students, authors and illustrators and school staff including teachers, librarians and principals.

Benefits for authors and illustrators

Connecting with audiences

The visits provide authors/illustrators with an invaluable opportunity to connect with children and young people, to better understand their world, what they are thinking and interested in. It enables them to test their ideas and get feedback from their audience.

Authors/illustrators say the connections with children and young people help them keep their writing fresh, current, and relevant.

Income

The programme provides a vital extra income stream to writers and illustrators by paying them per visit. It was pointed out that few New Zealand authors survive solely on their royalties: most need to cobble together a living from multiple income streams to supplement their income or have another job.

There is also evidence that both the schools and students buy the author or illustrator's books as a result of the presentations.

Benefits for students

In addition to noting the positive impacts on student wellbeing and educational outcomes, some authors believe that compelling storytelling can also have broader societal implications. As they pointed out, the voice

of children and young people is missing from important conversations that affect them and their future, so this is an important skill to develop if their voices are to be heard and impactful.

Some of the authors say they get letters from children, young people and teachers, sometimes with stories and illustrations, telling them that they too would like to be writers or illustrators.

"There will be kids who want to be writers... I am quite sure the next Margaret Mahy has lapped up the author's visits.." Author

While much of the focus of the programme is on writers and illustrators, there is general agreement amongst interviewees that the programme is also helping to create readers.



What helps the programme succeed?

In Aotearoa New Zealand, school staff say having authors and illustrators who understand and can relate to the culture and identity of the students is critical. The way the authors introduce themselves, the way they speak about where they are from, and their whakapapa is important to help establish connection.

Communication between school staff and the author/illustrator prior to the visit creates a shared understanding of student learning needs. When authors and illustrators were well prepared and ensured that the visits were interactive, students were better engaged, rather than having to sit and listen for extended periods of time.

The visits work best when authors are enthusiastic about sharing their stories and talking to young people about how they work, their techniques and approaches, and then finding lively, interactive ways to share books and stories with students. Staff say that when authors reveal the challenges they face, both the connection and understanding of the creative process deepens. Students, in addition to empathising, are more likely to then open up and discuss their own writing struggles.

The impact

Overall, the Writers in Schools programme is highly successful, and is rewarding for both students and authors/illustrators.

This evaluation has found strong evidence that the programme is supporting the conditions which underpin storytelling, writing and reading for pleasure, and wellbeing for students.

Authors and illustrators find the visits valuable, fun, and most would like to do more. In addition to being a valuable source of income, it provides an opportunity to test ideas and get feedback from your audience.



Get involved

You can support Writers in Schools by

- Signing up to visit schools as a guest author/illustrator
- Becoming a Read NZ member
- Helping spread the word in person or online

Visit read-nz.org to learn more