

Key Points for Teachers and Teacher Librarians

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

Benefits for schools, teachers and teacher librarians

Staff report that the visits are inspiring students and generating enthusiasm for and confidence in reading and writing. Classroom literacy and creativity curricula are being supported, with the writers offering fresh perspectives and new approaches to writing and editing techniques. Many staff say they have adapted or changed the way they teach reading and writing as a direct result of the visits.

Librarians say the programme has also enhanced the profile of school libraries and English departments. Some schools are noticing the emergence of a reading community that discusses books and makes recommendations to each other. School staff also believe the programme is helping to encourage students to read a wider array of books, both fiction and non-fiction.

“I had never seen the library so busy. That was the immediate ripple effect.” Librarian



Teachers say the idea that writing involves pushing through challenges is perhaps one of the most important messages of the programme, particularly for struggling students. This message of perseverance, editing, reviewing, “of writing and rewriting” is spilling into other areas of the curriculum.

School staff, and authors, believe the programme is exposing young people to stories and books from Aotearoa New Zealand, helping them to understand their history, culture, and support their identity. The diversity of stories and authors is also helping to validate the diversity of students’ experiences and stories.

Benefits for students

The vast majority of students surveyed responded positively to the visit, saying they enjoyed it and it made them want to read not only the author’s work but others’ stories too. Over two-thirds (68%) said the visit had helped to change the way they write or illustrate stories. Most (66%) said it inspired them to write or illustrate their own stories. School staff surveyed agreed, with 80% saying that their students were quite or very engaged with the visit.

While respondents say that all students benefit from the visits, in particular, Māori and Pasifika students are seeing themselves in the stories, hearing positive and affirming cultural narratives. Students see the authors and illustrators as important role models, particularly children and young people who enjoy creative pursuits, or who face challenges in their lives. Also of particular interest has been the positive impact on reluctant readers and those with special educational needs.

What helps the programme succeed?

A range of factors needs to be in place for Writers in Schools to be successful. If authors are well matched to their students, they connect well with their audience. When authors and illustrators were well prepared and ensured that the visits were interactive, students were better engaged.

Many school staff say they prepare for the visit by talking about the author or illustrator and reading or studying the books. Research shows this will maximise the impact of the visit; communication between school staff and the author/illustrator prior to the visit creates a shared understanding of student learning needs.

Ongoing reinforcement of new approaches to writing is vital; where the ideas were integrated into classroom teaching after the visit, teachers have noted improvements in achievement.

The impact

Overall, the Writers in Schools programme is highly successful. This evaluation has found strong evidence that the programme is supporting the conditions which underpin storytelling, writing and reading for pleasure, and wellbeing.

The programme has impacted teachers and librarians as it supports the literacy curriculum by showcasing writing and editing techniques. It has enhanced the profile of school libraries and English departments, and significantly increased library usage.



Get involved

You can support Writers in Schools by

- Becoming a Read NZ member school, which allows you subsidised access to Writers in Schools visits
- Hosting an author or illustrator at your school
- Helping spread the word in person or online

Visit read-nz.org to learn more