



LISA BURMAN

Why I Choose *Not* to Scribe in Bookmaking

Lisa Burman

This might be the most mis-understood philosophical principle about the pedagogical approach of Bookmaking/Writing Workshop in the Early Years. After scribing for children for *many* years, I stopped this practice almost 20 years ago. Not all the time. Not in all contexts. But in a Bookmaking/Writing Workshop context, I am very clear about why I choose not to scribe for a child.

This is largely because I don't want to take away the child's agency and identity as a writer. This is my main goal in Bookmaking – for each and every child to see him/herself as a writer. I want them to have an 'I can do that' attitude. It's my role as their educator to help them find the way to enter into building this identity and to find where they 'can do it' and, of course to nudge them along the complex and rich continuum of being a writer.

In other learning contexts, such as in Mathematics, or Science or during an Inquiry project, my goals are different: they aren't about the child seeing him/herself as a writer. So I'm very comfortable in scribing for a child in these contexts. During these times, I want to find out about their thinking as a mathematician or scientist or builder or artist...and scribing can help to make this visible and provide a memory to relaunch our collaborative learning. I always ensure there are other ways a child can make his/her thinking visible of course, but scribing their words is one way I know I can keep a trace of their thinking.

But back to Bookmaking or Writing Workshop...

Here is the rationale about my decision not to scribe. Each member of the team at *Lisa Burman Consultants* feels the same. Matt Glover, Leah Mermelstein, Alan Wright and Katie Wood Ray share our thoughts. We are not making this decision lightly, but based on many years of experience, research and deep reflection.

- We give a mixed message to the young writer – “You are a writer” but “The adult still needs to add the ‘real’ writing.” Even if this is not our intention, it is the way many children will perceive it.
- It creates a dependency upon the adult. “I can only do this if I have an adult with me.”
- We don't get a full picture of what a child CAN do. We risk working outside their Zone of Proximal Development – often under-estimating their language and literacy abilities when we scribe on their books.
- The scribing isn't necessary – we get more information for our formative assessment from what a young writer does on his/her own without scribing on their book.





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Why I Choose Not to Scribe in Bookmaking (cont.)

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- Scribing isn't all that helpful to the child when reading his/her book. The young writer who is still learning to read conventional print will be far more successful in reading the pictures than the conventional writing placed on their book by the adult.
- Scribing takes us away from learning more about the child and what s/he is writing about because you focus only on getting the words down. It takes us away from a pedagogy of listening to all the child's languages of learning. (Thanks to Leah Mermelstein for this insight.)
- When we *don't* scribe on children's books, children learn that *they* are the owner of the writing process and it is their role to add the words. It's far easier to nudge the young writer to add words (however they look in the beginning) if they understand that it's *their* job as the author. If children are used to their words being scribed, it can be much more difficult to nudge away from that. They've become used to the adult adding the words, not the author.

Scribing on a child's book is different to keeping a memory of the book to help with your assessment or to make the learning visible to families. Teachers all over the world have come up with ways to keep a memory of a book without needing to scribe on it. Some ask to photocopy or photograph the book and then write the words on this copy – AFTER a child has read the original to them. Others carry a small notebook with them for this purpose, or add it to their Conference Notes either on paper or electronically. My favourite way to keep a memory of a book is to video the child reading it to me. Technology has made this so easy for us! The bonus is the child is also publishing his/her book by reading it aloud and making it public.

This memory trace is just for the teacher and you don't even need to show it to the child. It becomes part of your assessment notes.

So, what do *you* think? I'm sharing my thoughts about my intentional teaching in the hope it might give you some food for thought also.