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**'It is by believing in roses that one brings them to bloom.'**

**-- French proverb**

**'This One Is Best.': A Study of Children's Abilities to Evaluate  
Their Own Writing**

**Kathleen Hill**

**B. Ed. (La Trobe); M.S.T. (University of New Hampshire); T.P.T.C. (Mercy  
Teachers College, Ascot Vale)**

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**Faculty of Education, Monash University.**

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## ABSTRACT

This study grows from a lifelong interest in children's language and literacy development. In 1990 I was given the opportunity to work with a class of children who were just beginning school. For the following six years I followed the progress of 18 of those children through their primary years. My interest was in their development as writers, more particularly, my focus was on their ability to make judgements about, and evaluate, their own written products. At the heart of the study was a desire to understand children's thinking about their own writing and about themselves as learners; to question whether adults may, in fact, underestimate these capacities.

By following the group of 18 children from Year 1 through each grade of primary school to Year 6, I was able to track the children's progress as they reviewed their own writing over time, selected and ranked their written products and made and defended their judgements about which texts were 'good' and which were 'not so good'. Using an ethnographic methodology, I analysed the evaluative statements the children applied to the drawings and writing they produced during scheduled language periods and which had not been formally assessed by their teachers. Within the time frame of the study it was also possible to examine the teaching context specific to each classroom and how this contributed to the children's progress – and, at times, problems – in learning to write.

The terms 'assessment' and 'evaluation' are frequently used interchangeably by educators. In this study I have used the term 'assessment' to apply more narrowly to the making of explicit judgements of students' performance in relation to specified outcomes – providing a measure of achievement that parents and the general public can understand. The process of evaluation, on the other hand, involves qualitative judgements about progress, processes and outcomes in learning. Thus when children are invited to evaluate their own writing, they may bring to the task their own personal experiences, emotions, and understanding of language – elements that assessment procedures are not able to capture. It was these elements of their judgement that I was interested to explore.

The theoretical framework for the study draws on major research in children's language and learning development (Vygotsky, 1962; Donaldson, 1978; Bruner, 1986; Gardner, 1991). Perera's (1984) work on children's writing, based on the early work of Halliday (1975), helped me clarify and organise the criteria produced by the children and suggested directions from which to analyse the data. The research methodology involved a number of ethnographic approaches. As participant observer in the classroom I was able to collect rich data about the classrooms, the language period, the nature of writing instruction, and the children themselves. Interviews with the teachers and principal and informal collaboration with them in staffroom and at staff meetings allowed me to build a picture of the culture of the school and the teachers' professional backgrounds, particularly regarding their preferred writing pedagogies and approaches to assessment. Interviews with the children's parents provided insight into socioeconomic background and cultural values.

The main data were generated through a series of rank ordering activities where, in an informal interview setting, the children reviewed selections of their work, ordering it from 'best', or 'good' to 'not so good'. Their criteria were elicited through dialogue with me and their own 'thinking aloud' as they deliberated about their writing. At intervals in the course of the study, tentative categories were created in which the children's responses were interpreted, organised, classified, revised and, finally, assigned to four main domains: the content, or topic, of the text, surface features of the text, syntactic and semantic elements and the children's judgements relating to their views of themselves as writers.

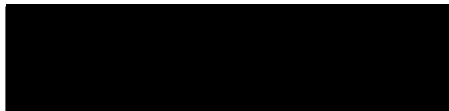
The findings suggest that primary school children have the ability to make discriminating judgements about their own writing and to provide acute comments about their own learning capacities. When given opportunities to evaluate their own writing, they find meaning that is not accessible to them from the limited feedback they receive from teacher-based assessments. The teachers' concern for their students' achievements and progress in writing was unquestionable, however, the assessment techniques they used gave them information mainly about the surface

features of children's writing. It did not inform them about students' thinking processes or why they write the way they do.

The findings further suggest that teachers and educators underestimate the capacity of young writers. Children's literacy competencies may well be enhanced when they are provided with the opportunity to take responsibility for evaluating and improving their own work. These findings have implications for practising teachers and for teacher educators in the kind of writing instruction and assessment and evaluation opportunities they present to children if their goal is to encourage effective learning.

## DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been submitted for examination in any other course or accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written for another person except where due reference is made in the text



(Signature of candidate)

..... 11<sup>th</sup> May 2001

(Date)



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For a researcher to be able to spend several years in a school as a participant observer is exceptional. I thank the principal and her dedicated staff for permission to work in the school, for their cooperation throughout the duration of the study, and for the pleasant conditions they provided at all times.

Finally, the eighteen children who participated in the study and who 'blossomed like the rose' as critical evaluators deserve special thanks, for they allowed me to observe at close range their growth and development as learners over the whole period of their time in primary school. Belief in their ability to think about their own learning made the study worthwhile.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### In Search of Understanding in the Classroom

*'... You don't get marks because you like it. You get marks because the teacher likes your story ... It's got nothing to do with you. I like it because I've written it. You have to like your story ... and you have to write as well as you possibly can'.*

Julia, Year 6

#### 1.1 Introduction

Julia's comment presents a child's eye perspective on the assessment of writing in her classroom and the apparently absolute authority of the teacher in this process. Yet despite her reservations, most teachers are concerned about their students' development as writers; teachers gather information about students' writing competence in a variety of ways, using both formal and informal assessment procedures to monitor children's progress. Formal methods, such as national standardised testing, are often determined by the culture in which teachers work and complement the range of classroom-based assessment strategies which derive from teachers' professional views about the nature, purposes, and practice of assessment in monitoring and improving children's learning. Whatever methods teachers use for gathering information, they are also influenced by their personal beliefs and judgements about what children are capable of doing as learners. Guided by prior

notions of what to look for in children's ability to write, read, or compute, and from the information that formal and informal assessments yield, teachers draw conclusions about each student's individual achievements and progress in literacy learning. Such conclusions are also often accepted as an accurate assessment of the child's intellectual potential.

Yet however well-intentioned and systematic the use of formal and informal assessment instruments and the prescribed tasks may be, there is always the possibility that teachers may underestimate the capacity students have for learning. This is likely to occur when a limited range of predetermined tasks with predetermined outcomes are used, or when assessment procedures such as tests are dictated by an agenda external to the school, occurring at fixed intervals and capturing only a snapshot of the student's ability at a particular time during the school year.

An aspect of learning about which many teachers do not have a deep knowledge is the capacity children have to evaluate<sup>1</sup> their own learning and to regulate their learning in an appropriate educational setting. Although the primary school that Julia attends does not subscribe to the traditional practice of allocating marks to assess writing, this cultural practice is, nevertheless, ingrained in students. As they advance in primary school, children's expectation, as Julia suggests, is that control and ownership of their own learning may be taken from them by the kind of writing

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<sup>1</sup> Later in this chapter (see 1.5.2) I explain my use of the terms 'assessment' and 'evaluation'. Briefly, I use the term 'assessment' to refer to discriminating judgements about particular tasks or tests. I use 'evaluation' as a broader term signalling the process of making more complex judgements about both learning processes and products.

tasks and assessment methodology the teacher uses to judge their achievements; there may be a disjunction between the way teachers teach and how children learn. For some children, enthusiasm for learning may reach a low ebb; for others the desire to learn may be suppressed altogether.

This study is designed to explore certain aspects of this problem. It sets out to investigate primary school children's potential to respond to and critically evaluate their own learning, specifically in relation to composition writing. By following one group of children from Year 1 through each grade of primary school to Year 6, it tracks the children's progress as developing writers by examining the judgements they make when invited to evaluate their own writing. Using an ethnographic methodology, the study analyses the evaluative statements the children apply to the drawings and writing they produced during scheduled language periods and which had not been formally assessed or evaluated by their teachers.

Within the time frame of the study it was possible to collect data that could identify the children's development as evaluators of their own writing and also examine the teaching context specific to each classroom and how this contributed to the children's progress - and, at times, problems - in learning to write. Thus, the study captures a contextually rich picture of children's performance and progress as writers, a picture that would not have been possible to procure from the administration of discrete tests of writing ability. At the heart of the study is the desire to understand children's thinking about their own writing and about themselves as learners; to question whether adults may, in fact, underestimate these capacities.

## 1.2 Background to the Study

The genesis of the study lies in unanswered questions that stayed with me when, as a primary teacher for over thirty years, I instructed children in writing and observed them during writing periods in the classroom. I enjoyed the experience of teaching at every level in the primary school. At the same time I was constantly searching for new perspectives and empirical findings that could help me understand why children performed the way they did that was not the result of my teaching and did not fit comfortably into commonly defined stages of cognitive development. Although I felt uneasy, I conscientiously followed the prescriptive and product-oriented teaching approaches of the time, which placed emphasis on the rules of grammar and usage at the sentence level and where, at the text level, emphasis was given to the characteristics of prescribed and limited forms of discourse. I tried to find meaning in text books such as *Let's Use Better English* (Bruce & Johnson, 1959) and applied assessment methods in the form of word knowledge and comprehension tests, traditional in schools at the time. The results of my testing procedures showed that some children responded successfully while others failed to achieve what had been taught. Learning theories, popular at the time, were in conflict with my own observations and intuition. While I could recognise the force of Piaget's account of children's cognitive development, I was never able to reconcile his model of stages of knowledge acquisition with what I observed about my primary students' learning. For some children there were periods of stability and instability that did not match a particular age or stage. Rather than grapple with Piaget's developmental theories, I was more inclined to be guided by intuition and my own observations of the children, whose learning did not fit neatly into specified stages.

Then came the influential work of Clegg (1964), a British educator, which had a major impact on methods of teaching English in the 1970s. The introduction of 'creative' or personal writing forced teachers to look at their students' potential for writing in fresh ways. The climate in my upper primary classroom which, at that time, was situated in a low socioeconomic environment, changed immeasurably as the children responded to the world around them by writing their own ideas and feelings about experiences and events. Their end products were not new to the world, but the writing was new to the individual child. Their products were a surprise to me as their teacher, who discovered that the children revealed an ability to write that the exercises in *Let's Use Better English* had not engendered. I had to choose the one that had purpose and meaning for the children. 'Creative' writing per se is not teachable, but it seemed to me it was possible to teach with the expectation that 'good' writing would evolve by providing 'creative' writing opportunities while exposing the children to techniques, styles and ideas drawn from literature and also the practicalities about written language drawn from *Let's Use Better English*. From this teaching experience, I gained insights about the learner and about writing, insights that I had been seeking for a long time. Yet unanswered questions persisted.

These early explorations in 'creative' writing seemed to pave the way for the enthusiastic acceptance that greeted the American research of Donald Graves (1975) presented at the *Third International English Teaching Conference* in Sydney, Australia in 1980. Graves' findings gave new direction to the teaching of writing in the 1980s and broadened the notion of 'creative' writing. The aim of the research conducted by Graves and his colleagues was to find out how children could grow in the control of their own writing, or composing, processes. The research raised



questions about how particular learning contexts can provide the grounds for students to become critical and self-determined thinkers. Graves' claim that young children had the 'urge' to write and believed they could do so on the first day of school presented a challenge, as did his advice to teachers to 'slow down, listen, and let the children lead' (1981, cited in Walshe, 1981:9). These maxims were a reversal of traditional pedagogy and challenged one's beliefs about learning. The underlying message was that there was no standard rule for the teaching of writing in the early years. Children were seen to bring with them to school resources previously overlooked, but which could prove to be valuable help in teaching them to write. Hence, the maxim '*let the children write*'. Furthermore, the process of development in writing needed time and an environment conducive to writing. I began to rethink my own writing pedagogy and at the same time to test Graves' theories about learning to write. By this time I was no longer a classroom teacher. I was an adviser to teachers as a language consultant for the Catholic Education Office in Victoria. The influence of Graves' research had spread rapidly throughout Victorian schools and I came in contact with many teachers whose current teaching reflected both the challenges and problems of rapid change.

The basic strategy of the new pedagogy was to '*let the children write*' for '*by writing they learn to write*'. Teachers wondered how children could write without prior instruction in spelling, grammar and punctuation, the traditional starting points for writing instruction. The new pedagogy placed emphasis on initial composing, or 'first draft' writing and then crafting writing through a retrospective analysis of the completed piece of writing and subsequent editing for correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. The maxim, '*let the children write*', was at first interpreted as a simple process by which 'good' writing would evolve with the minimum of teaching, or no

teaching at all. Teachers were prepared to let the children write, but they had only a vague understanding of what to do next and when to intervene in order to guide the children through the composing process and to be able to do this without taking away the children's control of the writing act.

In the following years Graves' studies were formalised in a writing pedagogy, which was referred to as the process-conference approach to writing and widely accepted during the 1980s. But by the 1990s teachers in Victoria were confronted with a revised English syllabus based on 'outcomes' or 'learning achievements'. I was made aware of the confusion teachers experienced as they tried to synthesise new beliefs about assessment and achievement with their current practices. Later, I discuss the implications the new syllabus had on teachers' assessment of writing. For now, it suffices to say that I found myself querying the assumptions teachers made about writing, as well as the assumptions they made about the writers themselves.

### **1.3 Children's 'Hidden Agenda'**

One of my emerging interests at this time was in the way young children write and how their writing evolves from scribble to a discovery of the symbolic function of writing and then, finally, to the composing of a cohesive text. However, the children's behaviour towards their own unfinished work during writing-time roused my curiosity in the same way as it had done in the 'creative' writing days. I wondered why children started a drawing, or a piece of writing, and then, of their own volition, left it unfinished and commenced a different topic. For some children, the second attempt would also remain unfinished, while with other children the second attempt led to a successful outcome.

Curiosity extended further to wondering why finished work should find its way to the waste-paper basket, yet other pieces of work, finished or unfinished, were cherished by the writer and later displayed with a sense of pride in the craftsmanship and in the overall finished product, again of the child's own volition. In Edelsky's terms, my concern and curiosity were really focused on children's understanding of how they are 'positioned' as readers and writers (Edelsky, 1991: 77), or, indeed, how they positioned themselves as readers and writers. I wondered why the excitement of learning, as evidenced in the lower grades, gradually changed and seemed to be a burden, referred to by the children as 'boring'. Enthusiasm for and pride in their work often appeared to be suppressed by a hidden force. Thus, while researchers were still preoccupied with observable aspects of writing development, it seemed to me that children, guided by a 'hidden agenda', made decisions that were related to some private and informal assessment and evaluation process about which I could only guess.

There is no doubt that children's behaviour in relation to their own writing can be attributed to a range of different sociocultural, personal and contextual factors, for example, the literacy practices of their families or the unique traits of personality. Teachers' and parents' expectations of children are also factors that affect children's behaviour. The writing behaviour I observed in classrooms did not seem to be accounted for, or explained, by any of the more superficial observations I had made earlier in my teaching career, or by the assumptions I drew from these observations. They appeared to be motivated by the children themselves, or by some kind of internal evaluative process as they appeared to reason about which pieces of their work they wanted to keep and which to dispose of. Their actions suggested

independent thinking about their own work. I remained interested in what seemed to be their ability to generate these evaluative responses about their own writing.

At the same time I was aware that teachers also make judgments about children's work, though for different reasons. Apart from compulsory formal assessments that enable them to report on their students' progress to parents, I noticed that teachers also singled out particular pieces of work, usually finished work, and rewarded children for these products with a tick or a coloured sticker, or by sending the child with his or her work to the principal's office.

The rewards were a teacher-devised strategy to motivate or encourage the writer to continue to produce 'good' writing. Fostering motivation is necessary for learning, but it is not a sufficient condition to ensure that children make use of deep learning strategies. From my observations, the extrinsic rewards, reserved for the 'best' work, gave only momentary pleasure. Extrinsic rewards do not inform the writer about how well he or she has constructed their text. Such rewards were about teachers' judgments of their students' learning.

I also wondered about the criteria that determine why pieces of writing should be judged 'good' and deserving of extrinsic rewards. What is it that teachers value in a child's writing when they use terminology such as 'good' or 'not good'? What theoretical underpinnings lie behind the numerical scores, letters, ticks, or stickers they use for the purposes of formal assessment? What incites criteria for a child's writing that is judged to be 'fantastic' or 'terrific'? Furthermore, in what way do children interpret the language teachers use to praise or criticise?

Conversely, why do children say they 'like' or 'don't like' their work? In the introductory comments to the chapter, Julia states that *'You have to like your story'*

and then adds '*and you have to write as well as you possibly can*'. What knowledge and understanding does she have of writing that elicits this kind of statement? Furthermore, are test formulae able to elicit insights into what children think? We do not know precisely what motivates children to say why they like or dislike their work, or why they preserve some pieces of writing and willingly dispose of other pieces. We do know that quite early in their school life, children discover that 'good' writing is measured by the teacher's approval, and links to marks and reports (Meek, 1991), or extrinsic rewards such as 'gold stars and tokens' (Donaldson, 1978). That the writing is 'not good', or 'bad', a term used by Ashton-Warner (1963), is a message conveyed by the withholding of gold stars, or articulated by the teacher.

Despite the vast amount of research on learning and writing, the observations adults make about children's writing behaviour are still open to speculation. Donaldson (1978) chides teachers for assuming that children are 'simply too ignorant' and consequently 'need help to sustain them through the actual process of learning' (Donaldson, 1978:139). Gelman admits that she and her colleagues were blind for many years to the evidence of preschoolers' cognitive and social abilities because they were unwilling to 'recognize facts that contradict existing theories' (1981, cited in Hubbard, 1989:18). There were questions to answer about children's learning, and my curiosity about finding answers led to the formulation of this study. I wanted to enter the private world of children to draw understanding from the mundane and obvious interactions that are taken for granted in classrooms, yet seemed to have meaning for the children. I wanted to understand how children evaluate their own writing

#### 1.4 Changing Views of Literacy

As already mentioned, teachers' practices in assessing reading and writing are prompted by their concern for the literacy learning for all students, a concern that is shared by all sectors of our society (Cambourne, 1985) and manifested in continuing attempts over the years to assess levels of literacy in Australian school children, a recent example of which is found in the *National School English Literacy Survey* (1997).

The question, What is literacy? has historically prompted diverse and conflicting answers. Definitions have evolved beyond the simplistic statement of the ability to read and write, to spell words accurately, to write in neat handwriting. Yet this view is certainly a significant element in the popular understanding of 'literacy' and which Barton (1994:178) refers to as 'schooled literacy'. Since school consumes a large part of children's lives and children mostly learn to read and write in school, it is probably true to say that this view of literacy is influenced by what goes on in schools. And while the assessment of literacy should support children's literacy learning, it is also used to monitor the accountability of teachers and to establish national standards for reading and writing. The National Survey, mentioned earlier, is a prime example of assessment for the purpose of mapping standards of literacy, and while the findings of the survey reveal considerable difference between the literacy achievements of the lowest and the highest achieving students in Year 3 and Year 5, the two grades who undertook the tests, they cannot throw light on the language and thinking processes that shaped the children's responses to the test items.

More recently, literacy has taken on new meaning. Literacy is considered to be more than knowing the basic skills of being able to read and write (Cook-Gumperz

& Gumperz, 1981). Gardner (1983) posits that there are 'multiple literacies'. The school's responsibility now for teaching students to be literate includes reading, writing, speaking, listening, computing and reasoning (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990:192). This is a far cry from the pragmatic use of signing one's name that once served as a sign of a literate person.

Further, we now know that literacy is what it is by virtue of how it is used in social life (Heath, 1980; Scribner & Cole, 1981; DeCastell, Luke & MacLennan (1986); Graff, 1987a; Barton, 1994. Literacy acquisition is recognised as a complex process that takes into account factors arising from home and school. Socioeconomic background, gender, language and ethnic backgrounds all count as important considerations for literacy acquisition.

Broader ways of looking at issues of literacy, language, and schooling have also engaged the attention of contemporary scholars from the fields of anthropology, education, linguistics, and psychology. Scholars now claim that literacy development is affected by who people are - their cultural histories and ways of doing things - as well as by the societies and institutions they encounter during their lives (Langer, 1987). The early work of Ashton-Warner (1963), for example, gives tangible evidence of how bridging a culture (Maori culture) and drawing on the children's everyday experiences provided an effective approach to the teaching of reading and writing in a literate Anglo-Saxon community in New Zealand.

Heath's (1983) study of literacy practices in particular sociocultural contexts illustrates how literacy is used in social life. It is an important study that provides insights into the functions and uses of literacy shared by members of three communities in South Carolina, USA. The study illustrates how households are part

of whole communities, which are oriented to literacy differently. Heath observes literate competence in three settings: pre-school home environments, school-based formal instruction; and other social and economic contexts out of the school environment. Her findings challenge many of the monocultural assumptions about literacy learning. Until recently notions of literacy were based on generalisations of the idea that all world communities have much in common. As Heath's study indicates, anthropologists present a different view. They argue that children become literate within the construct of particular cultures as they seek understanding of events through social mediation. Scribner & Cole (1981) share Heath's view that every situation is different and that each situation has to be examined in detail in order to understand the literacy needs of individuals.

Other studies of literacy that focus on gender, race, class, or ethnicity, further inform understanding of the social construction of literacy and the transmission of culture roles through the school (Edelsky 1991; Gee 1992; Luke 1992; Wells 1993). These authors emphasise that written language, like oral language, is socially shared and socially organised.

In seeking a deeper understanding of literacy development, Vygotsky's (1962) theoretical propositions about thought and language have kindled new studies that have made substantial contribution to an understanding of literacy and of learning to write. Vygotsky takes a much broader view of literacy than 'school literacy'. He sees the development of the child as an 'unfolding' in a social environment in which aspects of growth are shaped by social interaction. Broadly, his theory rests on the fundamental premise that a child's development occurs at the social level, within a cultural context where specific knowledge is learned from and shared with other



people and where social mediation is crucial for learning and development, a point that is taken up in greater detail in the next chapter.

Langer and Applebee (1987) suggest that literacy involves how people think, and learn, and change. Society, and hence literacy, changes as a function of the changes in its people. This assumption foreshadows Luke's definition of literacy as a 'dynamic, evolving, social and historical construction' (Luke, 1993:3). Giroux (1987), a radical sociologist in the tradition of Freire, pursues the argument that literacy practices, such as writing, should encourage critical awareness and action in the world. The assumption is that critical awareness and action can transform learning. The transformation of learning occurs when there is understanding of the way knowledge and information are transmitted by written texts. However, an issue here is the need for a critical language that allows teachers to understand how knowledge and classroom social relations are 'constructed, disseminated, and legitimated in everyday instruction'. To develop a pedagogy that has student experience as its focus is a complex matter that involves rethinking the curriculum and developing conditions in the classroom whereby students can make choices and think critically in the belief they can make a difference in the world. Such transformation requires a pedagogy that pays close attention to children's intentions and judgements (Giroux, 1987: 178-179).

Literacy, however, serves aims other than those specified by schooling. Scribner and Cole (1981) and their colleagues have helped us to understand the effects and limitations of schooling. Their studies have contributed to our understanding of the implication of literacy. They claim literacy is fostered and utilised in many life contexts outside educational settings - everyday events, and in family and work settings. In recent times, recognition of this range of contexts has given new

meaning to literacy. Nevertheless, schools continue to play a pivotal role in promoting literacy through instruction in reading, writing and computing.

The literacy I am interested in is print literacy. By now it should be clear that I view writing in its social context and not as a set of prescribed exercises given to children to reinforce writing 'skills'. Further, as Langer (1987) argues, at the 'core' of the development of literacy is not just the act of reading and writing, but also a way of thinking and learning (p.3). This literacy begins at home, not just when the child enters the classroom for the first time.

Yet while the ability to read and write are necessary conditions of literacy, they are not sufficient conditions to fully describe literacy. As Giroux (1987), Langer (1987), Luke (1992) and others posit, literacy also involves the ability to respond critically to written texts, to a focus on the type of written texts children read in the classroom, how the text is constructed, and how it is read (Baker & Freebody, 1989; Luke, 1993; Kamler, 1994b). Through this post-structuralist perspective has developed a pedagogy, which has recently been termed 'critical literacy'. It invites students to ask questions about the possible meanings of texts, highlighting, as Bull (1990) notes, ideologies embedded in texts and relating to issues of gender, ethnicity, or social class. We can speculate that such approaches may suggest criteria teachers might value when they assess their students' writing and convey to their students either explicitly or implicitly. The focus in this study is on the texts written by the children themselves but necessarily also takes into account the kind of literature to which the children are exposed in the classroom and the range of writing tasks the teachers select for instruction

As this brief review reveals, changing aspects of literacy contribute to change in what people learn. This has implications for how they learn, and how they think. Underlying the teaching of writing at the present time are a number of different - and sometimes competing - theories, each with a view to raising literacy standards. What is termed the 'whole language' philosophy may compete with a traditional 'skills-based' approach. The 'process-and-product' orientation may compete with genre-based instruction, and the teaching of phonics with word recognition methodology. The teachers in this study all demonstrated different elements and emphases derived from these approaches to literacy teaching.

While there is now a broader understanding of the complexities of literacy acquisition, this does not necessarily ensure that all children reach their potential as readers and writers and the problem of how best to assess and measure children's progress in literacy is a continuing one. In this study I argue that to judge children's writing is not a simple process of applying predetermined literacy benchmarks, although benchmarks may prove to be a useful guide in the process. Graves (1983) drew attention to the fact that there is information to be gained by listening to children like Julia (Year 6), mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, yet this information may not be straightforward, as Andrew's (Year 2) comment illustrates. He explained the difficulty he encountered when asked to evaluate his own work: *'You have to think hard why you don't like it, and maybe the next day you say, I like the bad ones!'*

As a beginning writer, Andrew is already aware of the elusiveness of thought and meaning within the printed word. One day he thinks his writing is 'bad' or 'not good'. When he re-reads it the next day, there is something intangible about the writing or about his thinking that dictates a different message. He is free to change

his perspective on his text and re-evaluate it, possibly prompted by his ability to make new, different, and strategic uses of the sources of information around him. He signals he is unable to make a fixed judgment about the worth of his text, and despite his inexperience as a writer, he is aware of his own thinking. Teachers, on the other hand, rarely have second thoughts 'the next day' about their initial judgment of a piece of writing, nor do they often have the opportunity to reflect on the relationship between thought and language that operates in the process of writing and of self-evaluation, or ask the question, What do children with limited experience of the world know about 'good' writing?

### **1.5 The Difficulty of Defining 'Good' Writing**

There is ambiguity about the word 'writing', which affects understandings about both the teaching and assessing of writing. Moffett (1981) provides multiple definitions, all of which can be recognised as part of the process of writing:

- Revising inner speech generated from inchoate thought
- Crafting conventional or given subject matter generated from given topics and language forms
- Paraphrasing, summarising and plagiarising generated from other writers' material and ideas
- Transcribing and copying generated from others' speech and texts
- Drawing and handwriting generated from imagery for sensorimotor activities.

Since all of these definitions are applicable to what writers do, including beginning writers, it becomes clear why no one-dimensional definition is adequate. However, as Moffett points out, failing to include all of these aspects when defining writing is unsatisfactory:

*When people write, they are simultaneously drawing letters, transcribing their inner voice, plagiarizing concepts and frameworks from their culture, crafting their thoughts into language forms, and revising the inchoate thought of inner speech. (1981: 90)*

To recognise and then accept these concepts has implications for the evaluation and assessment of writing. For each concept or definition there correspond criteria not always relevant to the other concepts, but, nevertheless, contributing to the quality of the writing. In order to give a fair appraisal of the quality of a piece of writing, these concepts are important.

In this study I found Moffett's definitions useful, as was Murray's (1978) caution:

*The writing process is too experimental and exploratory to be contained in a rigid definition; writers move back and forth through all stages of the writing process as they search for meaning and then attempt to clarify it. (1978: 86)*

Murray also proposes a broad definition that integrates Moffett's perspectives: writing involves the process of using language to discover meaning in experience and to communicate it (p.86).

The definition I seek is one that describes the writing that young children in Year 1 produce and the subsequent more developed writing in the middle and later years of primary school. Moffett's categories take into account both the writer and the

writing. Furthermore, his definitions do not suggest a step-by-step progression in writing. The definitions apply at all stages of growth.

Moffett's discussion of writing is useful in considering primary children's writing.

Broadly, his definitions reduce to two main dimensions:

- technical skills, and
- attributes that give meaning and make the content readable and of interest for the reader

The usefulness of these two categories will become clear in the chapters that follow.

Thus the definition of 'good' writing which I use takes account of the challenges that confront the young writer as he or she evaluates their writing from Year 1 and then, year by year, to Year 6. Moffett's dimensions allow for recognition of development in writing as the child moves towards more complex achievement as he or she develops as a writer. The study addresses the complexity of the composing process, and the functions and purposes of writing.

### *1.5.1 Distinguishing between Writing and Handwriting*

It is useful at the outset to make the distinction between 'writing' and 'handwriting'. Such a distinction is necessary, as when the study began, the six-year-old participants were learning handwriting skills and letter formation to assist them with written language. Moffett refers to handwriting as a process of drawing. This is not the drawing of pictures but the drawing of letters, commonly known as letter formation. As children work their way up to knowledge of the alphabet, teachers assume responsibility for teaching the correct formation of letters. Initial

handwriting activities link letter formation with speech sounds that can be transcribed into visible form.

Teachers often refer to handwriting (the formation and joining of letters) as 'writing' and to composition writing as any one of the following terms: 'story writing', 'process writing', 'personal writing', 'genre writing', and 'conference' or 'folder writing'. There is a difference between the 'writing of letters' (orthography) and written language. As Vygotsky (1978) reminds us, it is possible for a child to possess handwriting skills without having the ability to write a cohesive text. Thus, when children say they like their writing, '*because it's good*', as an evaluative statement, their judgement is ambiguous. '*It*' might mean either handwriting or the content and how it is constructed. According to Holdaway (1979:31), handwriting and writing are both important because they are cognitive tasks that embody insight into the conventions of print. In interpreting the children's comments it was sometimes necessary to pursue conversations with them to establish what meaning the word 'writing' was intended to convey.

In this study I use the term 'handwriting' to denote the formation of letters and words in either print or cursive form. I use 'writing' to refer to both the composition of a text and to the end-product. I interpret *drawing*, particularly in the early years as contributing to the development of written language.

### ***1.5.2 Defining Assessment and Evaluation***

Earlier in this chapter I made reference to the terms 'assessment' and 'evaluation' as significant classroom processes for which teachers take responsibility. Although my concern is about self-evaluation, there is need to discuss and clarify the two terms, which are integral to teaching practice. For the purposes of this study, I rely

on Wheeler's (1967) definitions which distinguish assessment from evaluation in the following terms: assessment is a term that implies some sort of scale on which performance can be ranked - in this case - in relation to writing. Evaluation involves judgement with respect to broad qualitative criteria (Wheeler, 1967: 268).

Assessment is a process that investigates students' progress in writing with reference to expected outcomes. It provides a measure of achievement that parents and the general public can understand. Both progress and outcomes are implied in evaluation. Thus, in evaluating writing, judgement may include the ways the writer tries to get at meaning in the text. The writer may bring to the task his or her personal experiences, emotions, and understanding of language, elements that assessment is not able to capture on a scale that measures achievement.

Competing ideologies about the purposes and functions of writing have also fuelled ongoing arguments about what constitutes 'good' writing. The terms 'assessment' and 'evaluation' have also been drawn into this debate and it is not uncommon for teachers to use the terms as though they are synonymous. Derewianka (1992) suggests one plausible reason for the dilemma about terminology is because it is difficult to sort out where 'assessment' begins and 'evaluation' starts (1992: xii).

Langer (1984) also observes the confusion about delineation between one and the other concept, stating that assessment and evaluation are separated artificially.

Langer argues that in the mind of the writer the concepts do not occur separately. This implies that the writer takes for granted that assessment and evaluation are implicitly involved in the process of composing, even without making use of the terminology. Teachers, though, are expected to differentiate between the two terms,



particularly in relation to their responsibility to provide information about learning outcomes.

According to Cambourne (1994), the problem teachers have regarding assessment and evaluation is the result of 'the incongruity that exists between language-education beliefs and practices' and 'beliefs and practices about assessment and evaluation' (p.7). Cambourne's distinctions are congruent with Wheeler's as described above. He suggests the term 'assessment' denotes the gathering of information about student competencies as reflected, for example, in their pieces of writing. Assessing is regarded as an ongoing cumulative process by which information is collected on different occasions over time. Assessment encapsulates the term 'testing', but 'testing' and 'assessment' are different aspects of the same process. As Cambourne (1994) points out, testing and assessment are the 'external processes' with which teachers are familiar. Procedures for collecting information may vary among schools, but not the purpose for which the information is intended.

The process of evaluation, a central theme of this study, involves the making of a considered judgment by the children in setting a value or identifying quality in the writing they produce in response to a particular task. Simplistically stated, evaluation includes the attempt to get at the meaning of the text. Where assessment is more closely connected to the use of quantitative measures, evaluation involves qualitative judgments and relies on factors such as the writers' opinions. These cannot be measured in purely empirical terms.

The focus in the study is on the evaluative processes the children deploy in reviewing and judging their own writing. The relationship between learning and evaluation is dialectical, that is, one concept does not precede or follow the other, as

in the case of testing to ascertain what skills have been learnt. Self-evaluation is viewed as an ongoing process for the writer. It enables children to position themselves as reader-writers, to make judgements about their written products and also to make decisions about their own learning, as revealed in composition writing.

In this investigation the children are invited to focus on the differences between the pieces of drawing or writing that they judge to be 'good' or 'not good' work. They apply their judgements to both written work completed and also to work which they have retained, but which, for whatever, reason they have chosen to abandon. As reader-writers they make judgments about which piece of writing is better than another piece, and how one piece of writing differs from another. The study recognises that the children's articulated evaluations arise from implicit as well as unvocalised evaluations about various processes involved in composing. The researcher must interpret the criteria the children offer and which determine their judgments when making distinctions between their texts. (This is discussed further in Chapter 4. The important issues that concern this study are reflected in questions such as: What criteria for 'good' writing can primary school children generate? What are the conditions that might enable children to internalise criteria and to use criteria effectively in their own learning?

### *1.5.3 A Framework for the Analysis of Evaluative Statements*

Insights from the work of Graves (1983, 1984), Heath (1983) and other ethnographers in the field of literacy have been a guiding force in establishing a framework that helps shape the methodology for this study. The descriptive grammars of English that can be applied to children's writing, (for example, Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Kroll & Wells, 1983; Halliday, 1985a; Harris &

Wilkinson, 1986; Kress, 1994), and Perera's (1984) work provide the theoretical background from which I develop the criteria for the analysis of the data.

Perera's work is useful for its discussion of the relationship that exists between speaking, writing and reading, grammatical factors and syntactical structures of written language, the structure of children's own writing, and the structure of material written for them in books, worksheets, and instructions.

Perera takes into account the transition from speech to writing and the stages of language development at which children can begin to cope with the different varieties of writing assignments. As she and others in the field of linguistic research point out, the linguistic abilities of young children are well developed by the time they arrive at school. However, language acquisition is by no means complete in the first year of school. The production and comprehension of language continue to develop, although development does not proceed in a series of steady incremental steps (p.157).

Knowledge of the differences between spoken and written language is essential when attempting to understand evaluation in writing, when studied from the child's point of view, as occurs in this study. The two modes are separate and distinct in relation to both linguistic functions and structures. One mode does not replace the other.

From the linguistic studies referred to above (for example, Halliday & Hasan, 1976 and Halliday, 1985a), it is clear that the demands and the responses of written language are different from those of speech. Writing is not simply talk written down, although initially this is the way children learn to write. The process of acquiring written language skills is gradual. Eventually the oral contributions to the

process are overtaken by specific written language skills - a theory also proposed by Vygotsky, to which I return in Chapter 2.

The second point in Perera's work, and one that links with the previous point, is the focus on linguistic development and the implications development has for the way children write. In the discussion of stages in the acquisition of grammar in speech, Perera begins with the structure within a simple sentence and moves on to the development of compound and complex sentences that contain nominal, adverbial and relative clauses. Children's conversation reveals knowledge of particular grammatical constructions and mastery of grammatical rules that they are not yet able to explain in grammatical terms. Nor are they able to immediately use the same grammatical structures in their writing. In speech, children usually use clause structure without error. Perera observes in speech as children develop, a trend in changes of clause structure and in the use of pronouns, revealing children's growing recognition of the grammatical differences between speech and writing. As writers mature they do not necessarily make fewer errors in writing, but they become more skilful at correcting them when they write more than one draft. However, the ability to make appropriate corrections in a draft depends on cognitive as well as linguistic development. According to Perera, phrase (noun and verb) structures that children use in oral and in written language give clearer indication than clause structure of their language development. Perhaps this is because children's speech is observed not to develop significantly in terms of length and complexity between the ages of five and ten (p. 112). This is the age group of children from Prep. to Year 4, when a great deal of experimental writing takes place.

While the coordination of clauses in compound sentences is apparent in speech, in writing, however, discourse organised in chronological sequence is dependent on

logical connectives to signal the relationships between the sentences. In the classroom children usually choose the word 'and' to keep the discourse moving forward. Temporal or logical links are not implied in the writing until children begin to use 'and then'. While the wide range of meanings that 'and' can express makes it an easy choice for children to use in their writing, it is reasonable to suggest that linguistic immaturity is an obstacle to using a range of connectives other than the ubiquitous 'and'.

Perera views linguistic maturity in writing in terms of children's increased ability to handle complex constructions successfully (p.245). Complexity for its own sake, however, is not always desirable. Short simple sentences are effective, and in the case of young children, whose linguistic ability is still evolving, this is the only form of written language they use to tell their stories. However, primary teachers expect children in Years 3 to 6 to be able to produce compound and complex sentences and to use appropriate connectives. They tend to assess writing as 'good' by syntactic features.

Educators who are aware of difficulties children encounter in their learning at different developmental levels give various reasons for what they perceive as inability to make progress in writing. There is little acknowledgment, however, that linguistic immaturity may contribute to children's inability to compose different types of texts. The ability to handle the structures of written language depends on the development of grammatical structures and linguistic maturity. Narrative, which is part of our oral culture and thus, a popular form for written language in primary school, is acquired in oral form early in childhood. It takes the form of typical story structure of an opening followed by one or more events recorded orally, in drawing or in simple sentences. It takes time for more explicitly organised descriptive or

explanatory discourse to develop, and this comes through linguistic maturity and knowing how to organise and reorganise a text through successive drafts. As Perera (1984) points out, the structure of a story does not derive simply from the links between events. There has to be a framework or discourse outline that includes setting, character(s), theme, episode, outcome and evaluation (p.324). However, these features alone do not create a cohesive text. Children may be aware of essential structural elements, as the research studies of Lenneberg (1964), Halliday (1975) and Tough (1977), for example, claim. Whether such knowledge influences children's own evaluations of their writing is one question this study asks.

A third perspective advanced by Perera is the value of reading. She approaches reading from the angle of self-chosen topics for writing. As part of writing instruction in the primary school, children are often permitted to choose their own topics as one way of encouraging them, not only to write, but also to produce quality writing. Perera argues that self-chosen topics do not automatically ensure that children will acquire complex structures in their writing. In her view, linguistic ability in writing also develops through reading and being read to. This argument implies that the input that comes from reading a wide range of different kinds of language contributes to the further development of linguistic skills. Perera argues that competent writers use constructions that rarely occur in speech but are found in reading and that young writers learn the characteristic structures of written language, which they apply to their own compositions. To develop as writers, children need to take in written forms of language and combine these forms with their own language resources, which they have acquired by listening and speaking. However, Perera posits that children do not acquire complex grammatical structures until they are

reading fluently. The influence of written texts on the children's criteria for evaluating their work is considered later in this study.

Researchers such as Clay (1975), Dyson (1984a; 1984b) and Meek (1991) argue that print provides a stimulus to children's development of oral and written language and that the kind of print materials that are used in classrooms are therefore significant. Print includes worksheets designed for various subject areas that involve reading, comprehension, and writing answers in the form of words, phrases, clauses and completion of sentences. These are also taken account of later in the study.

Perera's analysis of children's writing was helpful in suggesting a framework within which the children's evaluations of writing might be organised. It is clear from her arguments that criteria for 'good' writing should be based on linguistic features rather than on overemphasis on neatness and avoidance of errors. For this goal to be realised, teachers need to have the ability to make grammatical analyses of written language and to impart that knowledge to their students. This issue is taken up later in the study.

### **1.6 Aim of the Study**

The aim of the study is to achieve a closer understanding of children's capacities to make judgements about their own written work and, indirectly, about themselves as writers. It is based on the belief that students should be active participants in the assessment and evaluation processes, contributing, as far as possible, to discussion about their own learning and progress. It suggests that children's awareness of their own potential as learners may be obscured because of the way teachers instruct, assess and manage their classrooms.

The study does not suggest that teachers should abdicate their role as assessors of students' writing. Rather, it suggests that teachers might be encouraged to use strategies that do greater justice to children's intellectual abilities and individuality, and the quality of the social interactions and classroom management that together facilitate learning are crucial in this respect.

In the search for greater understanding of children's own self-evaluative abilities, I explore the following questions:

- When in their development and to what extent do children recognise and value their ability to make evaluative statements about their writing?
- What criteria do children draw on when they are given the opportunity to make explicit judgements of their own writing?
- Do the children's evaluative criteria change in the course of their primary schooling, and if so, what factors appear to influence change?
- Does the process of evaluation assist children to develop as, or become, critical readers of their own texts?
- In what way can information obtained from children's self-evaluations contribute to better teaching practices?

To guide my exploration, the theoretical framework of the thesis is built around three inter-connected themes through which I sought tentative answers to the above questions. One strand examines the strengths and/or weaknesses of selected learning theories. The second strand examines recent research on writing development and writing pedagogies. This strand shapes the third strand: the



meaning of assessment and evaluation in writing, particularly as applied to children's own assessment capabilities.

The chapters in the thesis are organised as follows: In this chapter I have attempted to spell out the genesis of the study and my aims in pursuing it. I have tried to clarify and elaborate certain key concepts and make clear my own position in relation to these. I hint that a study of children's own self-evaluations may better inform the teacher's own assessment strategies, and, perhaps, improve the learning environment of classrooms.

In Chapter 2, I discuss certain learning theories that have been influential in classroom instruction. The theories reflect different perspectives on learning and they have the potential to throw light on the processes of learning writing. It helps give focus to the research questions the study aims to investigate.

Chapter 3 falls into three main sections. The focus in the first and second section is the second strand of inquiry, and it provides a review of selected studies of research on writing that are of particular relevance to writing instruction in the primary school. The sheer weight and volume of recent research in this area prohibits a synthesis of research findings here. Hence, in this section I focus on issues most relevant for my study: the development of writing, revision of writing, and writing pedagogies. The focus of the third section is the third line of inquiry. In this section, I discuss various methods of assessment and evaluation, including strategies introduced in recent times that challenge the adequacy of traditional testing regimes.

Methodological issues that determine the way I investigate the self-evaluation of writing are addressed in Chapter 4. The chapter outlines the qualitative approaches I adopt in order to collect, analyse and interpret the data relevant to evaluation of

writing. It describes the nature of my classroom observations, conversations and interviews with the children and their teachers. It gives an account of the procedure used for choosing the participants and explains the analytical framework and sets of categories that are applied to the range of criteria the children chose when evaluating their own writing.

In Chapter 5, I describe the contextual features of the study. I explain the particular cultural context where the learning tasks and interactions took place. The chapter includes a description of the background, organisational procedures and the methodology for writing instruction and assessment that the different teachers in the study followed in their respective classrooms from Years 1 to 6.

Chapter 6 presents and discusses the findings of the study. The chapter gives a macroscopic view of the children's criteria, categorising and interpreting the evaluative judgements of the cohort of children across their years of primary schooling.

The aim of Chapter 7 is to sharpen the focus of the study. This is achieved by the presentation of two case studies. It charts the progress and provides a close-up of the processes and strategies two very different children adopted as they provided evaluations of their writing and of themselves as writers.

Chapter 8 considers the implications of the findings and makes recommendations to teachers and educators that might perhaps improve the teaching and understanding of writing in primary classrooms.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Child as Learner

*'Maybe if our bones had eyes they could see our mind [working] because the mind is near our bones - it's not outside us. We're inside our bodies so we can't see our minds'.*

Jessica, Year 2

#### 2.1 Introduction

An appropriate way to begin the discussion of the first strand of academic inquiry that informs the study is to draw attention to the comment made by one of the participants in the study. It is clear that Jessica is puzzled about learning. She attempts to solve the problem by describing the inner workings of her mind. If we could actually see the mind working, then we might be able to explain more cogently why we write the way we do; why we choose to value one piece of writing as 'good' work and another piece as 'not so good' work. Such a 'mechanism' for finding out what goes on inside the mind is naive and non-existent. However, there are other sources of information that inform us about children's learning and development. While adults resort to pragmatic tests to elicit information, Jessica, despite her age, is aware of the mystery surrounding how she learns. She creates her own metaphor - *'if our bones had eyes'* - in order to construct an image that would help understand the phenomenon of the workings of the mind. Her resourceful proposal alerts us to the language children draw on when they attempt to describe an issue that has been the subject of study and of controversy for centuries. It also informs us of the mental activity of which young children are capable.

While the main thrust of this chapter is learning theories that have influenced teaching and learning in the primary school, including the school where Jessica is a student, my concern is about children's capacity for self-evaluation of their own writing. Discussion of learning theories provides a framework for the investigation of self-evaluative skills that derive from learning. Jessica argues that '*... the mind is near our bones - it's not outside us*'. In other words, external behaviour or test results do not adequately describe cognitive activity. Thus, we are forced to turn to what the theorists tell us about learning and to the children's 'theories' about their own learning that they share with us.

There is a vast research field concerned with the nature of human learning and although the chief focus of this study is upon children learning in the classroom, what might be said about how they learn and how they think derives from a larger body of knowledge about how all people learn in the social milieu of the home, school or workplace.

Kohlberg & Mayer (1972) and Seaver & Cartwright (1977, cited in Jacka, 1984) have identified three main theories of learning, and since these theories have been influential in educational practice in Australian primary schools, I explore their importance in 2.2. The theories - the behaviourist theory, the theory of maturation and theories of cognition - differ in the concepts they use to explain learning behaviour. They also disagree on some of the fundamental assumptions that bear on the nature of development. In 2.3 and 2.4, I review current thinking and theories that help us understand how children learn and which underpin this study.

## 2.2 Theories About Learning

The nature of human learning is a subject that has interested and puzzled people over the centuries. It is a topic of interest to the general public and to people in many professions, among them educators and psychologists. However, there is no consensus about what learning is and how it happens. The following discussion provides a brief overview of some of the most influential theories of learning.

### 2.2.1 *The Behaviourist Theory*

For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theory of behaviour modification as a key to understanding children's learning dominated the field of psychology. Behaviourist theories attribute all behaviour to learned responses. McShane (1991) posits that such a theory presumes an organism disposed to learn. This organism is innately endowed with the ability to associate a stimulus with a response (McShane, 1991:38). Hence, the radical behaviourist school emphasises observable measurable behaviour (response) and measurable factors which affect this behaviour (stimuli). The theory gives less consideration to the intricacies of the brain.

Skinner (1957; 1971), a proponent of behaviourism, formulated the 'operant conditioning' theory of reinforcement of responses. 'Operant conditioning' is so named since the learner has to operate on the environment in order to obtain reinforcement. The prime motivation for such learning derives from extrinsic rewards and punishments. Thus, learning for the behaviourist is defined as a change in behaviour in response to a stimulus, or an incentive given by the teacher, parent, or carer.

It is clear that the reinforcement is contingent upon 'success'. Since 'being wrong' leads to aversive consequences, and since aversive consequences are non-

reinforcing, Skinner sought to maximise the frequency of positive reinforcements (Weigel, 1977:87). As Jacka (1984) points out, the function of the teacher then is to manipulate the classroom environment in such a way that children acquire specific behaviours defined for the educational program.

Skinner (1971), however, argues that continuous reinforcement gives fastest learning, but with random or intermittent reinforcement, learning is slower. He is critical of schools for their inefficiency in the way teachers control the learning process. The nature of reinforcements, and the infrequency and way in which reinforcements are used, contribute to unsatisfactory results. He insists that feedback (correction) is most powerful when it follows very quickly after performance of a task. While there is merit in giving immediate response, it is not always possible for teachers responsible for large classes to act quickly with all corrections. This is the realistic and inevitable circumstance in today's education system that Skinner's system seems to overlook.

A number of assumptions concerning learning underlie a behaviourist learning model. First, it appears that the child is born *tabula rasa* - like a blank slate or tablet, and second, the child is viewed as a passive recipient of the events to which he or she is exposed. This means that behaviour is shaped or determined by external rewards and punishments, and knowledge is conditioned rather than recognised as innate. Children learn to act in acceptable ways by being praised when they do 'good' things or give correct answers. On the other hand, praise is withheld when the behaviour does not comply with teacher expectations.

Operant conditioning, one of the concepts of behaviourism, is observable in the classroom in forms other than by using or withholding verbal praise. Ticks,

commercial stickers, or coloured 'stars', to which I made brief reference in Chapter 1, are popular rewards that serve as reinforcement to learning. According to Skinner (1971), these kinds of tokens are introduced into education to avoid the 'harmful by-products of punishment'. The reinforcement underlying much learning is about success and avoidance of failure.

A further claim made by Skinner in his earlier work (1957) is that the theory works in all types of learning. There is little doubt that for Skinner, behaviourism is the correct system for predicting and controlling children's behaviour. He emphasises how operant conditioning is able to account for subtleties of behaviour otherwise not explicable. He denies that his modified concept of early behaviourism - 'operant conditioning' - ignores consciousness, feelings, and states of mind. What a person 'feels' and 'thinks' are *causes* (original emphasis) of behaviour only in so far as emotion and thought are bodily events resulting from the environment.

Shuy (1973) explains that psychologists like Bereiter have extended Skinner's work in different areas. A study by Bereiter and Englemann involved a modification of behaviour that took operant conditioning in another direction. Shuy explains that these authors attempted to accelerate language development in socioeconomically disadvantaged children. Their study involved judging each child's success in terms of how accurately she or he imitated the language model provided by a teacher. The effectiveness of this procedure depended upon the direct teaching of specific skills and the use of rote repetition as though the children had no language at all. Shuy notes that rather than the persuasive procedure requiring structured responses as envisaged by Skinner, this study trained the children to speak in fully explicit formal language, culturally different from their everyday language.

Although behaviourism has been challenged by a number of theorists, and in particular by humanistic psychologists such as Rogers (1969) and Maslow (1970), behaviour modification programs exist in Australian schools as a means of motivating learning. Programs may involve either teacher control through negative consequences such as punishment for deviant behaviour, or reward for desirable behaviour. This may be because it is a simple mechanism - a conditioning and shaping mechanism - that is easy to put to good use, for it rewards desirable behaviour and quickly 'extinguishes' or punishes behaviour that is not approved of by the adult. The acquisition of new overt behaviour is also easy to assess.

The 'new overt behaviour', however, can be short-lived. The behaviourist position does not do full justice to the complex processes of human thought, as investigations by psychologists with a different perspective have shown.

### ***2.2.2 The Maturational Theory of Learning***

Unlike the behaviourist view of human behaviour as primarily learned responses based on reward or punishment, the maturational theory regards human development and behaviour as a function of biological or genetic factors. In simple terms, learning waits on maturation.

This perspective assumes that there are innate factors that predetermine development. In contrast to the reward and punishment system, the teacher's role should be to wait until the child is mature enough to be taught (Frost & Kessinger, 1976, cited in Jacka, 1984). To some extent teachers of young children are influenced by this theory, as evidenced in the range and flexibility of learning activities in early childhood programs.



A different perspective that derives from this philosophy is apparent in the pediatric research of Gesell (1940). Gesell developed norms that apply to learning. The behaviour of a child is studied with respect to responses at various ages and typical performances are established as norms. The emphasis is on the form or structure of behaviour at certain ages. Maturation, Gesell implies, takes care of everything. If the child is not yet ready, wait. Teachers' way of knowing the child's readiness is by the norms that have been established. In Gardner's (1991:24) opinion, Gesell advanced 'calendrical milestones that mark normal child development' a practice that Gardner does not approve of.

The simple age-functions do not tell us how to change behaviour. For the purpose of describing variation in learning, this theory is limited in its usefulness.

Nevertheless, to some extent teachers are influenced by the maturation theory, since this is the way the school system is organised. Child psychologists are not so convinced, as they search for a 'less superficial' or 'more fundamental' variable than age to account for developmental change (Mussen, 1960:37).

The development of norms, however, applies also to the use of measuring instruments and standardised tests. Although Gesell's studies took place decades ago, they have contributed in some way to the use of standardised tests to identify developmental tasks and stages. From the results of the tests, teachers can establish the developmental level of the child and plan for individual educational programs. Terms such as 'average', 'advanced', or 'typical' that teachers apply to students' learning are congruent with Gesell's work.

Maturation levels have implications for the type of learning activities teachers select for their students. They withhold some tasks, classifying them as too

'difficult' for children to learn because they have not reached a certain maturational level. Learning to write by writing falls into this category. Bruner (1960) challenges the adequacy of certain principles that classify learning activities using the criterion of 'difficulty':

*Experience over the past decade points to the fact that our schools may be wasting precious years by postponing the teaching of many important subjects on the ground that they are too difficult (1960: 12).*

Bruner is convinced that any subject can be taught to any child at virtually any age in some form. The teaching of reading and writing to very young children are two areas that were once considered to be too difficult.

An example of the application of the maturational theory is noted in the concept of 'reading readiness'. In the early 1900's the concept of reading readiness in young children took root (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). It seems that a desire among reading researchers to identify factors which enable children to be 'prepared mentally' for reading gave rise to the prominence of 'reading readiness' in the primary school. Debate prevailed then, as it does now, as to the best time to begin reading instruction. Despite the fact that many children read books at home or had books read to them before schooling began, the general view favoured formal reading from a book to begin at a mental age of six years, or at Grade 1 level (Chall, 1967).

One school of educational thought is convinced that reading readiness is the result of maturation, or 'neural ripeness' as Harrison described it decades ago (1936, cited in Teale & Sulzby, 1986: ix). Other educators believe that appropriate experiences can accelerate readiness. Hence, children are given 'readiness' training or pre-reading instruction involving identification and naming of letters.

Chall (1967:350) defines 'readiness' in terms of such characteristics as language ability, experience, general intelligence, interest, and emotional and social development. Research studies of learning in the pre-school years (for example, Reid, 1966; Bruner, 1983; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Teale & Sulzby, 1986, and others) provide significant data that indicate development by maturation is influenced by factors other than solely by maturation, or age.

Writing is another example where 'difficulty' has been hypothesised as a criterion for not allowing children to begin writing at an early age. The concept of 'writing readiness' and the postponement of teaching writing on the grounds that the subject is too difficult for young children to engage in are discussed at greater length in Chapter 3.

To counter the notion of difficulty in learning to read and write, psycholinguists and sociolinguists have pointed out that young children learn to speak without being taught how to apply major rules of syntax. Learning to speak is a difficult intellectual accomplishment, taken for granted by adults, yet learnt in the social environment of the family at a very early age. While parallels in learning to speak and learning to write can be discerned, learning to write is quite different from learning to speak. Therefore, the social environment of the school and the teaching of writing are important considerations in writing development.

Erikson (1963) extended the maturational theory by identifying eight developmental stages. He attempted to create a balance between physical, mental and social influences. He claims that the notion of stages influences the type of programs that foster development of qualities such as initiative and/or competence in the growth towards a mature personality. The stages assume a greater awareness on the part of

educators in regard to social interaction in a school environment. This awareness creates conditions that promote healthy personality development (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972), and, as a consequence, promote learning. The concept of 'stages' with regard to learning is an issue that I discuss later in this chapter. For now I review briefly the third perspective on learning that has been influential in understanding children's learning.

### *2.2.3 Theories of Cognitive Development*

So far I have given a brief account of the behaviourist theory, which classifies learning behaviour as desirable or undesirable, and which regards learning as a response to rewards or punishment. From a different perspective, the maturationist theory claims that human behaviour is a product of biology and that stages of learning and development are genetically generated and closely age related. They are concerned about assisting children to successfully master the tasks of the present stage rather than assisting them to move on to a new stage (Langer, 1969). This theory presumes that mental processes unfold automatically, at a certain point of development.

Behaviourist explanations of learning behaviour lost much of their appeal to cognitive psychologists during the 1960s. They were more interested in a cognitive constructivist approach to learning and challenged the reductionist theory of the behaviourists. According to McShane (1991), cognitive development is, to a large extent, 'the development of the ability to create increasingly complex and sophisticated representations of the environment' (p.42). However, it is not the aim of this section to provide a survey of cognition theories but rather to draw attention to the fact that there are diverse ways in which insight can be gained into the

cognitive system. As Kohlberg (1987:8) points out, most models identify the same major structures as important in cognition: a sensory register and store; a memory system, usually divided into a short-term, or working memory and a long-term, or permanent memory; some type of mental processor; and a response system. How theorists deal with the components of this structure creates a diversity of opinion that influences the teaching of literacy.

#### 2.2.3.1 Interactionist Perspective of Learning

A commonplace observation is that children of different ages extract different information from a stimulus event in the environment. Part of what develops is the ability to form increasingly complex representations of stimulus input. Cognitive constructivist theories, for example, describe how people 'transform' and organise reality according to common intellectual principles, as a result of interactions with the environment. According to Seaver and Cartwright (1977, cited in Jacka, 1984:25), theorists who subscribe to an interactionist perspective as a means of learning assume that people develop themselves 'from within, not according to a genetic blueprint or environmental dictates but according to self-organization'. The individual plays a self-determinant role in his or her own development, so there is no unfolding of innately prescribed traits as in the maturational theory.

As I have already mentioned, Skinner (1971) criticised schools for the nature and the timing of reinforcement of responses, which he believed contributed to growing unpopularity and rejection of his theory. In time, Skinner would reproach the cognitive psychologist theorists:

*Cognitive psychologists reassure themselves by attacking behaviouristic practices but they have supplied little to put in their place (1971: 93).*

Cognitive psychologists, whose research has been a major influence in the teaching of reading and writing, are concerned with knowing and the intellectual capacities that describe and explain human knowledge. The information I seek in this study is about children's intellectual capacity for evaluating their own writing and what influences this ability.

#### **2.2.3.2 Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development**

The inclusion of Piagetian theory is deliberate, since it is one of the most influential, and, at the same time, most energetically challenged theories of learning that has emerged in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the criticisms levelled at his work, Piaget is regarded as 'the champion of children' in that he laid the groundwork for many current beliefs about learning. Hence, it is timely to consider some of the main aspects of his work, which have contributed to an understanding of cognition and provided the momentum for much recent research on modern cognitive developmental theory. Furthermore, traces of his influential work can still be recognised in schools, just as traces of the behaviourist and maturationist theories can be recognised in the kind of instruction teachers plan for their students.

Piaget approached the function of thinking and learning in terms of the mental or cognitive structures that make learning possible and showed the way to a new approach to understanding the developing learner. As a complex and abstract interactionist theory is inherent in Piaget's theory of cognition, it is possible to give only a brief review of the most salient points of his theory of learning.

The genesis of internal mental structures is a major concern of Piaget. He rejects the assumption that language is necessary for intellectual development. Rather, he claims that the young child does not need language in order to think; images are

sufficient for his or her purposes. According to Piaget, thinking has its roots in action rather than in language. Thus, he put forward the proposition that children come into the world with minimal equipment to guide their behaviour. Within a few years they are able to walk and talk and deal with common everyday objects and situations. As they develop they become proficient problem-solvers in their environment. Once they have reached their teens they are able to deal with abstract matters (Phillips & Soltis, 1991).

In Piagetian terms the modification of internal cognitive structures is called *accommodation*. The child does not just absorb experiences as the behaviourist model holds, but rather actively modifies such experience as it is internalised in the form of images or symbols, a process Piaget terms *assimilation*. The interplay between assimilation and accommodation is intrinsically motivated and involves the child in personally creating or discovering his or her own unique internal cognitive structures (Jacka, 1984: 26-27). *Structures* is the term Piaget uses for the interrelated systems of knowledge that underlie and guide intelligent behaviour. He draws attention to the fact that throughout childhood and adolescence, children amass concepts, operations, and schema, which they organise internally. Mussen (1960) explains this schema as one that consists of a set of skilled, flexible action patterns through which the child understands the world.

Maturation enters into the scheme of things, but in Piaget's view, it is a condition that 'opens up possibilities'. He argues, however, that maturation is never sufficient in itself to actualise these possibilities (Piaget, 1971: 193). Other variables such as the social environment and intellectual stimulation are also required in the learning situation.

Piaget's work on concepts and reasoning has contributed much to our current thinking and theorising about children's learning. At the same time, features of his theories have been challenged, and criticism has been levelled at different aspects of his work. Donaldson (1978) was one of those who questioned tenets of Piaget's theory with regard to children's learning. I return to this issue in 2.3. Theorists argue that Piaget's theory is stated in terms of general structures. They claim that his formulations throw little light on the cognitive processes involved in coping with environmental situations. The notion of 'discovery' learning, for example, is one such issue that is applied to writing as well as to mathematics and science. The cognition of discovery, state Flower and Hayes (1980: 21), is a 'complicated intellectual process that is not yet fully understood'. Teachers are inclined to look at the product that results from 'discovery' and omit the process involved.

#### 2.2.3.3 Developmental 'Stages' in Learning

One of the most conspicuous and controversial features of Piaget's work is his list of developmental stages. Since cognitive structures are not tangible or easily observable, Piaget makes inferences about organisational principles from the various behaviours that can be measured. He borrows biological notions of *assimilation*, *accommodation*, and *equilibrium* to explain his theory of what happens during these stages of development (Brown, Metz & Campione, 1996). Although teachers do not use these terms as a guide to understanding development, Piaget's theory regarding 'stages' in learning is influential in the primary school. This attitude emerges in teachers' understanding of how children learn to write, although, as Bereiter (1980:82) notes, writing stages are supposed not to be 'yoked' to the Piagetian stages of cognitive development. However, there are teachers who take the narrow



view that every child passes through roughly the same stages in the same order, as Piagetian theory tends to imply.

The stages fit together into a succession of coherent and qualitatively different ages, but the focus is on the structures of thought applicable to any area of knowledge. Once out of a stage, it is as though the prior stage had never happened. (See Meadows, 1988, for a lucid explanation of this phenomenon).

The major problem for theories of 'stages' of development, however, is in criteria for their identification. Many psychologists and educators, including Gardner (1991), reject this theory of stages. Gardner has strong beliefs that children's early conceptions and misconceptions endure throughout their time at school. In Gardner's phraseology, early conceptions and misconceptions 'travel underground' (p.29). They are ever present and influence learning at any stage of development.

As suggested above, behaviourist theories are more concerned with reinforcement than with stages. A basic tenet of the behaviourist school is that learning is seen as linear and sequential. Both maturational and interactionist theories specify 'stages' in learning. However, the theories differ one from the other in the way the theorists assume the stages occur. According to the maturational theory, the stages are assumed to be genetically generated and related to the child's age. There is an unfolding of biological characteristics. Thus, an increase in age will lead to a new stage, which occurs regardless of learning at the previous stage.

Vygotsky's (1978) view of child development also challenges the notion of stages that are used to describe children's development as learners. He claims that two lines of development must be distinguished when studying the child - the biological or natural development, and cultural development. Vygotsky is more interested in

the learning *potential* that a child has - what the child might accomplish with the guidance of adults or peers. Hence, he is critical of the stages proposed by Piaget as indicators of the kinds of intellectual tasks a child can accomplish on his or her own at a particular age.

According to Piaget (1969), the child must personally discover ways of processing information and solving problems. The emphasis is upon the use of discovery teaching-learning procedures. For Piaget, learning occurs when internal mental structures are modified as a result of experience. He uses 'experience' in several ways, but in most cases he uses it to mean direct physical experience gained by manipulation of material objects. Hence, Bereiter's comment (1980) is a valid one. 'Stages' in writing, which involve the use of language, are unconnected with Piaget's stages that focus on manipulation of material objects, although thought processes are central to both types of stages.

#### **2.2.3.4 'Neo-Piagetian' Theory of Learning: Information Processing**

A contemporary approach to cognitive development, often regarded as a 'rival' to Piagetian theory, is information processing (Liben, 1987). In information processing theory, the focus is on the way individuals acquire and process material in specific domains such as mathematics. Neo-Piagetians propose different models of cognition to explain behaviour in areas other than mathematics. They refer to and describe the mental structures and processes that influence the way environmental events are sensed, modified, and stored to guide human behaviour (McShane, 1991).

The approach diverges from Piaget's position in aiming at the constructing of a theory that divides the cognitive system into components and explores the way in

which these components transform and manipulate information. It proposes a step-by-step account of the processes underlying the individual's performance.

In 2.2.3, I explained how various theorists regard components of the cognitive structure. Certain cognitive psychologists (for example, Rumelhart, 1975; Bruner, 1986; McShane, 1991) have linked these cognitive processes with studies of long and short-term memory. They argue that memory makes possible the construction by the child of the representations of the world and of self that are essential for effective interaction with the environment. Long and short-term memory also has implications for spelling and punctuation in writing, two skills that are taught and tested in primary schools.

Cognition and thinking are defined by Rogoff (1990) as problem-solving, which is another facet of information processing theory. Rogoff posits that problem-solving in writing development emphasises the active nature of thinking, rather than passivity - the 'passive possession of objects such as cognitions and precepts' (p.9). This view of thinking as problem-solving refers to cognitive processes that have been studied, such as skills in writing and calculating. In practical terms, the planning of work, organising information and, in general, composing texts are regarded as problem-solving activities at a high level of thinking. Rogoff argues that people engage in these problem-solving activities rather than simply acquire memories, perceptions and skills for the purposes of writing. Writing, however, is not an either/or activity. A combination of mental activities is involved in producing a piece of writing. What is of interest to me in the research on cognition is the concept of inter-subjectivity between people - a process involving cognitive, social and emotional interchange. It is about adult-child communication in which,

according to Bruner (1986), shared meaning is sufficient to allow the conversation about writing and evaluation to continue.

As mentioned earlier, Piaget showed the way to a new approach to understanding the developing learner. To some extent, Piagetian theory influenced most of the innovations in educational practice during the 1960s. It provided a broad framework of thinking from which educational applications could be derived.

The integrated curriculum, an innovative program in Victorian primary schools in the late 1970s is one example that illustrates practical expression given to Piaget's ideas. Educators questioned the artificial barriers that led to the division into separate subject areas. According to Piaget, children's thinking does not operate in this way. Teachers attempted to break down barriers by integrating subjects into broad areas called general studies and thematic studies. I refer again to thematic studies in Chapter 5, where I describe the curriculum, educational philosophy and teaching practices of the school where I conducted the research for this study.

However, when certain of Piaget's tenets were transferred to subject areas other than mathematics, teachers in secondary schools found that the ages Piaget gave for the various periods to be 'grossly understated' (Biggs & Telfer, 1981:261). Educators found that the logical concepts underlying Piaget's work were not easily made relevant to school subjects other than mathematics.

According to Feldman (1987), the more seriously Piaget is studied, the more questionable is the adoption of his work as a model for education. In the next section I discuss Feldman's assumptions in relation to the work of Donaldson (1978) and her colleagues. These studies illustrate some of the limitations of Piaget's theories when applied to young children's learning.

### 2.3 Key Theories of Learning Underpinning This Study

Several Piagetian claims, other than those regarding the notion of stages in learning, have been questioned by investigators interested in young children's learning.

Simple replications of Piaget's studies conducted earlier had almost always confirmed his claims. However, new ways of looking at his theories extended his work. These extensions revealed that children's abilities are evident at younger ages than had originally been found.

Donaldson (1963; 1978) and Donaldson, Grieve and Pratt (1983) acknowledge Piaget's scholarship and his contribution to developmental psychology.

Nevertheless, along with other eminent thinkers in the field, (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1986; Gardner, 1985), Donaldson notes basic flaws in Piagetian theory. For example, she rejects some of the limiting factors of his theory of intellectual development - aspects that underestimate the potential of the rational powers of young children.

Donaldson designed experiments to find out what a child understands and is capable of doing rather than what the child fails to understand. One of the basic principles of the experiments is the concept of self-awareness, or egocentrism, the child's general awareness of his or her own thought processes in the preoperational stage, that is, between eighteen months and around six years of age.

This is an important period in a child's development, as reflected in the following quotation from Gardner (1991):

*... I consider the period from age two to age six or seven a fascinating period of human development ... It harbors more of the secrets and power of human growth than any other comparable phases of growth.*

*The first instances of symbolic competency are mastered. Habits of body and mind are set. ... [and] powerful biases and constraints are mobilized and oriented in one or another direction (1991: 82).*

Gardner conveys something of the skills and capacities that young children about to enter school or in the first year of school possess, as Donaldson, Grieve & Pratt (1983:7) noted earlier.

Donaldson's (1978) early study has relevance for this study of self-evaluation of writing and how children view themselves as learners. The focus of her study is the learning situation from the child's position rather than from the experimenter's position, as in Piaget's experiments. One graphic illustration of this situation is the way Donaldson challenged Piaget's concept of the child's egocentricity.

Donaldson and her colleagues questioned the assertion that Piaget and Inhelder (1958) made about young children's inability to *decentre*. To *decentre* means that people are able to see their own viewpoint as one of a set of viewpoints, and to coordinate these different points of view into a single coherent system. The researchers devised tasks different from those used by Piaget to investigate children's ability to recognise and coordinate different points of view. The results revealed that children below the age of seven or eight years can perform in a non-egocentric fashion in certain situations. Contrary to Piaget's findings, the researchers found that children can take account of and coordinate two different points of view in both spontaneous and contrived situations. They are not nearly so limited in their ability to appreciate someone else's point of view as Piaget claimed. Despite these results, Donaldson is aware that there are limitations to children's competence, and she is mindful of the problems they are likely to face in problem-solving tasks.

Donaldson also found that young children are capable of inference, a concept arrived at by reasoning deductively. Children gave proof of this ability when they used the experimenter's statements as a basis from which they deduced conclusions about the tasks in which they were engaged. This conclusion should not surprise educators who recognise that in pre-school, young children can reason well about the events in the stories they hear.

Donaldson, Grieve and Pratt (1983) argue that young children operate in what is called an 'embedded' model of thinking. They explain that children 'fasten' upon something that is meaningful to them. Learning occurs when their minds become 'embedded' in the current context of a 'meaningful event'. The 'disembedded' tasks to which they draw attention are not spontaneous. They are 'set' by the adult, and children must, in turn, 'set' their minds to them with 'deliberate constraint and self-control' (Donaldson, Grieve & Pratt, 1983; 4-7).

Walkerdine (1982) takes Donaldson's findings further. She argues that young children are able to reason in familiar contexts not because they possess reasoning skills that are contextually bound, but because their learning involves being able to 'adopt positions in discourse in relation to familiar practices'. They are able to 'shift in and out of discourses' from a very early age. 'Familiar practices' are the actual social practices represented in speech as discourse (Walkerdine, 1982: 153).

It appears, however, that there are occasions when reasoning powers fail children. These occasions are often found in a test situation that is not 'a meaningful event' because of the language used by the person who is testing. The failure of many young children in Piaget's pre-operational stage was due to an *interpretation* (original emphasis) of the task that was different from the adult's assumption of

what might or should happen (Donaldson, Grieve & Pratt, 1983). A criticism of Piagetian theory is the difficult language that Piaget uses in his various experiments, which has been found to be an influential factor regarding the responses made by young children. Evidence from replications of Piaget's work shows that the logic of the experiments remains the same; changing the content of the task can make changes in understanding the task, as Donaldson and her colleagues discovered.

Through the activities they engage in during the preoperational period of development, children attempt to gain a coherent picture or vision of the world (Donaldson, 1978; Heath, 1983; Gardner, 1991; Kress, 1997). In Gardner's terms 'mastering and synthesizing this knowledge is crucial, for it is the knowledge that the child will bring with her to school' (1991: 83).

Complementing the cognitive notion of understanding the world is the notion of succeeding in the world. For children, this means experiencing success in learning. Various researchers mentioned in this section imply that teachers have need to tap children's intellectual powers so they can participate in successful learning. Traditional theories of learning have failed to uncover children's learning potential. It is this active process of cognition which is relevant in examining children's ability to assess their own learning, the view which is central to this study.

In challenging Piagetian theory with regard to young children's learning and problem-solving, Donaldson claims that variations between contextual frameworks surrounding the tasks given to children account for variations in their performance, rather than inability to think or reason at a specific age. The influence of Vygotsky's conception of development and his theory of children's learning is



acknowledged in Donaldson's work. This issue is taken up in the section that follows.

#### **2.4 Vygotsky's Theory of Learning: 'Learning Leads Development'**

In contrast to Donaldson, Vygotsky's work is not so amenable to application outside of its historical context. Nevertheless, it is possible to derive valuable insights from his work about children's learning. Despite their differences as mentioned above, recent research shows that Piaget and Vygotsky have more in common than otherwise thought. One notable difference is that Piaget focuses on the individual aspects of learning while Vygotsky focuses on the social aspects (Brown, Metz & Campione, 1996). However, both aspects are important when investigating children's learning.

In this section I discuss several important and interrelated concepts about learning. One of Vygotsky's ideas that has gained in popularity in recent years is the concept '*the zone of proximal development*'. An understanding of this concept gives insights into what is meant by 'learning potential' and how 'learning leads development'.

The zone of proximal development is not an isolated, independent concept, but an outcome of language and thought, a major focus of Vygotsky's work. A brief discussion of Vygotsky's theory of learning enables one to gain some perception of what is meant by the zone of proximal development and its emergence as a concept that gives insights to learning.

As the discussion in the preceding sections indicates, the relation between learning and development is a controversial issue that contributes to the various claims made by behavioural scientists and psychologists about the way children learn, and

whether learning occurs as a continuous process or as a pronounced stage-linked process.

Piaget regarded development as the broader and more all-encompassing concept, whereas learning is seen as narrow in scope and subordinate to development.

Although his early writings suggest that learning and development are unrelated (Brown & Reeve, 1989), recent research shows significant overlap between the ideas of Piaget and Vygotsky (see, for example, Tryphon & Voneche, 1996).

Nevertheless, Vygotsky's (1978) argument regarding the inadequacy of Piaget's learning and development theories is relevant. Vygotsky believes that a combination of the various approaches characterises human development, and that 'learning leads development'. 'Leads' is not to be interpreted as though learning is a temporal 'advance of' or a linear 'ahead of' development. Rather, Vygotsky expresses the dialectical unity of learning and development. His contention is that learning cannot exist without development, and development cannot exist without learning. This concept is in similar vein to Vygotsky's conception of the relationship between thought and word: 'thought is not expressed but completed in the word' (Vygotsky, 1987:282).

Wertsch (1990) reminds us that researchers are a long way from producing a theoretical framework based on Vygotsky's perspectives that would specify how various forms of mental functioning are systematically interrelated. Nevertheless, Vygotsky's contribution to education has given a much wider dimension to our understanding of learning and development. Some theories of learning and cognitive development have led to a focus on skills and standard measures of intelligence to the extent that cultural and interactional factors in learning and

development are often not considered. This is certainly true of influential Piagetian ideas. Vygotsky's work calls into question this focus.

It seems that Vygotsky was searching for a way to relate the psychological functioning of the individual with particular sociocultural settings, specifically with the setting of formal instruction (Wertsch, 1990). Learning for Vygotsky involves entry into a culture via induction by more skilled members (Newman & Holzman, 1993:139). He sees learning and development as neither a single process nor as independent processes. He believes them to be interrelated from the child's first day of life, and not coincidental. Thus, for Vygotsky, learning and development are not of equal measure, and growth does not appear in parallel fashion. One way of understanding Vygotsky's position is to visualise learning and development as being 'interwoven in a complex spiral'. If this is so, then a single theory of learning is not able to capture the interrelatedness of learning and development. (See also Bruner, 1971; Cole et al., 1978; Moll, 1990; Newman & Holzman, 1993, for interpretations of Vygotsky's theories).

Vygotsky claims that development is never defined only by what has matured. He insists that consideration must be given to children who are in the 'process of maturing' if one is to evaluate fully the state of the child's development (Vygotsky, 1978:208). To Vygotsky the mind is a psychological activity created or produced through the participation in and internalisation of social-cultural-historical forms of activity shared between people, particularly between child and adult. Higher, or human, mental functions are not attributed to the individual alone; they are also attributed to dyads and other groups with whom the child is in contact. Brown and Reeve (1989) examined this claim and found that social or collaborative interaction creates zones of proximal development.

On the basis of this claim, it follows that learning is also 'a historical precondition for development'; it does not causally lead or produce development. Until the child is motivated to learn, it seems that development is delayed (Brown & Reeve, 1989: 176; Brown, Metz, & Campione, 1996).

#### **2.4.1 Motivation to Learn: From Whence Does It Derive?**

Learning and development, then, are related, but the relationship is much more complex than can be explained here. A consideration of this relationship raises questions for educators: How does instruction encourage development? And what motivates children to learn? Vygotsky (1987, cited in Newman & Holzman, 1993: 60) claims the answer lies in the notion of the zone of proximal development:

*Instruction is useful when it moves ahead of development. [When it does] it impels or wakens a whole series of functions that are in a stage of maturation lying in the zone of proximal development.*

The underlying assumption behind the concept is that psychological development (motivation to learn) and instruction are socially embedded. To consider them, one must analyse the surrounding society and its social relations.

However, Wozniak (1996) is critical of this cultural-historical theory. He suggests that Vygotsky does not address the issue of a 'normative criterion' for development. A close study of Vygotsky's theory indicates that it is essentially a cooperative learning strategy. Social interaction creates 'zones of proximal development' that operate initially in collaborative interactions (Brown & Reeve, 1989:176).

Unfortunately, Vygotsky does little by way of describing what instructional or collaborative interactions look like or how they should function. Hence, various interpretations are given to sections of Vygotsky's discussion on learning. He does

argue, however, that what children can do with the assistance of others is even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone. This implies that the assistance of others is indispensable, but Vygotsky (1978) clarifies his argument by noting that, 'Generally, as the newly awakened 'processes' are internalised, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement' (1978: 90).

While the concept learning leads development is the zone of proximal development, one of the developmental outcomes is that the child is enabled to engage in developmental activity of his or her own volition and with conscious awareness rather than by merely giving an automatic response to meet adult demands. This is a challenge to the traditional understanding of 'motivation' as being internal and a prerequisite for, rather than an outcome of, learning. Volition and self-consciousness typically are seen as having a critical relationship to motivation. Motivation and outcome appear to be entwined.

The important point Vygotsky attempts to establish is that through interaction with people in a sociocultural environment, children become aware of the 'learning' process and they recognise their potential to learn. This gives credence to his theory that 'good learning' is, and must be, learning in advance of development, because the child learns that he or she is capable of learning, unaided. Internalising the concept that one is a learner is a 'revolutionary activity', as the child makes meaning of language to suit the task in the zone of proximal development. The question that remains to be answered is whether the child will continue to show enthusiasm for learning, even when there is little or no interaction provided.

Making meaning in the zone of proximal development belongs to the domain of thought and to the domain of speech, and it is a dominant theme that permeates Vygotsky's work on learning. The term 'revolutionary activity' had a special meaning in Soviet psychology, and especially for followers of Vygotskian theories. Nevertheless, it can be applied to the Australian scene. Vygotsky talks about 'activity' of the mind, not behaviour, personality or traits, characteristics that are the focus of other learning theories discussed in the preceding sections. This is not to say that personality and external behaviour are to be discounted as influencing learning outcomes. The inclusion of these factors in a study of children's learning is also of importance. Vygotsky defines development primarily in terms of fundamental 'revolutionary' shifts in thinking rather than as a steady quantitative increase of knowledge, although an increase in knowledge can hardly be ignored. When one considers this perspective, it is not difficult to understand Vygotsky's criticism of a general stage-like progression in learning. The major transition in making meaning occurs when some form of mediation is utilised (Rogoff & Wertsch, 1984). The authors refer to adult mediation. If children are to make meaning of the various activities in the classroom, the quality and timing of the mediation are important factors for teachers.

In its broadest terms and as interpreted in the design of this study, 'revolutionary activity' is about making meaning; learning leads development in the zone of proximal development. The unique human activity of making meaning is an ongoing process that involves thinking and speaking (Newman & Holzman, 1993).

#### **2.4.2 A 'Neo-Vygotskian' Approach to Learning**

In this study, the capacity of the children to attribute meaning to their own written products by evaluating them, implicitly and explicitly, is of central interest. The work of 'neo-Vygotskian' researchers in further exploring the concept of the zone of proximal development has relevance here.

'Neo-Vygotskian' refers to an approach to the study of learning and cognitive development that draws heavily, though not exclusively, on the work of Vygotsky. The neo-Vygotskian framework, by treating learning as essentially a 'situated' process avoids claims about the abstract level of actual or potential understanding of individuals (Mercer & Fisher, 1992:4).

Mercer and Fisher claim that the neo-Vygotskian approach has certain important features for researchers who are concerned with instruction and education. The approach gives central and prominent place to communicative and cultural factors. Interactions between peers, siblings, parent and child, and teacher and child (the primary socialisation agents of the young) are regarded as important (Rogoff & Wertsch, 1984). In a research study that addresses how teachers help children to learn, Mercer and Fisher argue forcefully for their model, which they declare represents 'the only available theoretical perspective which is potentially capable of handling teaching and learning as a culturally-based 'situated' activity' (p. 4).

However, this claim and the way the zone of proximal development has been applied in other studies has been criticised by Vygotskian scholars. Newman and Holzman (1993), for example, argue that neo-Vygotskians misinterpret and misuse the zone of proximal development. Criticism appears to stem from the problem created by mediated action, that is, the interaction or collaboration between adult

and child. Vygotsky views the zone of proximal development as 'tool-and-result' methodology. According to Newman and Holzman, neo-Vygotskians interpret the zone of proximal development as a more social tool - 'tool-for-result'. Mediated action is central to Vygotsky's sociocultural approach to mind (Wertsch, 1985b). Mental processes arise from and are mediated through dialogue and social interchange. With development, the child internalises cultural aids such as speech and begins to regulate his or her own cognitive functioning and behaviour. In the process of development, children are socialised into the intellectual life of the community. Hence, Vygotsky highlights the critical role of language in dialogue. This seems to be the issue at stake: the kind of dialogue and interaction that take place in the classroom. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the dissonance that exists between Vygotsky's abstractions of thought and language and neo-Vygotskian interpretations. Neo-Vygotskians aim for pragmatic instructions that inform teachers of Vygotsky's theory of learning.

#### ***2.4.3 The Metaphor 'Scaffolding' as Applied to Learning***

Several studies that focus on the zone of proximal development (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Clay & Cazden, 1990; McNamee 1990, and others) apply the metaphor 'scaffold' to explain the framework provided by the adult, within which a child learns a specific concept. Vygotsky, however, never used this term in his discussion of the importance of social interaction in learning. Use of the concept of scaffolding as an instructional strategy can be traced to the work of Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976). These authors identify several situations where scaffolding can be applied to a child's performance. Educators find the term a useful one to describe the interactional support in adult-child dialogue. In engaging children in an appropriate handling of a task, adults create supportive situations in which children



can extend current skills and knowledge to a higher level of competence (Rogoff, 1990).

Graves (1983) adopted the notion of scaffolding and applied it to writing development. His concern is not related to the concept of the zone of proximal development. The scaffold is a temporary structure that teachers provide in a writing conference (see Chapter 3: 3.6.1 for reference to the conference in the process approach to writing). Graves describes scaffolding as a strategy that enables teachers to follow the 'contours of child growth' (p.271).

For teaching 'reading recovery' and 'applying' the zone of proximal development, Clay and Cazden (1990) use a lesson format as a scaffold. 'Reading recovery' is a program that helps low achievers who have the poorest performance in reading and writing after their first year in school. To achieve accelerated learning in this program of instruction, Clay and Cazden promote emerging skills. The authors give attention to strategies or operations that encourage children to get messages from the text they are reading. The end goal is to be able to read at a particular age at an arbitrary level rather than to have the child recognise his or her ability to learn.

One of the problems with the scaffolding metaphor is the implication of a rigid structure or one that does not involve the child. Studies do not suggest rigidity but rather, through joint activity, learning leads development. However, it is this kind of intervention that Vygotskians declare is 'tool-for-result' and a 'misuse' of the zone of proximal development. Newman and Holzman (1993) state that more emphasis appears to be placed on the notion of 'scaffolding', rather than on self-regulatory learning, Vygotsky's way of viewing 'tool-and-result'.

#### 2.4.4 *The Role of Language in Learning: External Speech*

Vygotsky's ideas on the role of language in learning are important and relevant to this study. Throughout his writings, Vygotsky makes the claim that essential keys to understanding social (that is, inter-psychological) and intra-psychological activity are the linguistic tools and signs (speech) used to mediate the processes involved. Wertsch (1990) explains the process in this way:

*The theoretical mechanism ... he [Vygotsky] used was grounded in the theme of semiotic mediation; his line of reasoning was to identify the forms of speech or discourse characteristic of particular sociocultural settings and examine the impact their mastery has on mental functioning ... (1990: 116).*

The internalisation of speech in relation to the development of writing is a key factor in the understanding of the learning leads development theory.

Vygotsky was more interested in thought processes than in language acquisition. He studied speech not so much as a linguistic system, as did Chomsky (1957, 1968), Bakhtin (1986) and Halliday (1985a). He was interested in language, but in terms of the role it plays in the learning and development of the child. His insights speak directly to aspects of writing instruction.

Vygotsky's (1978) attempt to synthesise the individual learner and society can be explained in Rogoff's (1990) terms as follows:

*Central to Vygotsky's theory is the idea that children's participation in cultural activities with the guidance of more skilled partners allows children to internalize tools for thinking and for taking more mature approaches to problem solving that children have practised in social*

*context. Cultural inventions channel the skills of each generation, with individual development mediated by interaction with people who are more skilled in the use of the culture's tools (1990: 14).*

From this theoretical position, Vygotsky (1978: 32) claimed that the use of language, which he calls 'culture's tools', has three major consequences:

- It enables children to provide for auxiliary tools in the solution of difficult tasks
- It enables them to overcome impulsive action, to plan a solution to a problem prior to its execution
- It enables them to master their own behaviour

The consequences, recognisable in children's behaviour, derive from his study of the changes in the function of language he observed from infancy through to adulthood.

He identifies three stages of speech development:

- Natural stage or 'magical' stage in which children recognise a word as the property of an object
- External stage
- Inner speech

Vygotsky argues that the last stage, (inner speech), is thought itself.

The external stage and inner speech are relevant stages to observe when children are learning to write and when they become involved in self-evaluation. For pre-school children, language at first serves primarily a significant social and stimulating

function for the self, without much concern for influencing others. As Britton (1970:57) explains, 'the speech is both *to* himself, in the sense that it seeks no response from a listener, and *for* himself in that it helps him do whatever it is he is doing' (original emphasis).

The speech-to-self stage of development in language is not peculiar to pre-schoolers. It continues for some time after children enter formal schooling. At the commencement of this study, a number of the children were in this stage of language development.

Vygotsky was particularly interested in the function of 'spontaneous speech for oneself' - speech that is not addressed to another person and which is discernible in young children's behaviour. He granted this kind of speech, also referred to by Wertsch (1985b) as 'private speech', a formative role in the emergence of uniquely human, higher cognitive processes. As explained by Wertsch, 'the use of private speech as a tool of thought transforms the structure of practical activity, creating and giving birth to the purely human form of human intelligence' (p. 24).

The frequency of speech for oneself peaks at around five or six years of age. This is the time when children in Victoria commence formal schooling. Vygotsky notes that there is a transition from communication for others to reasoning for one self; the child begins 'to think words instead of pronouncing them' (Vygotsky, 1987:230).

In the first year of school, speech initially dominates writing in the earliest drawings and scribbles. Children tend to 'think aloud', oblivious of an audience, as Britton (1970) has indicated. The assumption is made that children learn to write later through discovering that speech about an experience can also be drawn on paper, in which case writing dominates speech. As audibility of speech for oneself declines, it

becomes transferred into inner or 'silent' speech. Luria and Yudovich (1971) call it 'expanded speech'. Vygotsky refers to the endpoint of this process as the 'internalisation process' - the complete fusion of language and thought. His theory of cognitive development rests heavily on the key concept of internalisation. Succinctly phrased, a thought is completed in speech.

Newman and Holzman (1993) interpret 'internalisation' of speech as an activity - a semiotic transformation, not of tools, but of meanings. Learning, then, is 'the revolutionary activity making meaning via revolutionary language activity' (Newman & Holzman, 1993:136). Hence, internalisation is not 'faded speech' (Zivin, 1979:383); it is a more 'active' process that refers primarily to the transferring of a function from the social plane to the psychological or mental plane.

Vygotsky conceives of thought as internal dialogues. These internal voices derive from voices the speaker has heard. Thus, for Vygotsky, there is no private language. His experiments led him to hypothesise that private speech, or speech for oneself in the young child is a universal human problem-solving tool, and that it interrelates with other aspects of social and individual activity.

Vygotsky's concepts of learning leads development and speech for oneself are complex issues. Nevertheless, his notion of speech for oneself seems to have more relevance for self-evaluation of writing than the learning theories discussed in the preceding sections. However, the notion of speech for oneself is made more complex because of the terms theorists use such as 'egocentric', 'inner', 'private' and 'self-regulatory' speech. It is evident that egocentric speech is linked with Piaget. It is a term that Vygotsky prefers not to use.

Behaviourists (discussed in 2.2.1) take a view of egocentric speech different from Piaget and Vygotsky. They regard egocentric speech as shaped and maintained by reinforcement contingencies. They claim that it becomes covert when socialising agents cease to tolerate it. According to Berk (1992), for the behaviourists, egocentric speech is merely 'a convenient, learned tool for controlling behaviour in the absence of adult monitoring and vigilance' (p. 24). However, Piaget and Vygotsky are also at variance with one another about egocentric speech and speech for oneself. Piaget regards egocentric speech as symptomatic of the young child's cognitive immaturity. He maintains that egocentric speech, which is said to characterise the child's speaking behaviour until the age of 7 or 8, has no communicative function. This is the age when egocentric speech 'disappears' and social speech supposedly emerges.

This is also the approximate age of children when they make the transition to Year 2 in Victorian primary schools. Hence, the importance of a brief consideration of egocentric speech, which may have the potential to provide insights into children's thinking as they evaluate their own writing.

Young children, Piaget (1955) argues, engage in egocentric speech because they have difficulty in imagining the perspectives of others. They do not need language in order to think; images are sufficient for the child's purposes. Language is only necessary when the mature primary school child attempts to use abstract ideas (p.206). Piaget's assumptions about egocentrism and children's apparent incapacity to express their thoughts or to communicate a point of view appear to run counter to Vygotsky's claims about young children's thinking and use of language. Donaldson (1978) and her colleagues take issue with Piaget's assumptions, as mentioned earlier.

Vygotsky, (1962), on the other hand, argues that egocentric speech or speech for oneself is 'splintered off from general social speech' and gives rise to inner speech. He suggests that children learn to speak in the to-and-fro of social talk of those around them. They use language as in a running commentary while they engage in various activities. Once they have learnt to speak, children use speech to explore their own activities. Vygotsky refers to this form of speech as 'speech for oneself'. Thus, reference is often made to egocentric speech as language that accompanies actions but that is not intended for an audience (Britton, 1970:57).

Vygotsky theorised further by stating that when young children stop using speech for one self, it is because that speech has become internalised and continues to operate in the form of 'inner' speech. Thus, he saw significance in the function of egocentric speech, a significance that eluded Piaget. Vygotsky's stance provides a clearer understanding of the link between 'inner' speech and thought processes. Vygotsky believes egocentric speech involves a certain amount of unconscious language behaviour. It serves a function in the verbal activity of children. Speech for oneself continues to exist while children also participate in social forms of speech. As Smith (1996) points out in his discussion of the social development of rational knowledge, the simple division of language statements into egocentric and socialised language varies considerably with the environment, according to the degree to which the adult intervenes.

Of the propositions made about egocentric speech, it seems that what Vygotsky has to say about speech for oneself is the most illuminating for it gives prominence to the fusion of thought and language in the learning environment.

## 2.5 'Inner Speech' and Writing

The connections Vygotsky and other researchers have made between inner speech or 'inner dialogue' and writing are now important issues in pedagogy. Vygotsky (1962) was aware of the problems of the transition from speaking to writing, as the statement below indicates:

*Written speech is a separate linguistic function, differing from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning ... In learning to write, the child must disengage himself from a sensory aspect of speech and replace words by images of words ... It is the abstract quality of written language that is the main stumbling block, not the underdevelopment of small muscles or any other mechanical obstacles... The discrepancy between competence in speaking and writing is caused by the child's proficiency in spontaneous unconscious activity and his lack of skill in abstract, deliberate activity ... (1962: 150).*

Vygotsky (1978) cautions that without an 'inner understanding' of written language, it will be mere learning, as implied in the behaviourists' concept of learning. In Vygotskian terminology, writing should be a 'meaning-making' activity:

*Of course, it is necessary to bring the child to an inner understanding of writing and to arrange that writing will be organized development rather than learning. (1978: 118).*

According to Vygotsky, as mentioned in the previous section, development and learning are a 'joint activity'. To make possible 'organized development', it seems, then, that children need to be taught (which implies learning) elements of writing recognised by the particular culture in which they are situated.



Inner speech is described as the immediate precursor to writing. The characteristics of inner speech - planning, reflecting, reorganising, evaluating - are reflected in the composing process (Graves & Murray, 1980; Moffett, 1981; Emig, 1983; John-Steiner, 1985). For beginning writers, however, written texts are not very different from the texts that are created in spoken monologue. Young children rely upon speech for all they want to communicate when they draw or write. Little attention is given to composing, or 'inner dialogue' as they learn first how to manage the formal and mechanical aspects of writing (Wells, 1986).

According to this theory then, inner speech is not a replica of external speech. The developmental course of inner speech, as espoused by Vygotsky, is regulated by age and factors associated with task difficulty. There is general agreement that writing is a difficult task to perform. As Wells (1986) notes, it takes time for young children to be in touch with 'inner dialogue' when writing.

Various activities that begin early in life, such as drawing and play, are usually accompanied by external speech. As Vygotsky observed the relation between play, drawing, and written language, he found that drawing and play - specifically pretend games children play - are links to written language. Imagination and memory are as important for written language as they are for play. It is the external speech during these activities that enables young children to arrive at an 'inner understanding' of writing (Vygotsky, 1978:118). Gradually, however, the timing of such speech changes with respect to the ongoing activity. Speech that once accompanied the writing ceases, and precedes the activity. Planning ahead is thus one indication of writing development.

If Vygotsky's development ideas are correct, most children will have reached the final category in development of language and thought - silent speech or inner thought ('inner dialogue') by Year 2.

## **2.6 Concluding Comments about Learning**

In drawing together the threads of this discussion, it becomes clear that no single theory can adequately describe or inform us of how children learn. As Jessica observes in the introduction, there is no concrete mechanism such as 'eyes' on our 'bones' that would enable us to 'see' the brain at work. We have to rely on theories and our own intuitions. While theories have contributed in diverse ways to a broader understanding of learning, they also invite more questions than answers. Most people would be in agreement with the notion that learning is a complex set of variable processes of behavioural change. Some changes occur sequentially; others occur concurrently. Although no theory is without flaws of some kind, Vygotsky's theory of learning has a sharper focus on the child. He takes into consideration many aspects of the human person that influence learning, factors that escape the attention of other theorists in the field of learning. Vygotsky's ideas with regard to writing development and 'inner speech' are of particular relevance to this study.

Thus, the theoretical writings of Vygotsky, Bruner and Donaldson provide me with the beginnings of a framework for the investigation of children's cognitive processes as revealed in their ability to evaluate their own writing.

To conclude this discussion of learning theories, I draw from the work of Toulmin (1978) who gives the following succinct and insightful description of Vygotsky's work:

*[Vygotsky's writings] are a novel unification of Nature and Culture that acknowledge the variety and richness of historical and cultural differences, without ignoring the general processes involved in socialization and enculturation (1978:57).*

This study acknowledges the importance of historical and cultural factors, which tend to be neglected in the behaviourist and maturational models. However, there are limitations as to what extent historical and cultural factors can be identified as contributing to learning. Important to the study is the recognition of the cognitive processes and the individuality of the child, as also the many and varied features that make up the learning environment.

The investigation of learning theories leads to my interest in the second and third strands of inquiry: studies of writing development and studies related to the assessment and evaluation of writing. This is the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Children's Development in Writing and Evaluation Practices: Implications of Recent Research Studies

*'... Well, I didn't do a rough copy for this. I was just sitting there in front of my typewriter, and I was just thinking like that. I just sat there, just sort of writing, and while I was writing, it came out like this'.*

Debbie, Year 5

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter is set out in three main sections, dealing respectively with research on writing, writing pedagogy and assessment and evaluation of writing. These factors are relevant to this research study, which deals with children's self-evaluation of their own writing. The chapter explores the theoretical issues, the challenges and debates relating to teaching and assessing writing in the recent past. As such, it describes the broad educational climate in which the research participants studied and which therefore may have bearing on the criteria the children valued and commented on.

I discuss research studies on writing in Section 3.4 and Section 3.5. The sheer volume and variety of studies prohibit a synthesis of research findings. Hence, I have selected studies that are most significant for writing instruction in the primary school during the period 1964-1994.

When this study began, the children were in the beginning stages of learning to write. At the conclusion of the study they had developed as more experienced and

proficient writers, like Debbie (above) who reflects on the process of composing her text, which she wrote, unaided. Hence, there is need to take into account studies that deal with both ends of the learning to write continuum.

In Section 3.4, I discuss studies that investigate the beginnings and development of writing among pre-schoolers and children in the early primary grades. In Section 3.5, I discuss studies that focus on writing in the middle and senior levels in primary school. Some studies draw on cognitive psychology, which provides insights into what goes on in the writer's mind when composing. Other studies emphasise the social dimensions of writing.

In Section 3.6, I discuss significant writing pedagogies in the primary school.

The focus of Section 3.7 is on the self-evaluation of writing, which is the specific topic of this study, and Section 3.8 deals with three other strategies for the assessment and evaluation of writing.

### **3.2 Functions of and Purposes for Writing**

The evolution of writing spans centuries of civilisation and is marked by series of historical events that have contributed, in turn, to changes in society and consequently in the functions of writing. In a literate society, the ability to write is considered a basic skill that identifies people as members of that society (Biggs & Telfer, 1981; Heath, 1983; Edelsky, 1991; Meek, 1991). However, the purpose for which people use writing is very much dependent upon the kind of literacy their society values and how competent and motivated people are in using writing (Meek, 1991:9). Writing is claimed to be an important and powerful form of communication between people. The claim is also made that it has varied functions

and forms (Britton et al., 1975; Emig, 1983; Murray, 1985; Langer & Applebee, 1987; Garton & Pratt, 1989; Barton, 1994).

The diverse definitions of writing and, more broadly, their application to literacy, generated by academic disciplines such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and philosophy add to the views, or definitions of writing proposed by professional writers and writing specialists in educational institutions. Thus, the wide range of definitions reflect different ideologies or value descriptions that have implications for the way people view literacy in their particular culture. The different perspectives, in turn, influence assessment and evaluation methodology and account for continuous debate about the most appropriate strategies to use to 'measure' achievement.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, all definitions of writing are correct. In Gardner's terms, (1975, cited in Mitzell, 1982:202), no single definition adequately encapsulates the many and varied aspects of writing, which he describes as 'the most complex and multifaceted of human activities'. In similar mode, Emig (1983:123) posits that writing is 'one of the most complex processes man engages in'. She argues that writing is a unique mode of learning. In the light of recent studies that have investigated the use of language and the concept of writing as a tool for thinking and learning, writing is understood as a process as well as a product. When viewed as a product-and-process, writing possesses, Emig asserts, 'attributes that correspond to certain powerful learning strategies' (p.123).

Most people understand that different writing functions require different kinds of engagement with ideas and information (Durst & Newell, 1989). Consequently, a number of educators explore the conditions thought to be necessary for learning to

take place, as well as focusing on how children learn (for example Graves, 1975; Smith, 1975; Cambourne, 1987). Where appropriate conditions prevail, it is possible to identify the special advantages that writing has for learning, whether the focus be related to techniques essential for writing, or for students' understanding of writing processes. Writing is also considered to be a vehicle for critical thinking and understanding (Britton, 1970; Emig, 1983; Beach & Bridwell, 1984; Murray, 1985; Langer & Applebee, 1987).

For children, writing offers an occasion for organising events in their daily lives (Britton, et al. 1975). Writing is also used to explore cause and effect, and other relationships (Bruner, 1972), and as a form of problem-solving (Flower & Hayes, 1980; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Problem-solving involves the generating of ideas, planning, goal-setting, monitoring, evaluating what has been written and searching for language with which to express meaning. With the text in front of them as they produce it, writers are able to reorganise information, clarify what it is they are trying to say, and sometimes to recognise that what they started out by saying is no longer appropriate and needs changing or deleting (Harley, 1992).

Several scholars define writing as a 'process of discovery'. Individuals can 'unlock' meaning as they actually write and revise (Britton, 1978; Murray, 1978; Perl, 1979; Odell, 1980; Graves, 1983). The discovery of meaning is a long process of rehearsing, or thinking and talking about the content, drafting and making revisions. According to Macrorie (1980), this is the way good writers perform. Beach and Bridwell (1984) apply other functions to discovery, such as helping the writer discover 'a controlling idea'.

Harrison (1983) explores the reflective dimension of writing, stating that through reflection the writer is involved as a learner. In Vygotsky's terms, reflection is 'an internal discussion' while Meek (1991) believes that writing makes us reflect.

Meek's view is that reflection is 'a kind of scanning backwards, a combination of remembering and thinking when we look at what we have written' (p.26).

Furthermore, the development of thought, feelings, emotions and attitudes through writing and its potential as a means of personal growth has been the subject of discussion among other researchers (Moffett, 1968; Bruner, 1972; Britton et al. 1975; Arnold, 1991).

From this range of definitions it becomes evident that the interest taken in writing by linguists, psycholinguists, sociolinguists and cognitive psychologists is determined by different goals. In a unique way, each perspective contributes to an understanding of the functions and purposes of writing. Educators and classroom teachers are interested in knowing about language and its uses in listening, speaking, reading and writing - the four main aspects of language and essential components of the curriculum in the primary school. However, for the classroom teacher who is committed to children's literacy development and who is accountable for teaching and assessing writing, the diverse perspectives can also be problematic. Evans (1987) does not pursue a specific perspective but posits that it is difficult in practical terms to 'tie down' the precise nature of writing because it involves so much and because the product merely displays a visible outcome for perusal and skills of handwriting, spelling and punctuation.

The emphasis on writing as 'process-and-product' (Emig, 1983; Graves, 1983) and the assumption that it is an 'intellectual tool' (Vygotsky, 1978) that influences thinking, challenges traditional beliefs about writing. The traditional view is that



writing can be reduced to a series of competencies taught in developmental sequence and in isolation. Most educators today do not regard this as the most effective way to teach writing.

The complexities of the writing process and the interrelationships of its components contribute to difficulty in selecting studies that give a straightforward account of the development of writing. Since writing is an organic process, it seems relevant to begin with the oral component, (speech), which interrelates with the written component, and then proceed to discuss the development of the written component as though it were a separate entity.

### **3.3 Developing Relationship between Oral and Written Language**

Rosen and Rosen (1973: 267) suggest that 'to understand what kinds of problems children face when they write we have to work out in what ways speaking (which they do very well) and writing (which is new to them) differ'. The relationship between speech and writing has been the subject of studies, notably those of Vygotsky, (1962), Britton (1970), Olson, (1977), Wells (1981), Halliday, (1985a) and Kress (1994). Researchers focus on different features. For example, Vygotsky informs that the 'rich' development of the social function of speech takes place very early in a child's life and that speech development involves a differentiation of functions. He developed this view on the basis of a comparison of written, oral, and inner speech and illustrates how the syntactic system differs in these three forms.

Wells (1981) posits that the quality of oral language with which children are surrounded has a considerable impact on their learning development. Nevertheless, as Wells and Chang (1986) note, the relationship between speech and writing in the course of development and at any particular point in that development is complex.

In studies of writing development, researchers have found that much of the writing produced by pre-schoolers and children in their Preparatory Year at school can be interpreted only when the writer gives an oral explication (McLane & McNamee, 1990). Vygotsky (1978) is a pioneer in this regard. Although he considered memory techniques as the first precursor of written language, he noted in Luria's experimental findings that there were occasionally 'some astonishing cases' where the child makes meaningless (to adults) lines and squiggles 'but when the child produces phrases it seems as though he is reading them; he (the child) refers to certain specific marks and can repeatedly indicate, without error, which mark denotes which phrase' (p.14).

When Dyson (1981; 1983) attempted to trace the 'rooting system' for learning to write in young children, she explored the oral-written connection. She suggests that early writing, from the point of view of the child, is only partly a 'paper-and-pencil' activity (Dyson, 1981:776). Children talk their way into the creation of a text, even while still producing the kind of gross approximations to conventional writing that have been described by Clay (1975).

From these accounts and various others, it seems that talk permeates the writing process and thus provides the meaning to the text. Dyson's (1981) study is an example of how the use of talk in young children becomes a tool to create meaning. Talk, however, is not restricted to beginning writers. It may go 'underground' as children mature as writers, but talk is present before, during and after composing. It helps some children begin to make systematic connections and organise information, which they record in symbolic form. Talk influences a rewriting or revision of a text. Dyson's findings are consistent with Vygotsky's theoretical position in that

children first become aware of spoken language as a separate structure, 'free from its embeddedness in events'. Vygotsky explains that:

*Written speech is a separate linguistic function differing from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning (1986: 180-181).*

Furthermore, he notes that:

*Writing requires deliberate analytical action on the part of the child ... (1986: 182).*

For several decades, educators like Moffett (1968), Britton (1970) and Emig (1971), have acknowledged the value of using sustained talk or narrative as a prelude to writing. This is not the same kind of talk to which Dyson draws attention. Debbie's evaluative statement for 'good' work that opens the chapter is an example of the 'unity' of thought and 'private' or inner speech about which Vygotsky (1962) theorises. For Debbie, alone at her typewriter, there is no external talk: '*... and while I was writing, it came out like this*'. This observation gives some indication of the way the mental and physical activity of composing are intimately interwoven. In the classroom, however, and surrounded by her peers, Debbie sometimes resorted to talking aloud about a problem she had with her writing. She also interrupted her own writing to comment on a peer's writing.

In his dealings with more experienced students, Elbow (1973) states that talking in groups as a prelude to individual writings seems 'a well-substantiated phenomenon' different from thinking aloud while composing. Emig (1971) used 'think aloud' protocols in her investigations to gain insights into her students' composing processes. One of the weaknesses of the think-aloud methodology is that students

make an unnatural effort to talk aloud about their thinking. Humes (1983: 213) calls the protocol 'a hybrid of writing and speaking'.

For Enig, however, 'writing is more readily a form and source of learning than talking' (1983:124). Britton (1970) is also supportive of this view and, in addition, emphasises the importance of talk in relation to writing. He argues that all that children write, their responses to each other, and the teacher's response to what they write take place 'afloat upon a sea of talk'. One of the advantages of using talk is that it enables children to recall and analyse events, and to organise them into a meaningful structure (Britton, 1970; Tough, 1977).

The patterns of organisation that underlie young children's spoken monologues are not suited to the development of complex compositional written skills that the more skilled writer is capable of performing. Although young children are able to produce complex oral narratives, there are additional skills characteristic of writing that have to be developed to gain some degree of fluency and control of the substance and form of writing. The advantage of oral monologue is that it provides an opportunity to develop some of the skills of composing, such as planning, selecting information and organising ideas, which are necessary for writing. Children acquire these skills in the educational environment in which they are situated. The works of Britton and his colleagues (1975), Graves (1975, 1983), Barnes (1976) and King and Rentel (1979) are among those studies that have had far-reaching effects on our understanding of writing in the primary school.

A consideration of the relationship between oral and written language is an important factor in the research that I undertook for this study, which involved

discussing with children their criteria and their written texts. In the early years, the children were in the transitional stage of recording their speech in written form.

For the remainder of the discussion on writing research, the focus is on the written component of language, as in the visual representations children depict on a writing surface. I begin with the first early signs of writing ability.

### **3.4 Studies of the Beginnings of Children's Writing**

The traditional view that literacy learning (reading and writing) begins in school is no longer regarded as a plausible theory. Studies show that children begin experimenting with writing and reading well before they meet literacy instruction in school. Research in the homes of families of all income levels provides descriptions of home literacy (Bissex, 1980; Heath, 1983; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Sulzby, Teale & Kamberelis, 1989; McNaughton, 1995). Insights derived from these studies and other early childhood studies have given some understanding of children's development as writers.

There is evidence to suggest (for example, Dyson, 1982b; Newkirk, 1982; Klein, 1985; Sulzby, 1985; Morrow, 1989; Rowe, 1994) that in literate societies the following factors are evident:

- Awareness of a writing system and experimenting with writing begin early in life
- Children arrive at school with emergent theories about what language is, about what writing is, and about how to learn
- Writing can take many forms, and choosing a particular form to convey a message is apparent in preschool years

- Cultural ways and socially structured features combine to shape children's early experiences in reading and writing, as they interact with adults in ongoing recurrent practices
- Children can make decisions about composing a message, and about narrative, before they can write in conventional form

These insights have given impetus to investigations that have furthered our understanding of children's awareness of the writing system. It is now generally believed that most children enter the classroom in Preparatory Year with knowledge of and a desire to learn more about writing. Whether this attitude continues throughout their school life is debatable.

Two overlapping perspectives on children's writing can be distinguished in research studies. One perspective portrays the individual as his or her own teacher, who observes from the social environment the purposes for writing, as in the writing of shopping lists, telephone messages, and cards for special occasions. They imitate with little or no instruction. In this perspective the child's mind is thought to interact with the information and structures provided by the immediate environment. Guided and supported by idiosyncratic thinking and the use of language, the individual is believed to have the power 'to abstract, hypothesize, construct, and revise' (Bissex, 1980:101). Development as a reader/writer is not dependent entirely upon the influences of home and/or school.

The second perspective focuses on the development of writing in the social context. This perspective builds upon research studies that demonstrate that the home and the classroom are important contexts in which children learn to write. In both these environments there is interaction with peers and with adults. Opportunities to make

meaning, the one-to-one interaction children have with certain adults, and the type and nature of adult interaction with children combine to provide an important key to early language learning (Snow & Ferguson, 1977; Bruner, 1983; Wells, 1986; McNaughton, 1995). These findings are similar to those expressed by Vygotsky (1978) that learning is motivated by 'mind-in-society' between and among people and those who mediate our relationships to ourselves, and with each other and the world. Vygotsky considers that cognitive and social elements are central to an understanding of children's development as writers. That the mental activity of writing grows out of the cultural context as much as the individual's head is a central concept of Vygotsky: learning is immersed in and affected by one's culture (Vygotsky, 1962; 1978).

In the discussion that follows, I review studies of children's development as writers. In her pioneering work on early writing, Clay (1975) collected writing products and analysed them for organisational patterns. She then categorised her findings as 'concepts' or 'principles', which she termed recurring, directional, generating, inventing, or contrastive.

DeFord (1980) did a study of children aged from two to seven years. She observed a movement that evolved as a form of communication represented by and encompassing scribble, drawing, or a mixture of symbols and letters to more differentiated communication that included concepts of letters and words. DeFord includes in her framework the concepts of uniformity, symmetry, left-to-right motion and directionality (1980:162).

An outcome of these studies, particularly those of Clay and DeFord, is Sulzby's (1985) framework, which distinguishes five important features about early writing, which she categorises as follows:

- Scribble
- Drawing
- Non-phonetic letter strings
- Phonetic ('invented') spelling
- Conventional orthography

These attempts to write are variously interpreted as play, experimentation, imitation, and more recently, a way of communicating a message, which implies there is meaning in the writing. It is quite possible that children engage in all four interpretations at different times.

#### ***3.4.1. Early Signs of Writing: Scribble***

The first visible sign most children make on paper or other surfaces appears to be a form of scribble that springs from an intent to communicate and which suggests the 'messages' carry meaning (Miltz, 1980; Gardner, 1983; Dyson, 1986a). Vygotsky (1962) suggests that even before children scribble on a surface they communicate a human need through the symbol of gesture. According to Vygotsky, the pretend games children play, using gesture and speech, acquire meaning and as such they form a link between gesture and written language.



The visible scribble that appears later in their development is considered by Vygotsky as 'meaningless and undifferentiated squiggles' that a child makes as an aid to recall - meaningless in the sense that it bears no resemblance to conventional writing. However, when there is interaction, the child tends to interpret the 'squiggles' as though they contain a message. Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984: 18) define scribble as 'writing'. They claim the scribble serves to record semantic meaning for the writer. Meaning is already embedded in the discourse and context of culture.

Another line of thought assumes that the primary pleasure young children derive from scribbling is that of movement, or 'motor pleasure'. However, Kellogg (1970) dismisses the notion put forward that the purpose for scribble is a 'meaningless muscular activity'. Kellogg's investigations show that over time many children between the ages of three and five can differentiate between two functions of scribble. One function, when children produce random scribble, is imitating the action of adults. The second function of scribble is to convey a message, also in scribble, but the child is dependent upon adult interaction to help decipher the message. Whichever the function intended, through scribbling children begin to explore a system about which they have no knowledge other than that gleaned from observations in the social environment of the movements of older people.

Scribble varies in its formation, as Kellogg discovered in her studies of over a million copies of early scribble. She identified twenty basic scribbles, which she grouped into six categories: no line movement (dots), vertical, horizontal, diagonal, circular, and alternating. The consistent patterns that developed confirmed her belief that scribble has meaning for two critical operations of intelligence: reading and writing. Although these markings are part of a non-conventional and non-phonetic

writing system (Goodman, 1986), they are representative of messages that the child has composed and communicated to an audience. As children continue to learn and develop, their scribble begins to include distinctive features of the culturally elaborated writing system to which they are exposed (Kellogg, 1970; Clay, 1975; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Morrow, 1989). From the scribble stage, children advance to drawing to convey ideas and messages.

### *3.4.2. Drawing as a Form of Communication*

In the study of children's pictorial work, there are two different perspectives. One perspective is an artistic view (Arnheim, 1969; Kellogg, 1970). The other perspective relates to a child's development of writing (Clay, 1982; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Sulzby, Teale & Kamberelis, 1989). Kellogg's (1970) analyses of early scribbles demonstrated that scribble is not fixed and immutable. Rather, early pictorial representations of humans, animals, and buildings evolve from scribbling (Kellogg, 1970:248).

In a controlled situation, Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) examined the distinctions three-year-old children made between writing and drawing. The children, who were drawn from low and middle-income families, were asked to write or draw their names and then to draw a picture of themselves. The researchers detected differences in the children's scribbles depending on whether the child had been asked to write or to draw. Relying on semiotics and Vygotskian theory to interpret their findings, Harste, Woodward and Burke concluded that children have a schema for writing that includes both writing and art (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984:36).

Sulzby, Teale and Kamberelis (1989) replicated the work of Harste, Woodward and Burke with two-year-old children and found that the children used the terms 'draw' and 'write' interchangeably. In this study the children did not draw first and then attempt to write, as drawing and writing did not follow in any order. (See for example, Clay 1975). Sulzby, Teale and Kamberelis concluded the children were learning to distinguish different kinds of markings into two representation systems - drawing and writing. As Sulzby points out in an earlier study:

*Pre-schoolers know the difference between drawing and writing, but they still use drawing as a form of writing and speak in ambiguous ways about whether drawing can be writing. (1985: 190).*

Newkirk (1982) also concludes that children write and draw interchangeably. Similarly, Dyson (1982a) found that kindergarten children use letters and pictures interchangeably to represent their ideas. However, drawing comes to have less importance in the composing process as the writer learns to plan internally.

Other researchers focus on meaning-making in children's drawings, which, they claim, are an integral part of their writing. Influenced by the work of Arnheim (1969), Goodnow (1977) investigated young children's drawing and its relationship to writing with a view to understanding more fully the underlying thought processes involved in their graphic work. She drew evidence from the drawings of her two children, and from the drawings of Australian and American pre-schoolers, that there are conceptual links between drawing pictures, copying geometric shapes, and printing numbers and letters. Goodnow concluded that graphic work is truly 'visible thinking', displaying features of all problem-solving (Goodnow, 1977: 154).

The participants in Hubbard's (1989) study of 'visual thinking' were Grade 1 children in an American classroom who were more advanced in their writing development than most pre-schoolers. Hubbard was not concerned about transition from drawing to writing. She noted how children use dimensions such as time, space, movement, and colour in their drawings. Her systematic exploration of the visual and verbal symbol systems that young children create in the process of writing and reading is significant in that it supports Vygotsky's (1962) notion that words alone are secondary in shaping thought.

### ***3.4.3. Non-Phonetic Letter Strings***

Children's drawing and writing in the early years has been found to include experimentation with letter forms, which they explore along with scribble and drawing (Kellogg, 1970). Children 'create' words by stringing together any letters they happen to know so that they look like words (Clay, 1975; Genishi & Dyson, 1984; Gunderson & Shapiro, 1988; Strickland & Morrow, 1989). These non-words vary in length and incorporate letters that are part of the child's name, or letters remembered from popular advertisements and environmental print. However, Ferreiro (1984:155) considers that to copy letters is to 'draw letters and is really not writing'. Nevertheless, Ferreiro is observant of developmental changes in early writing. In an earlier study, Ferreiro (1978) concluded that young children make 'discoveries' about writing, and that they shift to new hypotheses as their current ones conflict with written structures they encounter, as they go through the process of inventing and comparing their inventions with conventional writing.

Various theories about writing one's name as part of the process of learning to write are put forward by researchers. Children's early attempts to write a word are shown

in the writing of names (Durkin, 1966; Clark, 1976; McNaughton, 1995). For pre-schoolers, writing one's name provides a firm basis for developing general writing expertise and in some cultures, for example, Maori and Samoan, learning to write one's name is expected of children before learning to identify the letters of the alphabet (McNaughton, 1995:141). A child's name is often the first word that he or she can write and that can be deciphered. As Sulzby, Teale, and Kamberelis (1989) point out, writing one's name has significance for the child in that it shows 'ownership of things' and is an important way of being 'empowered' in the process of becoming a literate person.

Children learn to write their names by memorising the letters and the spatial arrangement (Dyson, 1991), or by negotiating with adults about what information to take in and what to reject (Ferreiro, 1984). Decades before researchers began to take interest in children's writing, Hildreth (1936) made similar comments about children's ability to write their names. In a case study, McNaughton (1995: 38) analysed his child's developing skill as he learnt to write his name. Before the child was two years old he was unable to write his name. By the time the child was two years and nine months old he was able to write his name, unaided.

Chomsky (1972) relates how a three-year-old spontaneously began making letter combinations and pronouncing them, and by this means learnt by rote to spell his name correctly. He selected the information he needed from the television series *Sesame Street*. According to Schickedanz (1984, cited in McNaughton, 1995: 134-5), when children use strings of random and ordered letters to 'create' words, one of which might be their own name, they are beginning to accept the arbitrary nature of words, even though the words written do not resemble conventional words.

Different environments provide different information for children, which they use

when constructing a word. This also suggests that products will be unique because of varied experiences among children, and may even influence the kind of evaluations they make about their work.

#### **3.4.4. *Phonetic ('Invented') Spelling***

The influence of Piagetian developmental theory (see Chapter 2: 2.2.3.2) is evident in the work of American researchers (Chomsky, 1972; Read, 1975; Bissex, 1980; DeFord 1980; Henderson & Beers, 1980; Graves, 1981) who provide evidence of young children 'inventing' spelling. 'Invented' spelling is a systematic but unconventional way of spelling words that children use by going through several levels of understanding before being instructed in the conventional system. Read (1975) claims that children's spelling tends to reflect quite systematically the underlying phonological structure of speech, demonstrating linguistic sophistication and auditory acuity.

A replication and expansion of Read's (1975) investigation conducted by Schickedanz (1984, cited in McNaughton, 1995:139-401) describes seven stages of children's strategy development when 'creating' or 'inventing' words: physical relationship, visual design, syllabic hypothesis, letter strings (visual rules), authority based, early phonemic, and transitional phonemic. Ferreiro (1984) posits that this kind of exploration of letter forms is problematic. Ferreiro's evidence comes from a study of pre-schoolers' work, when they wrote random letters representing 'writing'. This stage preceded the stage when letters with conventional sound value as in 'invented' spelling were written. Ferreiro concluded that identifying a letter or a string of letters as writing does not solve the problems children encounter when learning to write. Ferreiro considers that two processes are at work simultaneously

when learning to write. One process is trying to understand separate elements of the writing system, and the other process is learning about the nature of the system and how to integrate the elements. The child is really 'trying to find the frontier that differentiates drawing from writing' (Ferreiro, 1984:155).

### **3.4.5 Theories about Learning to Write**

Assumptions are made about specific social and cultural factors as influential in children's acquisition of writing skills. One assumption is that young children acquire insights about writing through hearing written language read aloud. This theory suggests that books play an important part in the development of early literacy (Holdaway, 1979; Heath, 1982; Teale, 1984). Researchers argue that if children have extensive repetitive experiences with a range of favourite books, they will learn about the conventional registers of written language (Smith, 1982).

Purcell-Gates (1988) identified syntactic and lexical expectations of written narrative in 20 kindergarten and 20 second grade children whom she classified as 'well-read-to' children.

Researchers have also studied early writing in the tradition of various cultures. Heath's (1983) well-known study of three communities in the Piedmont Carolinas explored links between culture and cognition. McNaughton (1995) examined what children and their families do with written language in the home. The longitudinal two-year study of 17 children and their families in a New Zealand setting revealed that literacy had its roots in the informal reading and writing practices that were shared with all members of the family in the home. The social interaction of everyday activities was found to provide important sources for learning. From this study, McNaughton derived the 'socialisation model of emergent literacy' (p.2).

A common theme running through the investigations suggests that, even without formal instruction, children are aware that there is a writing system, that the system is functional, and that they can learn about it by experimenting with different forms such as scribble, drawing, strings of letters and 'invented' spelling. While this 'writing' may bear no visual resemblance to actual print, it is an important component in the child's journey towards becoming a literate person.

These studies provide valuable information about learning to write, which is applicable to the children in this research study when they were in Preparatory Year (Prep.) and Year 1. However, none of these studies mentions young children's ability to make critical judgments on their own work. This study focuses on children's capacity for self-evaluation. One of its aims is to investigate at what stage in their development children are able to critically evaluate their own written texts.

### **3.5 Studies of More Advanced Forms of Writing.**

The studies reviewed in the preceding section focused on the development of writing in young children. Klein (1985: 4-5) comments that this early writing is often interpreted as 'writing-as-mechanical-act' (knowledge and formation of letters and words) and 'writing-as-conceptual-act' (a communicative or expressive skill for sharing ideas and thoughts). With the exception of studies such as those by Graves (1975), Bissex (1980) and Calkins (1983), few contemporary studies deal with the writing processes of children in the middle and later years of primary school. Where the focus has been on primary school children, the studies are descriptive, often lacking in a theoretical basis for the findings. Numerous studies of adolescent writing, on the other hand, show that the act of writing involves a great deal of problem-solving, thinking, perception and use of language. Evidence of these processes can be discerned in the writing produced in the middle and later years of



primary school, where there is a gradual movement away from the early writing discussed in the preceding section to the processes involved in more advanced writing. These processes include prewriting, drafting, revising and editing in preparation for a reader. In this section I have selected for discussion studies that focus on the topics that are relevant to the middle and later years of primary school.

The most influential research studies that have contributed to an understanding of the writing process were conducted by Emig (1971) in North America, and by Britton et al. (1975) in Britain. Although Britton and his colleagues and Emig worked independently, their investigations reveal that they shared key ideas about the way a written text was produced (Durst & Newell, 1989). The participants in the two studies were secondary students. However, the findings provide valuable insights that can be applied to writing in the primary school.

Emig (1971) interviewed eight Year 12 students about their writing and has provided a detailed case history of one student, which includes think-aloud protocols of the writing processes, mentioned earlier in the chapter. From a different perspective, Britton et al. (1975) examined the texts written by British students aged between 11 and 18. They identified three text genres along a continuum: expressive (writing for an intimate friend), transactional/expository (written for a less personal audience, such as the teacher), and poetic (written for oneself). Britton et al.'s terminology partly parallels that of Emig, although they use three categories while Emig uses two: reflexive writing and extensive writing.

Britton et al.'s model, however, met with criticism from a number of researchers, including Emig, who is critical of the category 'expressive'. She argues that 'expressive' cannot be separated from 'transactional' and 'poetic' writing as an

alternative. Bereiter (1980) offered five 'possible stages in writing development', which can be ordered differently from Britton's model. A stage is simply a form of organisation that precedes or is followed by other forms, and has nothing to do with Piagetian stages.

Despite criticisms, two important themes emerged from the landmark studies of Britton and Emig. One idea is that the process of writing depends upon the text or genre. The other theme is that to study writing one needs to examine writers at work.

Direct contact and extended observations of the children themselves enabled Graves (1975) to reach conclusions relating to development, in his investigation of the writing processes of seven-year-old children. Together with the ideas of Graves, the themes from the works of Britton and Emig have been influential in the teaching of writing in primary and secondary schools. Britton et al.'s (1975) work in language and learning and their interpretation of Vygotsky's writings have been particularly useful.

There appears to be general agreement among researchers (Murray, 1978; Flower & Hayes, 1981a and 1981b; Emig, 1983; Graves, 1983; Boomer, 1985 and others) that writing is a cyclical, recursive process. As Boomer (1985) points out, there are complex strategies which writers must apply in the process of producing a piece of writing. One of these strategies is revising the text while in the process of composing, which Hilgers (1986) refers to as 'implicit evaluation'.

Murray (1978) describes the process in three stages: rehearsing (which involves collecting data and making preliminary plans for what one is going to say), drafting, and revising. Murray also refers to the three stages as 'prevision, vision, and

revision' (p. 86). This tripartite division or three-stage model for composing established by various researchers is expressed in terms such as 'prewriting', 'writing' and 'rewriting' (Rohman, 1965), or 'planning', 'transcribing', and 'reviewing' (Flower & Hayes, 1981a).

Boomer (1985) prefers the terms 'exploring', 'composing', and 'evaluating'. He agrees that different terms may be used by teachers to describe each stage of the composing process. However, he argues that there is little dissension about the kind of activities that belong to each stage. According to Murray, (1978), these activities are part of a continuing cycle, with the writer collecting information, connecting bits and parts to create a whole text, writing a draft or drafts, and reading what has been written.

The activities that Murray describes do not proceed in a linear sequence. Rather, they are recursive. Not only do writers plan, write, then revise; they also revise, plan, and then write. The recursive quality of composing led some researchers to focus exclusively on revision as a central and important part of writing. However, they do so in quite different ways (Murray, 1979; Perl, 1979; Bereiter, 1980; Bridwell, 1980; Nold, 1981).

Beach (1992: vii) outlines the directions taken by researchers in regard to revision. Some have counted changes in language use within and between drafts. Others have studied the self-assessing process, or looked at the dissonance between goals and texts, or examined revision in the social context of the classroom or peer-conference interactions.

There is disagreement, however, about whether the term 'revision' refers to the product, that is, the changes that are made, or to the process that authors go through

in their minds as they compose, or to both (Fitzgerald, 1992: 483). The manner in which revision is understood by expert and novice writers has also been explored and has relevance for this study. Studies (for example Perl, 1979) show that experienced writers are willing to revise their writing and, in this revision, are likely to find or invent new ideas, which they develop. Novice or less experienced writers use revision for clarification of ideas or to find the 'right words' (Stallard, 1979; Sommers, 1980).

Perl (1979) argues that the single most important factor in successful writing is to allow for the recursive quality of composing by re-reading the text as one produces it, waiting for a 'felt sense' of structure to emerge and guide planning. Both Perl and Murray (1978) found that revision is often confused with editing and proof reading, as students focus more on mechanics than on the content or on communicating meaning to the reader.

Murray's (1978) focus is on composing and on the central role that revision plays in the quality of writing. He posits that writers use language as 'a tool of exploration to see beyond what they know', and, in the process, they discover meaning (1978:87). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the notion of discovery is not seen to be a single, isolated, straightforward event but is contained in a long process of rehearsing, drafting, and revising over and over again until the writer's meaning is found and made clear (Murray, 1978:4). Flower & Hayes (1980) argue that writers don't *find* meanings; they *make* them (original emphasis). To some extent, both terms are plausible as they eventually lead to a 'discovery' of meaning.

Calkins (1980) found that third grade children had no problem deciding whether to rewrite a piece. The difficulty came in knowing what to do when they revise.

Graves (1975; 1983) argues that the same factors observed in revision behaviour in older students can be identified in primary school children, and that the 'tool of revision' is part of the children's learning style. The six-year-old children in Graves' study (1975) did not revise their writing, but revision patterns were noticeable in their drawings and paintings. Eventually this skill of revision transferred to their writing. According to Graves, the first glimpse of revision occurs when the child changes a letter in a word and replaces it with a different letter. In addition to this observation, children also change a lower case letter to upper case, or vice-versa, or note such things as the omission of the dot above the letter 'i'. I take up the issue of revision in Chapter 5.

In his studies of younger children, Vygotsky does not make use of labels such as 'expert' and 'novice' to describe development of writing. He uses the terms 'actual developmental level' and the level of 'potential development' (Vygotsky, 1978).

His idea of discovery is that of evolution:

*... writing grows out of the young child's discovery that he or she is able not only to draw objects and other things of interest but also to write words (1978: 48).*

The children in this study could aptly be described as 'novice' writers. However, Vygotsky's description of 'actual' and 'potential' capabilities is the preferred term for it takes into account children's maturational and cognitive development, important characteristics to take note of in children at primary level.

The general consensus of the writers reviewed is that composing processes are complex and recursive. A conclusion drawn from these studies, most of which were conducted among secondary and college students, is the importance of ensuring that

students are given time to rethink, to respond to hunches and techniques that trigger revision, together with a strong sense of the audience for whom one is writing (Bizzell, 1986: 58). Bizzell's propositions are of equal importance to primary students who, also, are capable of revising a text and need time to rethink and to respond to useful techniques.

In the final section of the writing strand, I discuss writing pedagogies that informed classroom practice from the late-1970s to the 1990s.

### **3.6 Significant Writing Pedagogies in the Primary School**

As a result of research studies in cognition and in the acquisition and use of language, a number of important developments in the teaching of writing took place from the late-1970s to the 1990s: the process-conference approach; the genre approach; the issue of critical literacy and the whole language concept. I discuss each of these approaches and their relevance in the classroom in the sections that follow.

The rapid changes in writing pedagogy that occurred in less than two decades created difficulties for teachers as they sought to understand competing ideologies and align these with their personal values and beliefs. They adopted practices based on early language learning, writing development and a sociocultural approach, theories that researchers assume will work. However, the onus is on teachers to make these practices work, because they are held accountable for their students' achievements and for literacy development.

It seems that no one approach to writing operates in its entirety as a single ideology. Although teachers may give more weight to one approach than to another, they tend

to draw from different 'progressive' approaches, as well as from the 'traditional' notion of literacy, what they consider to be useful for writing instruction.

### ***3.6.1 The 'Process-Conference' Approach***

In Chapter 1, I made brief mention of one of the most influential of research studies in the composing process and writing pedagogy - the work of Graves (1975; 1983; 1984) and his colleagues. The process-conference pedagogy that evolved was an advance on the 'traditional' skills-based approach to writing. This new approach could be described as a personal growth model and the ideas were associated with 'whole language', a concept discussed later in the chapter. This approach to writing involved interaction between four essential elements: writer, reader, subject, and the craft of writing (Walshe, 1981; 1982). The teachers' aim was to help children attain mastery of all the components of the process. Teaching writing meant, largely, providing favourable conditions for students to learn to write. The approach allowed children space and provided encouragement to express themselves. According to Graves (1984), the conference is the heart of the writing program. It takes into account writer variability and idiosyncrasies, and, over time, children develop responsibility for their own writing. Skills are taught in context rather than by performing decontextualised exercises. Graves (1984: 160) explains that in the conference the child does most of the talking and the teacher reflects the child's information back and helps to keep the writer on track.

The conference structure is not a new concept peculiar to the work of Graves. The strategy appears in other studies of writing, such as those of Lee and Rubin (1979), and Murray (1982). However, for teachers at the time the notion of conference was a radical approach to teaching writing. Instead of telling children what to do as in

traditional methodology, they struggled to learn the skills of questioning the child's text as an aid in the process of composing. The children, on the other hand, responded positively to the changes. Writing instruction gave them opportunities to write in different forms - messages, letters, poems, autobiographies, and advertisements. They wrote about personal experiences and used their imaginations and ideas in fiction writing.

The children enjoyed the opportunity the process-conference approach offered to talk about work-in-progress. Learning to write took place in the context of 'social interaction' (Kamler, 1987; Harwayne, 1992). Children learnt to listen with respect to one another's ideas. They also learnt about publishing a story (narrative) for self and for other readers in the classroom. Their published stories resembled the features of a trade book - a firm cover with title, frontispiece and the names of the author and the illustrator. The text was written or typed in single sentences or paragraphs, depending on the content. The last page had information about the author and a photo of him or her.

With narrative as the most popular genre, the children learnt to write sentences fluently and to become more knowledgeable about the writing process. Teachers attempted to extend narrative to descriptive, persuasive and argumentative texts (Britton, 1978), although they experienced some difficulty due to uncertainties about instruction and about the composing process.

The children's concept of story through experience in reading stories and having stories read to them may account for the strong appeal of narrative writing (Applebee, 1978; Rosen, 1986). The extent of their sense of story or internalised



representation of stories affected their ability to retell and create stories of their own composition. Rosen notes that:

*Since we dream in narrative and speak to ourselves in narrative (inner narrative speech), these are pointers to its profound relationship to thought; the narrative forms we master provide genre for thinking with* (1986: 230).

The significant point often overlooked in writing pedagogy is the reference Rosen makes to the thought processes involved in constructing a story and in other forms of writing in which children are instructed. This suggests that narrative has an importance much deeper and broader than the literary values educators and curriculum developers tend to give it. In this learner-centred approach to writing, there is enjoyment in 'creating' a story, a concept that had not been encouraged in the traditional skills-based approach.

The process-conference approach gave new direction to the teaching of writing. It opened up 'a new era in school writing' (Walshe, 1981), and brought about a wave of writing 'reform' in many English-speaking countries, particularly in Australia.

The process-conference approach also brought about a wave of criticism, particularly from Barrs (1983) and systemic functional grammar theorists (Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987). Barcan (1987) described process writing as a 'hazard' and one of a series of pedagogical 'fads and fashions'. He raised a number of objections and suggests one 'remedy' for the predicted low standard of writing would be 'to restore an externally-set exam at the end of primary school in English' (p.33).

Almost a decade later, Power (1995) wrote in defence of process writing from the North American perspective, which had influenced writing pedagogy in Australian schools. Blake (1995), however, gives quite a different assessment from that of Power, noting that the reports of the great success of the process movement had virtually disappeared, leaving a 'strange silence' (p.396).

Blake believes this may be the result of an attitude that teachers know all there is to know about process writing, or, perhaps because they emphasise other pedagogical strategies such as reader responses. Dyson (1992, cited in Blake, 1995) suggests that the 'strange silence' is a reflection of the rigid interpretation teachers gave to the writing process. The steps discussed above (prewriting, writing and postwriting) had become 'so firmly ingrained in students and teachers that consistent pictures are painted of uniform classrooms in which the child writers draft and respond in a sequence of lock-step activities' (p. 396).

The decline in interest and enthusiasm for the process-conference approach in Australian schools was only partly due to the overemphasis on the 'process' as a 'lock-step' method for teaching writing. Teachers appeared to have difficulty in grasping the concept of the holistic nature of the writing process and the interconnecting concepts or systems that define its nature. The model required change in understandings about writing and the teaching of writing to young children. A simplistic sequence of writing development is not possible because of the intricacies of the process and the uniqueness of the writer. Paradoxically, the children had no difficulty in adjusting to change. In a sense, conflict in the classroom came about because of the teachers' inability to meet the needs of the children.

Such change had implications for classroom management, the importance of which was never fully understood and contributed in some way to misconceptions about the craft of writing and the purpose of the conference. Furthermore, an inadequate amount of time was available for continuity in professional development in order to absorb an innovation described by Walshe (1981) as a 'revolution'. Hence, most teachers never really came to terms with the implications of the new model. The apparent laissez-faire approach towards 'correct' writing, particularly with regard to spelling, caused disquiet among parents. The perception, fostered in the media, that process writing was linked to a decline in literacy standards (Barcan, 1987) did little to assuage anxiety about the best way to teach process writing. To stem the tide of illiteracy, predicted to occur because of process writing, policies regarding teacher accountability emerged. These policies were instrumental in a return to a more prescriptive curriculum. The development of the policies was influenced by systemic functional linguists who argued that process writing limited the range of text types or genres which children were taught. They claimed that the approach disadvantaged students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and those of non-English speaking backgrounds. They argued that these students needed explicit instruction in order to achieve writing competence. This issue is discussed more fully in the next section.

Since the euphoria of the 1980s, and probably because of mounting criticism of his work, Graves (1994) has modified his views on the process-conference approach with regard to the teacher's role. He focuses on conferences in a context different from his earlier writings. He is aware of the essentials of teaching writing and in this regard encourages teachers to be more directive in their teaching. He advises them to encourage their students to be responsible writers and take ownership over

what they write. To be able to take responsibility for their own writing, however, requires an environment in which students can read, criticise, question and revise their own texts.

Graves' advice was long overdue. It is not clear how well it has been received and practised.

### ***3.6.2 Genre-Based Approach to Writing***

The process-conference approach to writing, and the emphasis on narrative writing in particular, was a contentious issue among Australian systemic linguists like Kress (1994) and Martin, Christie, & Rothery, (1987). Martin (1984) claimed that narrative, or genres of personal experience, were too dominant in the primary school, implying that teachers neglected other language forms and features seen as essential for control of the social environment. According to Christie (1988), the first writing children do in schools is observation and recount. Their writing is factual, not narrative. She argues cogently that narrative is not a natural tendency. Rather, teaching practices encourage children to produce narratives. Learning to write is a matter of learning 'to create a genre appropriate to various contexts and to the kinds of meanings which are to be realised as part of those contexts' (Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987:84). Kress identifies the major school genres as 'descriptive, scientific, technical, and historical writing' (1994: 99).

Systemic-functional linguists value language as a social product, identifying the relationship between the contexts in which language occurs and the nature of the language used. These linguists refer to genres as social processes because members of a culture interact with each other to achieve them. Genres are socially constructed conventions of writing, which Martin defines as 'a staged, goal oriented

social process' (1984:59). Thus, texts are produced in and determined by social contexts. The language of different forms of writing is patterned differently to create a different overall pattern or 'shape' (Christie, 1988).

Genres have specific linguistic characteristics which are neither fully determined nor largely under the control of individual writers (Kress, 1994). It is the social context, not individual choice, which has the greatest influence on what people say or write (Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987:77).

Genre theorists, as these particular linguists came to be known in Australia, explore the implications of systemic perspectives in language, register and genre for classroom teaching. Halliday (1985a & 1985b), whose work is a major influence in linguistics, defines register as field (content), mode (oral/written) and tenor (relationships between participants). Systemic functional linguists argue that genre theory is a theory of language use. From their perspective, students should develop an awareness of the social purposes, text structure and language features in a range of identified text types or genres. They identify 'narrative', 'report', 'recount' and 'expository' forms as contexts important for primary children to learn. Their focus is on the written product, rather than on the process involved in its production.

The systemic functional school of thought claims that ignorance of genre and language and the dichotomy of meaning and form that sanction the ignorance are a major stumbling block to empowering children as literate members of the community (Martin, Christie and Rothery, 1987:64). Knapp (1995), however, is concerned about another kind of 'stumbling block' - one that the genre approach might create. He claims that the genre theory may result in 'a reductionist theory of language teaching based on a homogenised notion of the social', thus creating

problems in Australian classrooms, which have moved away from uniformity in what children write (Knapp, 1995:35).

According to Christie (1988), genre boundaries must be laid down. Teachers have a responsibility and a 'duty' to teach different ways of shaping knowledge and experiences. The main issue is how genres are learnt (and taught). From a pedagogical stance, Sawyer and Watson (1987) are critical of the assumptions that the theorists make about the teaching of genres. The rigidity of a small and fixed number of genres around which boundaries should be drawn is unacceptable, since writing is now largely regarded and accepted as a continuum.

For some time educators expressed concern regarding how schools should respond to the assumptions of systemic functional linguists. Teachers operated differently from the prescribed list of 'key' genres that Kress (1994) recommended should be taught. A study by Michaels (1985) shows that young children have only a 'vague' sense of the appropriate form. However, this vagueness about a particular genre is transformed and clarified under the pressure of what the writer is trying to communicate. Although they may not be known innately, Michaels suggests that genres do not need explicit instruction in order to be known. This finding is not a convincing one for genre theorists, who argue for explicit teaching of genres at an early age when children are more or less exploring the written system of language.

Assumptions about explicit teaching of genre run counter to the notion put forward in the 1970s, and continued during the process movement of the 1980s, that learning is facilitated when young children are allowed to use their own language rather than being forced to conform to the particular language conventions of specific subject areas. This view is illustrated, as mentioned in the account of the process-

conference approach, when children compose their own stories, a genre they have begun to internalise from hearing stories read to them at an early age, as Britton, (1982) and Rosen (1986) discuss in their work on stories and meaning.

Understanding may be 'vague', as Michaels points out, but is 'transformed' as the writer interacts with the teacher or a peer in the conference approach to writing.

Howe (1994) enters into the debate on the 'best' way to teach writing in the secondary school. He is critical of the flaws in both process and genre approaches. According to Howe, the process approach is as restrictive as the genre approach. Explicit teaching of genres is as much a matter of concern as teaching that is not explicit enough.

Howe argues that the genre approach 'devalues' narrative in schools and therefore 'devalues' the personal experiences of children. The dangers for classroom practice are that the teaching of genres could become mechanistic, and thus generic forms and features would dominate while the ideas or content would be devalued.

Howe posits that emphasis should be placed on how children learn. As a solution to controversial competing ideologies, he advocates a methodology that draws on different strategies to suit different backgrounds and different cognitive styles. Insights and new ideas are left to the judgement, or imagination, of teachers.

Kamler (1994b), however, is critical of Howe's suggested methodology. She argues for 'a new writing pedagogy, which draws productively from process and genre understandings, rather than 'opening up to new ideas' as Howe recommends. 'New ideas' appear to be a hidden agenda, and Kamler is aware of the uncertainty that accompanies new ideas.

Writing practice today appears to be built precariously on random 'insights' and 'new ideas' taken from the process-conference and genre-based approaches to writing and the 'whole language' concept. In the classroom teachers use strategies that they consider promote learning, without always a full understanding of the theoretical underpinnings and the implications thereof. As yet, classroom practice does not derive maximum benefit from the process-conference perspective nor from the genre perspective, and teachers have difficulty in melding the two into a single perspective.

Critical literacy, discussed in the next section, is yet another example of changing pedagogy.

### *3.6.3 The Elusive Concept of Critical Literacy*

Although it is not a new concept, critical literacy emerged as an important issue in the teaching of writing in the 1990s, a time when the focus of research in language and literacy changed. From an emphasis on cognitive psychology the focus moved to sociocultural factors. As discussed in the preceding section, the accent in the 1980s was on the writing process and the skills and subskills involved. Attention then turned to an exploration of the written product, to understand more about how texts illustrate or perpetuate social issues such as culture, gender and class. It meant examining, analysing and challenging how language is used.

This direction led to interest in the context of classroom talk, patterns of interactions between teacher and students, and texts in use in the classroom. 'Critical literacy' is one of the key descriptors now given to literacy and writing development. Other terms used are 'literacy and empowerment', 'literacy and justice' (Edelsky, 1991) and 'explicit teaching' (Delpit, 1988). However, as Comber (1993) points out, there



is no unanimity among educators as to what critical literacy is, or how it is to be constructed. Wilson (1988: 544-545) explains that critical literacy involves more than absorbing information from texts. It requires strategies like questioning texts and comparing the writer's ideas with one's own.

This raises many questions about the teaching of 'high-level' thinking skills. It implies a reader/thinker who has some background knowledge to bring to the thinking task and who knows how to use that knowledge.

Literacy is dependent upon contexts and the nature of different kinds of texts, especially where language is related to power and at the same time to personal experience (Meek, 1991). The concept of texts having a single meaning, however, is now challenged by researchers. The role of the teacher as one who mediates and constructs meaning has also been considered, together with literacy practices that tend to marginalise and silence particular cultural groups.

The concept of whole language, discussed in the next section, is believed to give all students access to the dominant culture regardless of their own culture, gender, socioeconomic status and academic ability. Embedded in this belief is the notion of 'empowerment'. Students who are able to read and write are thought to be better equipped, motivated, or empowered to take part in, suggest, or contribute to making changes in society (Meek, 1991).

Most of the studies on critical literacy come from the tertiary and secondary sectors in education (for example Gee, 1992; Gilbert, 1993; Luke, 1993). Gee and Luke in separate studies argue that no curriculum or pedagogy can be regarded as neutral, because they have the power to shape or distort social practices both in literacy contexts and the wider society. Edelsky (1991) claims there is a deliberate attempt

in society to position thinking about curriculum and teaching into a political context. Hence, her forceful position in advocating the whole language approach. A growing number of researchers believe that students need to be 'empowered' and given control of their writing if it is to be a meaningful experience for them (Emig, 1983; Graves, 1983; Boomer, 1985; Cambourne, 1985; Giroux, 1987).

As I attempted to show in an earlier section of this chapter, researchers have been looking more closely at the types of reading and writing activities that are encouraged in the home in order to trace the roots of literacy (Dyson, 1984a; Morrow, 1989; Sulzby, Teale & Kamberelis, 1989). Investigations of how children learn to write have brought about a new emphasis on the learner's need for social interaction with supportive adults and other children. Nevertheless, there is concern for appropriate curricular activities that will nurture the beginnings of literacy. Theorists studying critical thinking consider that literacy skills and attitudes acquired in the home are not always relevant to what takes place in schools.

Knapp (1995) has reservations about a 'critical' pedagogy in schools. He points out that the critical capacities required by such a pedagogy are more suited to mature adult learners. Furthermore, the idea of imposing this culturally-specific position on working class and minority groups is 'idealistic and in practice, unrealistic' (p.39). The notion is more suited to middle-class society. Giroux (1987) does not agree with Knapp's argument. He argues that in schools literary practices such as writing should encourage critical awareness and action in the world. Giroux considers that the process-conference approach to writing is an approach to critical literacy, because it links 'the nature of learning itself with the dreams, experiences, histories and languages that students bring to the schools' (1987:176).

However, an important issue emerges regarding the availability of critical language. If teachers are to be influential in establishing a critical pedagogy with the intention of empowering their students, they also need to know how classroom social relations are constructed, and, as Giroux points out, how social relations once constructed are 'disseminated, and legitimated in everyday instruction' (1987: 177).

To develop a pedagogy that has student experience as its main focus is a complex matter that involves rethinking the curriculum and developing conditions in the classroom whereby students can make choices and think critically in the belief that they can make a difference in the world. The situation is made more difficult when emphasis is given to standardised testing and 'measuring' knowledge, a point to which Giroux draws attention.

Despite criticisms of critical literacy pedagogies in the primary school and the low expectations held of young children's ability to critically analyse texts, Comber's (1993) exploration of critical literacy in the context of the primary classroom suggests otherwise. He reports on two approaches to critical literacy in the early years of schooling. In the first approach, the teacher formulated questions to elicit opinions about the authors' and illustrators' decisions about what was portrayed in the texts. The routine procedure in most classrooms is to question the children about the characters in the story or the part they like best. From the perspective of critical literacy, the children were invited to show how they understood the writers' constructions of characters and the kind of information writers and publishers believe is appropriate for children. The children also analysed Mother's Day catalogues and junk mail in order to look at a gendered cultural event and its connections with marketing and advertising.

In the second account, dealing with another teacher's approach to critical literacy in a disadvantaged Catholic primary school, Comber describes how the children in a junior primary grade read, analysed and evaluated the texts of short-listed books for the Australian Children's Book Council of Australia. These children, likewise, responded to texts in ways probably never envisaged by adults.

The types of questions the teachers posed about the texts appear to have generated critical thinking, despite the early cognitive development of the students. The teachers did not underestimate the children's ability to think. They sought to develop critical faculties in young learners that led them to question why authors make decisions to represent the world in certain ways.

In the next section I discuss the concept 'whole language', which has influenced writing pedagogy.

#### *3.6.4 Implications of the 'Whole Language' Concept*

Although the whole language concept is not about a new writing pedagogy or a method, I discuss the concept because of its popularity in the primary school.

Whole language is a 'movement' towards establishing 'a theoretical, philosophical and political perspective-in-action' (Edelsky, 1992:325). The concept emerged in the mid-1980s, at the time when the process approach to writing was in use in primary schools. Whole language is a new and popular term that has become part of the literacy debate. According to Goodman (1992), the words 'whole language' came about incidentally as a name and a movement among American teachers and spread to Australian schools.

A basic tenet is that children learn when they are in control of their learning and know that they are in control. Through the functional use of whole language, children are 'empowered' or liberated to learn. Goodman and Goodman (1990) describe learners as capable of learning relatively easily what is relevant and functional for them. The whole language concept provides conditions for learning in a context that embodies a 'complete curricular philosophy' (Goodman, 1992:357).

From the point of view of teaching, the concept is not really original. It can be traced to the early work of Dewey (1904, cited in Goodman, 1992). Dewey deplored political interference that undermined teachers' decisions about what to teach, how to teach and how to assess students' work. The whole language movement in North America has been instrumental in bringing about a new professional dialogue in education (Goodman, 1992:357). Goodman believes that teachers are now forcing policymakers, publishers, teacher educators, test makers and the general public to change their attitude towards teaching. This in turn implies a change in attitude towards how children learn and how to teach reading and writing.

One of the aims in promoting whole language is to 'empower' or liberate teachers in the classroom by giving them more control and power in the way they teach reading and writing. Thus, advocates of whole language are opposed to standardised tests, basal readers as used in North American elementary schools, the drilling of skills, and the overuse of worksheets. Resources for teaching language, which are often influenced by covert political biases and mandated by external authorities, are also under scrutiny. Whole language educators reject behavioural learning theory as 'unscientific and inadequate' for explaining human learning. Goodman (1992) states that the notion of whole language has helped teachers in a number of ways. They

have been able to establish a collaborative rather than a 'conflictive' relationship with their students, thus enabling them to build a community of learners with no 'artificial ceilings and floors, no destructive labelling of learners' (Goodman, 1992: 361).

Whole language educators believe language should be treated as a whole, not as something that can be taken apart and conceptualised in a fragmented way. The concept of fragmentation of language implies that 'good writing is good spelling, good punctuation and good grammar' (Edelesky, 1992:324).

Central to the whole language movement is the notion that all students, regardless of culture, gender, socioeconomic status and academic ability, should have access to opportunities in the society in which they live. Theorists who have a political bias say it is a call for justice in a democratic society. According to Edelsky (1991), the aim is for a collaborative, democratic relationship both between the student and the teacher, and between the student and the texts they create and control (Edelsky, 1991).

Despite the prominence given to whole language, for some time there were no specific guidelines to help teachers achieve what the whole language concept appeared to offer. In Australian schools, the initial application of whole language was somewhat different from the political stance taken by North American teachers. Cambourne (1992) sought to draw different strands of thinking into a more coherent concept in order to establish a sound theoretical base. He identified several broad areas of belief about learning, derived from research in primary schools, which support the notion of whole language. I list these beliefs, which Cambourne (1992:

19) claims are at the 'core' of whole language, in that they shape and guide the way a whole language classroom should operate. Beliefs are about:

- Learning
- How knowledge should be structured and presented so that optimal learning will occur
- The role that process plays in the acquisition and development of literacy
- The relationship between language, thought and learning

These theoretical principles are examined in the light of classroom practices.

Where the principles are recognised, argues Cambourne, teaching and learning in the whole language classroom is not seen to be a 'laissez-faire, non-interventionist, bandwagon trend', as adversaries of the movement suggest.

Proponents of whole language (for example, Goodman, Goodman & Hood, 1989; Goodman, 1992) are supportive of Cambourne's initiative to establish a theoretical base founded on a view of learning distinctly different from the behavioural theories discussed in Chapter 2: 2.2.1. This theory of learning integrates development of language, thinking, and content in what Goodman describes as 'a dual curriculum in which knowledge is built at the same time as thought and language' (Goodman, 1992: 360). The acquisition of knowledge depends on language development.

The conceptualisation of whole language appears to be in accord with the views Vygotsky (1978) put forward in that it enables teachers to build on the social learning theories he advocates and which are discussed in Chapter 2: 2.4. Learning in whole language is seen as active, intelligent, and both personal and social.

Underpinning the whole language movement is the question of how to educate for social justice. Edelsky (1991) points out that educating for social justice is not merely getting students to read and write, but also to make learning 'revolutionary', a Vygotskian term applied to learning. For whole language educators, this is assumed to mean a 'threat to the stability of existing hierarchies' in present-day stratified society. It implies radical change. One interpretation of making learning 'revolutionary' is to assist students to understand what it is to be a critical thinker and to act accordingly. This was the direction taken in the 1990s.

The ideas about whole language and critical thinking are relevant to this research study, which investigates the ability of primary school children to develop as critical thinkers, through the process of self-evaluation of their own texts.

### **3.7 Studies of Self-Evaluation of Writing**

The traditional framework for assessing writing seemed unable to deal with the problems of a new pedagogy. The literature indicates educators have attempted to reconceptualise assessment, to deal with issues that emerged from writing research. Interest increased in the 1980s in the ways in which students may be encouraged to take more responsibility for their own learning, not only to work independently of the teacher, but also to assess their own performance and progress in learning. This is not an entirely new direction. Decades ago, Wheeler (1967: 277) recommended that learners should be involved in evaluating their own learning because 'evaluation is an integral part of the learning process'.

It has taken several decades for Wheeler's foresight to be recognised as an effective way for eliciting information about students' progress and achievement. However, there are still very few coherent and complete theories of self-evaluation of writing



as allied to, or distinct from, the various theories of assessment and evaluation of writing and learning. Despite the dearth of studies, education theorists remind teachers of the importance of self-evaluation, and teachers urge their students 'to take responsibility for their own learning'. In both circumstances the underlying justification for promoting self-evaluation or self-monitoring is not clearly explained and perhaps not understood.

According to Anthony et al. (1991), self-assessment and self-evaluation of learning are 'a vital part of any assessment and evaluation program' (p.5), and 'a key activity in every classroom' (p.53). Goodman (1986: 41) considers that self-evaluation is 'the most useful form of evaluation'. With regard to writing, Graves (1983:152) states that evaluation is an essential component of a writing program and the 'consummation' of the composing process, while Hilgers (1986:36) adds that the ability to make appropriate evaluation is 'the cornerstone upon which rest the successful writer's composing skills'. Despite this affirmation of the importance of self-evaluation, there is little evidence to show that teachers utilise the potential self-evaluation has for learning.

Although the main focus of a study carried out in British schools by Wilkinson et al. (1980) is not self-evaluation, it is nevertheless important. Wilkinson et al. explored new possibilities for analysing children's writing, taking into account factors other than only linguistic features. The authors devised a multi-dimensional evaluative model on four planes and based on a broad view of personal development: cognitive, affective, moral, and stylistic. Their study addresses the involvement of the writer in manipulating language at various points in the process of writing. It bears resemblance to the notion of 'revolutionary activity' and the qualitative shifts in thinking that interested Vygotsky.

Several studies in North America investigated self-assessment and self-evaluation of writing among high school or college students, and ESL (English as a Second Language) students, who comprise a significant proportion of the whole school community.

Beach (1989) describes a study he carried out with high school students that focused on the differences in the effects of teacher evaluation, guided self-evaluation and no evaluation on the drafts the students wrote. He found that student self-evaluation did not improve writing. Teacher evaluation and correction of drafts during the process of writing had a positive effect on writing quality. Beach concludes that students need to be taught how to evaluate their writing.

Beach (1989) also discusses a second study he conducted at a higher academic level, which identified the need students have for understanding the purpose of evaluation. He argues that evaluation comes about through revision of rough drafts. His emphasis is on 'self-assessment', the technique Beach prefers and recommends for making appropriate revisions to rough drafts.

Probst (1989) makes observations similar to those of Beach regarding revision. He concludes that for students to become effective as their own evaluators they must become skilful readers of their own drafts. They also need teacher response in the conference setting when in the process of writing drafts.

In the literature, the terms 'postwriting' (Graves, 1975), 'revision' (Murray, 1978), and 'evaluation' (Boomer, 1985) are used as synonymous terms that involve skilful reading of one's own texts. Whatever term is used, there is general agreement that evaluation is central to the composing process. Evaluation in this context is about re-reading, distinguishing inappropriate language or structure and making changes.

Graves (1983), whose research focuses on the writing development of elementary children, describes, metaphorically, this composing behaviour ('evaluation' or 'revision') as 'noticing ideas in the shadows that demand further attention' (p.152). This kind of evaluation occurs during the process of writing, as the writer makes decisions about what kind of information is needed and where that information fits into the text. While most people are familiar with this process of evaluation, there is little evidence to show what criteria primary children value in the completed text. This research study attempts to discover some of the features that primary school children regard as important in their own pieces of writing.

Rief's (1992) study is notable for the derivation of criteria, a feature that is not mentioned in earlier studies. Rief describes how she evaluates her eighth grade students' growth as writers. The students determine their own criteria and evaluate their own writing. Rief compares the students' criteria with the external criteria she has imposed on the contents of the students' portfolios. Rief argues that the students' criteria derive from their reading, which is a central feature of her classroom. Although the procedures for eliciting criteria are different, Reif's research is pertinent to this study in that the students evaluate their own work.

Evaluation conferences are an important component of Atwell's (1986) classroom. Atwell gives an account of how she plans evaluation conferences for her eighth grade students. She attempts to overcome the constraints of a traditional reporting system by involving the students in individual interviews. The interviews give the students an opportunity to reflect on the writing and on themselves as writers.

In separate Australian studies, Moss (1981) and Arnold (1991) focus on assessment and evaluation issues. Moss examined the written and spoken comments teachers

made during the acts of assessment. He concludes that students are often confused by the 'stock language of assessment' and the widespread use of non-specific, generalised, and loosely worded comments that are intended to be encouraging (Moss, 1981: 63).

While self-evaluation is not the main focus of Moss' study, the findings support the observations discussed in Chapter 1, that is, teachers' comments and rewards do not always inform writers about how to solve problems regarding the construction of their texts. This is the specific guidance that students want, as Beach (1989) and Probst (1989) point out.

In order to test the proposition that self-expressive, reflective writing tasks would promote students' writing development, Arnold (1983; 1991) used a psychodynamic theory of writing development in her four-year, longitudinal study of 35 students from Year 6 to Year 9. Inherent in the psychodynamic model is an interest in the mind of the writer at work, not just an interest in the texts they produce. The theory takes into account the cognitive, physical, and psychological aspects of writing development.

Arnold's study does not focus on self-evaluation of completed writing, but it does embody concepts that identify with the process of self-evaluation. Arnold devised an assessment scheme consisting of descriptive categories: audience, purpose, thinking, feeling, and language. She used these categories for the marking of the end-of-year and across-the-year writing tasks. A group of reliable and trained raters assessed the writing.

According to Arnold, the descriptive categories provided more reliable evidence than that gleaned from the method of holistic or impression marking. A prime

objective for authentic writing in schools, she believes, is 'the writer's recognition of the special self-enhancing abilities released by, and symbolised by, such [expressive, reflective] writing' (Arnold, 1983: 72).

The studies discussed so far focus on adolescents and young adults. However, there are educators who think that even young children can and should be engaged in evaluation (Gipps, 1994:128-129). Several studies of children as writers (for example Graves, 1975; Bissex, 1980; Dyson, 1983; Childers & Lamme, 1983) suggest that evaluation can also occur among beginning writers.

Kellogg (1970) observed self-evaluation in pre-schoolers' scribble when the children made decisions as to which scribble was playful and experimental 'writing', and which scribble was intended by the child to convey a message. Kellogg recognised the partial knowledge young children have about writing, that is, they know when and why writing should be used, although their understanding is naive when compared to the more experienced writer.

Children's partial or 'conditional' knowledge is termed by several educators as 'metacognition' (Cazden, 1972; Wertsch, 1978; Flavell, 1979; Brown, 1985).

Metacognition, as the term is generally used, refers to the conscious monitoring of one's cognitive strategies. According to Brown (1985), what flows from metacognitive processes are skills applied to activities that fit into two categories:

(1) activities that are concerned with conscious reflections on one's cognitive abilities; and (2) activities that are concerned with self-regulatory mechanisms.

Metacognitive reflection might also be called 'evaluation' as children think about what they know about their writing and, perhaps, how they learnt particular strategies.

A study of third grade children by Calkins (1980) takes on a perspective different from the studies discussed above. Calkins considers critical ability as the making of choices when criteria conflict with each other. She notes:

*Choices emerge from tension - between writing for information and writing for grace, between inclusion and focus, between intended meaning and discovered meaning (p.340).*

Calkins observed that the criteria the children used emerged in the process of writing their own texts. Graves (1975) also detected similar tensions about criteria in second grade children when they were asked to pick out their best work. Their behaviour indicated that the children juggled with criteria to determine qualitative differences in their work.

Research studies carried out by Newkirk (1982) and Hilgers (1984; 1986) with elementary children in North American schools have contributed important insights on self-evaluation. In a study of a group of first grade children, Newkirk (1982) refers to the children as 'critical readers' of the texts they composed. His findings show that young children are able to make critical judgments about their writing. According to Newkirk, at first the judgments are 'proto-critical', or reactions to written language, and to a variety of associated elements of the text, for example, the picture, spelling, handwriting or the experience.

As fluency in writing develops, however, so do critical reading skills. Children make decisions about information they wish to include in the text and the language to express their ideas. Newkirk argues that this ongoing process of inquiry helps to generate changes the children think need to be made in the text. This type of behaviour develops into the skill of reading their own work critically. A similar

point is made explicitly in Probst's (1989) study, and implicitly in Rief's (1992) study, discussed earlier in this section.

Hilgers' (1984) study concerns the way writers, particularly beginning writers, develop critical standards and how they learn evaluative skills. The children in this study did not evaluate their own writing. Hilgers provided them with three pieces of children's writing, and asked them to evaluate it in various ways. In developing a taxonomy of evaluative statements, Hilgers found that young children are capable of first-level or low order evaluations, that is, evaluations about visual features and personal experiences. From the findings of this study, Hilgers suggests that the ability to make evaluations is a function of cognitive development plus training. Beach (1989) arrived at a similar conclusion.

Hilgers' (1986) second study focused on children's ability to critically evaluate their own writing. Four children were observed from second year to fourth year. The participants discussed the quality of their own writing and performed other evaluative tasks. The findings of the study indicate that evaluation does not occur in isolation but is intimately connected to the writing process. Hilgers deduced that children are capable of applying several criteria to their writing. He also found that the range of criteria expanded over time.

The texts produced by young children clearly differ from those of more experienced writers at high school and tertiary levels, in their knowledge of text structure and use of language. However, the studies mentioned indicate that the ability to evaluate one's own writing extends to young children.

The researchers provide insights into young children's capacity for self-evaluation. However, there are still unanswered questions. We know very little about how

children become skilled in using evaluative criteria and how they put evaluations to practical use. Do teachers see self-evaluation merely as another device for reporting progress to parents? Are they prepared to trust their students by creating an environment in which self-evaluation is the norm rather than the exception? Furthermore, although self-evaluation of reading and writing is fostered in Australian classrooms, there are no studies of primary school children comparable to those discussed in this section. This research study attempts to make a contribution to this under-explored area by describing and documenting the processes of self-evaluation of a cohort of 18 children through their primary school years.

In the section that follows, I discuss several strategies that appear in the literature and that could be described as 'stepping stones' to independent self-evaluation tasks.

### **3.8 Rethinking the Links between Teaching and Practices for 'Measuring' Literacy**

In Chapter 1, I made reference to the responsibility teachers have for assessing writing and the difficulty of devising a model that has meaning for teachers, students and parents. Teachers' attempts to rethink assessment and evaluation and to devise a model congruent with emerging theories of writing and of learning proved to be problematic. Gipps (1994: 8) attributes the difficulty to the teachers who, she claims, were not fully aware of the need to 'dismantle former ineffective practices and rebuild a different kind of assessment system'.

The point is well made. Nevertheless, to be fair to the teachers, for a long time most were aware of the disadvantages of the traditional system of assessment. They had been more than willing to replace the notion of testing for skills and knowledge, once thought to be the best way to assess students' progress, with a more meaningful system. However, rebuilding a different kind of assessment system is also



problematic. Teachers bring to the task their own ideologies and values about writing and about learning.

Cambourne (1994) approaches these complex issues from another perspective. He analysed the incongruities between language education beliefs and practices and the beliefs and practices of assessment and evaluation that prevailed at the time.

It is apparent that the 'process' pedagogy, the dominant pedagogy during the 1980s, emphasised a set of writing behaviours different from those traditionally valued as 'basic' to writing. Children wrote more fluently and they were encouraged to edit their own work. Initially, teachers did not correct editing efforts, particularly incorrect spelling, for fear of taking away the children's control of their own writing; of 'disempowering' them, a concept discussed in the preceding section with regard to the teacher's role in the classroom. Failure on the part of teachers to teach and correct spelling and grammar in the traditional way gave Barcan (1987) and other critics reason to complain about process writing. The title, *'Process Writing - How to be a Satisfied Illiterate'* (News Weekly, August 3, 1988:11) indicates the strong feeling that existed among those opposed to process writing. Since interpretation of the process writing theory was misconstrued, it is not surprising that 'orthodoxies' (Graves, 1984:184) emerged, with implications for assessment. To decide upon an appropriate way to ascertain children's progress, and to make an assessment of their writing with due reference to skills such as spelling and handwriting, presented a more difficult task than was initially anticipated.

In retrospect, this was a period of trial and error, when various strategies for assessing writing development were practised. At first, strategies focused on the recording of writing development. Professional literature, for example, Parry and

Hornsby (1985), and articles published by the *Australian Reading Association*. (A.R.A.) now *Australian Literacy Educators' Association* (A.L.E.A.) and *Primary English Teachers' Association* (P.E.T.A.) provided practical ideas and guidelines for literacy profiles and assessment. Later articles included Anstey's (1990) work that focused on what kind of information to record and appropriate ways of recording.

Throughout the late-1980s and the early-1990s teachers experimented with different ways of recording and reporting their students' progress in learning. They used strategies promoted by academics at professional development conferences and ideas in professional journals. At the same time, teachers gleaned snippets of information about self-evaluation. They observed more carefully children at work and provided time for the sharing of work in a group, with students telling what they had learnt, although the focus seemed to be more on reading than on writing.

Teachers were encouraged to discuss with their students the successes and failures of classroom practices in an uncritical and friendly environment. How effective these activities were is a matter of conjecture.

Despite well-intentioned efforts, confusion about assessment and evaluation of writing seemed to produce an ad hoc methodology that differed from school to school.

That educators are willing to review and modify traditional methods of assessment and evaluation in response to changed understandings about writing is an indication of their interest in and concern for children's learning. I describe three of the most popular strategies that attempt to address literacy development – 'kidwatching', checklists and portfolios.

### **3.8.1 'Kidwatching': Teacher Observation**

A key phrase frequently used in classrooms is for children to 'take responsibility for their own learning'. 'Taking responsibility' tends to mean the completion of teacher-assigned tasks. In fact, taking responsibility implies goal-based assessment where goals are set and teachers make clear their expectations. Goodman (1978; 1991) is credited with popularising the slogan 'kidwatching', which she recommends as a strategy for teachers that assists with goal-setting assessment and provides more reliable data than tests.

Goodman considers formalised tests to be non-productive measures of understanding how children develop as readers and writers. In their stead, she proposes an alternative method of informal observations by the classroom teacher of individual children in various situations where they work independently of the teacher. One could speculate that a form of self-evaluation occurs, but is not expressed explicitly.

Goodman draws teachers' attention to the fact that many evaluative activities, already practised in classrooms, provide more useful information about children's progress in literacy than do standardised tests. This idea is congruent with the findings from research studies that focus on language learning and the significant role children play in their own learning.

However, as well as strengths in a model that depends on ad hoc observations as an assessment or evaluation device, there are also weaknesses. While observations inform the teacher about external behaviour, they do not inform about the child's thinking. From the information recorded in anecdotal records, running records, and samples of work, teachers form hypotheses about learning. Anthony et al. (1991),

who are strong proponents of self-evaluation as a vital part of any assessment and evaluation program, are critical of the strategy that concentrates solely on observation. They argue that the accumulation of data would make the recording of children's progress 'an unmanageable jumble of demands' (p.3).

From a Vygotskian perspective, observations have limitations. In investigating the relationship between learning and development, Vygotsky (1978) comments that if we determine the child's level of development from observations of what she/he can do independently of others, then we are considering only that which has already matured. Observations do not allow us to see how to help the child towards maturity or a higher level in their development.

'Kidwatching' is not a specific activity for teachers in primary grades, as Goodman's work intimates. McGregor (1989), in a comprehensive account that he calls 'criteria for kidwatching', outlines the many ways kidwatching can be addressed in the secondary school. He extends observation strategies to include discussion and the reporting of students' learning. McGregor regards self-evaluation as an integral part of the assessment process, which also includes the teacher's assessment. Self-evaluation involves students answering a series of questions about learning goals and planning work in relation to a set of teacher-prescribed language activities. The focus of self-evaluation is the building of a student profile of development.

The point made by Rosen and Rosen (1973) is worth considering. They contend that a caring teacher knows in a short time when his or her students are working well enough to be able to help them without resorting to the time-consuming task of writing down observations. However, two decades on, changes in ideology and

methodology require concrete evidence of children's literacy development.

Furthermore, the term 'caring' has broadened considerably in its application to children's needs.

### ***3.8.2 Checklists: A Systematic Method of Noting Skills and Concepts***

In the early years of the process writing movement, teachers used checklists to record children's progress. Checklists categorise key writing skills and concepts derived from the language or English curriculum. This new 'instrument', introduced as a convenient, quick, and simple process, enabled teachers to monitor or evaluate children's progress in writing. Anthony et al. (1991: 74) caution against relying on checklists as a single method for assessing and evaluating writing. They note that checklists 'may act as blinkers producing tunnel vision' and they warn that checklists may not cover all significant behaviours.

Checklists inevitably have built-in assumptions and generalisations about what skills count as important for 'good' writing. Items listed for checking purposes are similar to test items in that they emphasise product and omit components of process.

Researchers on writing suggest that writing does not fit into the watertight categories usually found on checklists. Overt aspects of the process can be observed, interpreted, and recorded, but they tell us nothing about aspects of the process that are not observable.

In addition, variables such as the circumstances in which the writing came about, the writer's initiative, the planning involved and the social skills of collaboration with teacher or peers are difficult concepts to translate into checklist categories.

Another disadvantage of checklists is that children can regard the itemised skills as the sole criteria for 'good' writing. It is possible for such an attitude to develop when checklist items are regularly emphasised by the teacher as important for writing. Children assume that what the teacher reiterates matters. Such influence can also cause conflict between the writer and the evaluator.

However, checklists can be used to good effect. The kind of language teachers use to compile a checklist can be a useful method to help children monitor their progress as writers. Reflective-type questions encourage self-evaluation; skills itemised in isolation may be less effective. Checklists and teachers' influence both play a significant part in self-evaluation. The choice of criteria tends to be based on teacher values, which the children assume are important for 'good' writing. The teacher's criteria may contribute to better writing. However, it is difficult, in devising checklists, to specify criteria that capture some of the more intangible aspects of the composing process.

### *3.8.3 Portfolio Assessment*

Portfolio assessment was designed as a move away from teacher-oriented assessment to involvement of the student in the development of a portfolio of his or her work for assessment. The portfolio was intended to be a more realistic qualitative measure, a substitute for the traditional quantitative method of standardised testing. According to Freedman and Hechinger (1993), and in the American tradition, the portfolio movement provided a link between large-scale testing and classroom assessment and teaching.

In Australia, portfolio assessment grew out of the need to collect samples of students' writing for the purposes of assessment and evaluation. Teachers used this

information to prepare reports for parents (Turbill, 1994). If properly kept, portfolios can demonstrate children's progress and give parents more information to complement or replace written reports.

However, most portfolio projects lack guidance as to what work goes into the folder, the purposes for which the work is collected, and how the results are recorded.

There seems to be an assumption that this strategy ensures children will take responsibility for their own learning without supervision. The reality of portfolio assessment or evaluation, however, is that the responsibility falls heavily on the classroom teacher, who may be too busy to follow through with a final evaluation of the portfolio or may not be fully aware of the extent to which the method involves teacher-child interaction. This is an example where a useful strategy often becomes a burden and is ineffective because of inadequate training of teachers, insufficient preparation and inconsistent supervision.

Research findings raise questions about the widespread use of portfolios, for there is little evidence of their contributing to understanding children's development as evaluators of their own writing. Calfee and Perfumo (1993) took a close look at elementary school settings with a view to understanding the nature and purposes of portfolios. Their recommendation was for further investigations to be made, if the strategy were to realise the promise of a different tool with the potential to improve traditional assessment procedures. In a report made by the National Center for the study of Writing and Literacy (1993: 3) and based on this research, Calfee and Perfumo note that though assembling a portfolio of work appears to be simple, interpreting a folder full of samples into a valid assessment is 'not simple at all'.

Gomez, Graue, and Bloch (1991) also looked at the ways portfolios are used in the elementary school. They note that the proper use of portfolios is complex. The New Hampshire study reported by Simmons (1990) shows how portfolio assessment can be wisely used. As an alternative to holistically scored writing samples, the research team successfully used portfolios to measure production, perception, and reflection across a population of 27 randomly selected fifth grade children.

Educators who are concerned about the 'human' element in learning believe that strategies like those discussed enable teachers to respond to children's writing and collect information about multiple factors at multiple levels. To a limited extent, the children participate in the process. 'Kidwatching' facilitates ongoing evaluation. If followed through consistently, checklists and portfolios have the potential to provide useful information about children's learning.

### **3.9 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter reviewed studies on writing, writing pedagogy and the assessment of writing.

It discussed studies of the early development of writing and research into more advanced writing, to encompass the range of writing observed in the primary school. The functions and purposes of writing and the relationship between oral and written language were explored. The concept of 'inner speech', and its relation to thought processes was also considered, and significant writing pedagogies in the primary school were investigated.

All the above factors are relevant to this research study, which invites primary school children to verbalise the criteria they used to evaluate samples of their own work.



The chapter also looked at writing assessment, to set the context for self-evaluation, which is the focus of this study. Many and varied methods are available to teachers for the purposes of gathering information about their students' learning and ability to write, and some of these were discussed.

Some classroom strategies investigated in this chapter could be described as 'stepping-stones' to self-evaluation. Several studies dealing with student self-evaluation were examined. However, it was noted that there are no Australian studies of self-evaluation of writing by primary school children. This points to the need for research in this area and leads to the focus of this study, which explores how a group of children through the years from Prep. to Year 6 evaluated their own writing.

The next chapter discusses the methodology used to investigate children's potential for self-evaluation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### How the Study Evolved: Methodological Issues

*'In your mind it's almost a perfect story, [but] sometimes when you write it, it goes all gobbledy goo, and then you go, "This doesn't make sense". So you take out all the different pieces and slot them together, and it makes a good story'.*

Karen, Year 6

#### 4.1 Introduction

Most adults (including this researcher) can empathise with Karen (above). We wonder why the story loses shape and meaning once it leaves the darkened chambers of the mind. Then the thought processes activate with language as we, too, struggle with a 'gobbledy goo' text that '*doesn't make sense*' as we aim to write the '*perfect story*' or the '*perfect*' text.

Karen's evaluative statement informs us of the process she is aware of when she writes her stories. She assures us that she has crafted a '*good story*'. Her evaluative statement, however, evokes queries about how the teacher will assess the story, particularly if he or she has not considered the process to which Karen gives insight.

This study is designed to investigate children's thinking, as demonstrated in Karen's statement, when they are given the opportunity to evaluate their own writing. It examines the criteria children value for 'good' writing and whether or not their criteria change as they develop as writers.

Although the study does not focus explicitly on how children learn, it would be misguided if boundaries were placed around self-evaluation without due reference to learning. Therefore, I deliberately raised questions about children's learning in Chapter 1. The questions were based on the assumption that teachers do not have a deep knowledge of their students' capacity for learning, despite the attention given to assessment and evaluation strategies. Quantitative research approaches are not designed to take into account children's ability to juggle with or interplay the '*different pieces*' (Karen's terms) of an unstructured text so as to create a meaningful text that '*makes sense*', the '*perfect story*' embedded in one's mind. Such research measures fail to acknowledge the child's ability to plan, shape, organise and revise ideas that eventually form a coherent text.

In this chapter I consider a range of methodological issues that influenced and determined the nature of the investigation, providing the *modus operandi* that enabled me to probe and find answers to the research questions raised in Chapter 1. The chapter divides into three sections. The first section deals with the research design used in the study. It addresses data collection issues and the researcher's role. The second section outlines the context of the study and provides profiles of the children who are the participants in the study. It also describes the relationships between the researcher and the teachers. In the third and final section I describe the procedures used for data analysis, the organisation of the analysis, and the discussion of the findings. Where the school and the participants' teachers are mentioned, pseudonyms are used.

#### **4.2 The Nature of Ethnographic Research**

During the 1980s, an important shift in research focused on learning from the students' perspective rather than from hypotheses formed by teachers and

researchers (Entwistle, 1987). This research draws on a particular type of qualitative methodology known as ethnography. Ethnography, one of the several methods available to social scientists, derives from the anthropological process of studying a whole culture. It means literally, 'a picture of the way of life of some interesting human action' (Wolcott, 1975: 12). The researcher and the research act itself are part of the social world under investigation as, for example, in the studies of Scribner and Cole (1981) and Heath (1983). Malinowski (1922, cited in Burgess, 1984), who pioneered the notion of ethnography, explains that the goal in ethnography is to understand how members of the society studied view the world. The researcher attempts to do this by long-term participant observation and sensitive interviewing in order to develop a closer, more intimate view of everyday life and to make inferences about the 'meaning-perspectives' held by the members of the society that is studied.

In the context of education, ethnography has important strengths for the purposes of collecting data for this investigation of children's thinking and learning, as it lends itself to the study of phenomena in the normal setting of the classroom. It seeks to understand social behaviour from the participants' frame of reference. It sets out with a view of penetrating their boundaries in an attempt to discover what lies beneath the learning behaviour that adults are not privy to. Researchers try 'to step inside the landscape of the child' (Beekman, 1986) to find out more about children and their abilities for learning.

In their ethnographic study of young children acquiring written language, Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) viewed the children as 'curricular informants' who showed the researchers the process of their learning. Hubbard's (1989) ethnographic research studied young children's illustrations to their writings.

Hubbard made similar claims: that children can teach us as 'ethnographic informants' (p.19). The underlying principle that guides these studies and other ethnographic research is the assumption that individuals have meaning structures that determine much of their behaviour (Wilson, 1977), and that such meaning structures can only be understood in the sociocultural context in which they occur.

However, as discussed briefly in Chapter 2, if we endorse this view there is need to reconceptualise the learner as a social entity rather than an individual who learns in isolation. In order to understand the individual, one must first understand the social relations in which the individual exists. This Vygotskian theory is built on the premise that individual intellectual development cannot be understood without reference to the social milieu in which the child is embedded (Cole et al., 1978).

The school is influential in devising curricula that has emotional and cognitive meaning for its students, and is a special cultural milieu in the broad meaning of culture. As Vygotsky emphasises, children's participation in cultural activities allows them to 'internalise' (a Vygotskian term) the tools of thinking and to take more mature approaches to problem-solving practised in the social context.

Wiersma (1991:223) sums up culture as 'the collective understandings' among the members of a group. In his discussion of the ethos of Catholic schools, Dwyer (1993) defines culture in more explicit terms:

*A group's culture is the way it has of meeting its members' needs, finding meaning in their lives, and expressing that meaning. It is the composite of ideas, values, symbols, customs and stereotypes that are shared. It is what we learn from those whom we are with. In a nutshell, it is life as people understand and live it. (1993: 2).*

These observations imply that there are perspectives peculiar to the group, in this case, the students, teachers and parents, to the culture of the school, and to the wider organisation of the education system.

In order to gain some understanding of the culture of the learning process, the ethnographer observes the way children's learning appears to be shaped by the patterns of everyday action within and across the events of classroom life.

Ethnography attempts to take into account individual beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes, which are largely implicit and, therefore, difficult to discern accurately.

Nevertheless, this approach provides the opportunity to describe and interpret data in a way that is more meaningful and useful to teacher and student than data that is strictly statistical evidence.

All methodologies have a particular focus and a specific way of gathering data. An ethnographic study offers an approach different from surveys and experimental methodologies, which usually do not focus on the sociocultural milieu in which the child is 'embedded'. Fact finding, as in a survey, gives information, but it does not give indication of why children perform the way they do. Experimental research deals with measurable phenomena that allow conclusions to be drawn about cause and effect. While quantitative methods have value for specific purposes, they provide only partial information about children's learning. Similarly, theory testing, as deployed in experimental research approaches, does not accommodate the ethnographer's purpose of documenting and theorising about what is happening while she is immersed in the research milieu. The theory building most hospitable for the ethnographer is 'grounded theory', that is, theory generated in the process of collecting and interpreting data.

#### **4.2.1 *Grounded Theory Methodology***

Glaser and Strauss (1967) are regarded as the originators of grounded theory methodology. Their intention was to build theory that would be faithful to and illuminate the area under study. They argue that its systematic techniques and procedures of analysis enable the researcher to develop a theory that meets the criteria outlined as essential for doing 'good' science. In an updated version of grounded theory, Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe evaluative criteria for grounded theory as 'significance, theory-observation compatibility, generalizability, precision, rigor, and verification' (pp.249-258). Research studies aim for, and achieve, these criteria by different methods. Strauss and Corbin define the grounded theory approach as a qualitative research method that uses 'a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon' (p.24). Through systematic data collection and analysis of data, theory is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified. In short, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. This kind of approach enables the researcher to think about data in new ways and to develop what theorists call 'theoretical sensitivity', an important concept in grounded theory. In developing theory, the researcher attempts to meet the evaluative criteria that Glaser and Strauss classify as important and which are mentioned above. A priori theory enters into the research only after its relevance has been established (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wiersma, 1991). The implication for data analysis is that it will be inductive, rather than deductive (Denzin, 1970). However, data analysis is not restricted entirely to induction. In pursuing deliberate lines of inquiry, induction and deduction may be in 'constant dialogue' in response to events in the field that change perceptions and understanding of an event and its organisation at the time (Erickson, 1990:81). As a

model of inquiry, the analysis is based on the information that emerges from the data rather than being imposed on the data according to some prior theory or hypothesis.

To some extent the methodology for ethnographic research emerges as the research is in progress. It begins with questions rather than hypotheses, but tentative hypotheses are formulated and modified along the way. The kind of social interactions that occur during the study influence and modify the hypotheses.

Grounded theory research thus differs from experimentation and survey research, which, traditionally, have involved a priori hypothesis formulation followed by specific procedures designed to test hypotheses. It stands in sharp contrast to data about learning derived solely from statistical evidence. Where studies involve human behaviour and intellectual activity, such as composing a piece of writing and making judgments about its quality, a grounded theory approach provides scope for consideration of the variations in human thought, the idiosyncrasies of the writer, and the influence of the culture of the classroom.

The ultimate purpose of the ethnographical approach is to provide rich source material to attempt a careful interpretation of the analysis and to attribute significance to that interpretation. As the researcher, my role was clearly defined, for the main data collection in ethnographic research is observation conducted by a participant observer (Wolcott, 1975). Hence, I assumed the role of a participant observer in the social environment of the classrooms I wished to study, and in so doing I became the chief research instrument of a social investigation. A key feature of social research is its reflexivity (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Wiersma, 1991). This means the research is part of the patterns of interactions and perspectives of the people within the social world it studies and research implies participation and



membership of the group. Thus, my work involved (a) intensive, long-term participation in the school; (b) careful recording of events and activities as they actually happened in the classrooms by documenting observations and collecting other kinds of evidence, described in 4.3; and (c) subsequent analytic reflection on the recordings I made, and reporting by means of detailed description, vignettes and descriptive analysis.

#### **4.2.2 Case Study Methodology**

The case study methodology, also used in this study, is congruent with an ethnographic approach. It is concerned with providing an account of what an observer sees observed persons doing. As in ethnographical research, the case study approach involves observation and sensitive interviewing. One of its strengths is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to attempt to identify the various interactive processes at work. The focus is a substantive one that attempts to derive rich meanings of actions from an individual participant's point of view. In the field of research in written composition, this approach has been particularly fruitful.

At a period in educational research when there were few or no case study models, Emig (1971) conducted a study of *'The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders'* (mentioned in Chapter 3). From a description of the processes the students used during the composing process, Emig analysed the data and devised a taxonomy that had implications for teaching writing. In recent years, writing researchers have also found the case study procedure useful when examining the subprocesses in writing (Hayes & Flower, 1980). The research studies of Graves (1975), Bissett (1980), Kamler (1987), and McNaughton (1995) have been influential in changing research

design regarding the teaching of writing to young children. Graves (1975) used case study procedures to examine the writing processes of seven-year-old children.

Observations made in this approach provided depth and scope of data to gain some understanding of the factors that contribute to young children's writing development. According to Graves, conclusions would have been difficult to arrive at from observations made in a large group of children. Many of the factors discussed in the large group findings, however, became apparent as a result of the intensive observation, interviewing and testing in the case study approach of one child's writing.

Unlike Bissex's (1980) study of her own child in the home environment, Kamler's (1987) case study of one child's writing development over a two-year period took place in classrooms. The study illustrates the advantages of extended participant observation in the social context of the classroom. Close observation enabled the researcher to view the emergence of variations and discontinuities in writing development in the complex interaction between the learner, the learning context and the written language system (p.54). Because of the natural setting of the classroom, the case study provides valuable data that draws us closer to an understanding of the learning process. Chapter 7 gives an account of two case studies that illuminate the self-evaluation phenomena investigated in this study.

#### ***4.2.3 Constraints and Advantages of Ethnography***

The particular qualitative research approach of ethnography and case study enable the researcher to make interpretations that are not possible from non-qualitative data. Any method used for observing and interpreting human behaviour and human potential is complex and shaped by the values and subjectivities of the observer and

the sociocultural context in which she is working. One of the problems in the development of classroom-based ethnography is that the school is only part of a whole community. What children learn in school is determined by a combination of forces within and beyond the classroom. Therefore, what they learn at home and in the community can influence school performance as well as evaluations of performance or ability (Elkind, 1979). Hence, the school is not fully representative of the influences that affect behaviour in the life of a child. In the interpretation of data, it is difficult to know where the influences lie and how to test the accuracy of data. Generalisability may be problematic in that qualitative work in one area may not apply to other areas. However, data may be related in a way that will enable people in similar classroom settings, for example, to recognise problems and ways of solving them.

Constraints also occur in developing the ethnographer-child informant relationship. The status of an adult as an authority figure can create difficulties. In a situation different from the norm, children tend to display a certain diffidence when questioned. It is possible for them to make assumptions about the adult's purpose for wanting information and to give replies for the sake of giving a 'right' answer, which may not be the most accurate answer for the purpose of the activity. The adult researcher ultimately speaks on behalf of the child; the child's intended meanings are thus always vulnerable to an adult gloss. This is a risk the ethnographer takes in a study of children's learning. It required sensitivity on my part to win trust and then to retain that trust if the informants were to view the ethnographer as a person interested in their learning rather than as a critic. Even then I could not be sure of the accuracy of the data. Inappropriate questions or ill-timing of questioning were cause for a child's annoyance, or puzzlement, in which

case the child may have been satisfied to give a monosyllabic answer of no substance. Children, like adults, are sometimes reluctant to enter into dialogue about what they think, in case of misinterpretation.

Another problem is the kind of interaction that occurs between teacher and students, and among the students in the classroom. In any school where there are gender differences and different ethnic backgrounds, the type of community being studied will have its own unique setting. The staff social network and hierarchies and established school policies are issues that also need to be accounted for in the process of gathering data. Despite problems, however, ethnographic research and the case study approach in a time frame that spanned children's development for the entire period of primary school, that is, from Preparatory to Year 6, allowed me to observe developmental changes in individual children and to explore sequentially linked behaviour in the classroom environment.

The 'grades' system of grouping students in Australian schools tends to create discontinuities in teaching and learning, although discontinuity is natural and perhaps necessary in learning new practices. In recent years 'grade' has been replaced by 'year'. Hence, I refer to whatever grade the children happen to be in as 'year'.

I was able to make consistent observations of the child's history as a learner as he or she made the transition from early childhood (two to six years) to middle childhood (six to twelve years) (Erikson, 1963). The children commenced school at five years. By Year 6, they were on the threshold of adolescence, with changed views of the world and of learning. Middle childhood, their longest period in primary school, is a challenging period for children. The child has to adapt to new environmental events,

which are influenced by school, peers, and the media. This is the period when there is a growing ability to reason, use concepts and logic in thinking, and language develops. This period is also remarkable for progressive development in thinking and learning, followed by a rapid increase in levels of performance with everyday concepts. Children's use of and understanding of language changes as they approach middle childhood. These changes are particularly noticeable round about the ages of seven to eight, the time when children make the transition in Victorian schools from Year 2 to Year 3.

An ethnographic approach made it possible for me to study the development of the children's self-evaluative skills. In the context of their primary classrooms, I was able to note the use of language in thinking, mastered at different developmental levels, and the social interaction and transactions that mediated learning.

#### **4.3 The Research Design: Data Collecting Strategies**

The focus of the study was on the interactions between the child-evaluator and the researcher in the role of participant observer. The children interpreted their own texts and interacted with the researcher about the quality of their drawings and writing.

The design of the study falls into several stages: before the study commenced, during the period of participant observation, and after the data collection had been completed. Although I use the term 'stages' (see Burgess, 1984: 177) as a way of clarifying the chronology of the study, there was interplay between the activities that occurred at each stage.

Throughout the various stages, I collected data using a range of recording techniques, which I explain later. Data were of two kinds:

1. Data relating to the children's activities that focused on self-evaluation of writing
2. Ethnographic details about the school and the classrooms

Data were kept as separate components. I describe later in the chapter self-evaluation activities. Generally, I wrote by hand on A4 lined paper ethnographic details of the school and the classrooms. Material was filed in separate journals and labelled appropriately for each year. To facilitate the sorting of data in the final stages, I wrote in a column at the right hand side of the page the issues and features that appeared to be important in the investigation. By colour-coding events I was able to indicate those that were typical and widespread and to separate people from organisational matters. At intervals, I transferred major issues to a flow chart. I filed each year's fieldnotes in separate journals. Another source of information came from individual conferences with the teachers and the parents of the participants. Data were also audiotaped, transcribed, word-processed and coded.

Before I give a detailed description of the activities, I describe the events that comprised the various stages of the study.

### **Stage 1: 1989-1990**

In 1988, I approached a Catholic primary school in one of Melbourne's northern suburbs having in mind a longitudinal study. A few months previously the principal had invited me to work with one of her teachers, who was interested in experimenting with drama and its effects on narrative writing. Hence, I had some knowledge of the dynamic leadership in the school and concern for the intellectual needs of the children. The climate was such that I was encouraged to return to the school and discuss with the principal the possibility of undertaking a longitudinal

study that focused on self-evaluation of writing. The principal and staff discussed my request and the ramifications of a long-term study. Once I had their approval, I approached the Director of Catholic Education in Victoria for permission to carry out the study. When permission had been granted, the principal then informed the parents of the study and of my position in the school. However, permission to work with a select group of children was delayed until I had made decisions with regard to the composition of the group I wished to study. When this decision had been finalised, I contacted the parents personally to explain the purpose of the study and to request approval for their child to be one of a cohort of children to be studied.

A time of preparation took place in 1989. In that year the 48 newly enrolled children were divided evenly into two Prep. grades. As the two Prep. teachers were unsure of how to instruct Prep. children in writing, they often requested help. During the language period, devoted to teaching reading, writing, vocabulary and handwriting, I was able to make observations and talk with the teachers about the children's ability to respond to language activities. Eventually I remained with one grade for two reasons. First, due to the class teacher's ill health, one grade had a succession of teachers, each of whom had different ideas about teaching writing. Under the circumstances, it seemed appropriate for me to withdraw rather than exacerbate a situation that was becoming more difficult for the teachers. However, I still maintained some contact with the children, when the teachers requested specific help. Secondly, it was becoming increasingly clear that time should be devoted to one classroom. I assumed that this grade, Prep. C, would remain intact in Year 1 for the purposes of the study, as I had discussed this matter with the principal. I intended to select a smaller group of children representative of a cross section of the

grade. However, it was not until all classes for 1990 had been finalised that I learnt the fate of the children in the two Prep. grades:

In 1990, 30 children chosen from the two grades comprised Year 1. Of the remaining 18, three had left the school and the remainder were assigned to a composite grade of Years 1 and 2. The main reason for this arrangement was behavioural problems that had emerged with the change of teachers. I continued my observations in Year 1 in 1990. As the teacher was an inexperienced graduate who solicited help with his grade, I spent more time in this classroom. The children were happy and friendly. As I listened to the exchanges made to one another about their work, there was no doubt about their interest in learning. It was a difficult matter to select a smaller group whom I could observe more closely. I was anxious to include in the group children whose cognitive ability was representative of the normal range. From the information I had gleaned from their previous teachers and from my observations, I chose 18 children whose level of cognitive development varied, as did their personalities and who gave indication that they could be articulate about their work. From the 18 children, however, I chose four as case studies, and then reduced the number to two. These children had the ability to communicate their progress as writers and to comment on the development of their writing as they made the transition from grade to grade. This approach made it possible to follow findings from a large group to a smaller group of four and then finally to two case studies. Conversely, I was able to follow findings from the case study to the whole group of eighteen children. However, the selection of the case studies did not eventuate in Stage 1. Some time elapsed, and further observations were made, before I was able to make a decision about the case studies.



To avoid further misunderstanding, I gave a list of the 18 children to the principal. I renewed my request, in writing, that, as far as possible when class arrangements in the future were being discussed, the group should remain intact. This consideration would ensure continuity of the investigation as well as facilitate the collection of data. The principal and teachers complied with my request in Year 2 and Year 6. In Years 3, 4 and 5, the children were separated and allocated to straight and composite grades. Equity of numbers and behaviour issues were the reasons for separating the children. However, they came together as a group for the language period. The policy seemed to be that language should be taught at grade levels.

Once approval had been given for the formal study, I commenced the ongoing process of gathering data concerning the school structure, policies, literacy programs and curriculum documents. With individual staff members, I discussed methods of teaching writing as practised in the school, assessment procedures and the reporting of results to parents. I also observed the place of literature and how library programs operated. From these sources I gained a broad overview of what the teachers regarded as essential in the development of language, particularly written language.

To facilitate the gathering of data, I began to construct a wall-size flow chart, which gave me a visual picture of issues that were emerging. On this chart I inserted provisional categories and subcategories into conceptual issues and events. The subcategories were divided again into value and pedagogical factors. At Stage 1 the categories and subcategories were not static. However, the chart provided a framework that allowed for cross-referencing among the subcategories and eventually contributed to the making of decisions about essential and non-essential

data. According to the nature of the data collected over time, I was able to develop, extend, delete or refine. I did this during subsequent stages.

Stage 1 also included preparation for the main self-evaluation task I proposed to implement. There were negotiations to be made with the teacher about conference times with the children. I also planned organisational matters regarding the storage of the children's completed work.

### **Stage 2: 1991-1995**

Given the nature of the study, Stage 2 did not fit automatically into a chronology of events that occurred in specific years. In fact, certain preliminary work such as the review of literature was ongoing throughout all stages. The literature review (Chapters 2 and 3), encapsulated the three strands of inquiry: children's learning, writing, and assessment and evaluation of writing. It was from the literature during this period that I was able to gain theoretical insights and examine these in relation to the data I collected for the study.

Stage 2 was a prolonged period during which time my attention was divided among multiple strategies such as the following:

#### ***Fieldnotes***

Fieldnotes were ongoing. I kept detailed accounts of pedagogical matters, interactions between teacher and children, the classroom environment, and interactions between teacher, children and the researcher. In a separate volume I kept fieldnotes of my involvement with other members of the staff, professional development programs, school functions and events, and other incidental information.

### *Interview protocols*

I devised a series of basic open-ended questions for interviews with the principal, teachers, and parents. I then had to negotiate with each group regarding a suitable time and place for the interview. The interviews took place over several years rather than months.

### *Transcripts*

Transcripts were made of all interviews with the children, teachers and parents. I transcribed the children's tapes so that I could begin to categorise data as soon as possible. I solicited help with the transcription of all other tapes.

### *Documentary records*

I kept a folder that contained school documents such as the weekly newsletter to parents, models of report forms, copies of information regarding school excursions and copies of worksheets. I also had a copy of the school's language policy. Appendix 1 contains details of the school language policy and its assessment policy.

### **Stage 3: 1992-1993**

Before I could make links in terms of concepts and themes and then insert this information on the flowchart, I re-read the 18 transcripts of the main self-evaluation task that had been given in Years 1, 2 and 3. At this stage I developed a taxonomy or system of classification for the evaluative criteria that had been provided by the children. The taxonomy enabled me to discern patterns and relationships that existed among categories. In this provisional analysis of data, I explored the categories for properties that would generate subcategories. Later, I included in the

taxonomy data gathered during Years 4, 5 and 6. I then had a broad overview of emerging patterns of evaluative statements and how subcategories related to a category.

The procedures I took did not fit into neat and orderly compartments, and there were no fixed boundaries. It was impossible to keep all strategies moving towards the final goal simultaneously. It became inevitable that one or another strategy would lag behind; that while I focused on keeping fieldnotes up-to-date, for example, analysing the data to discover categories lagged behind. Nevertheless, at intervals I attempted to make connections between what the children were saying, what I had recorded in my fieldnotes and what the literature had to say about children and their learning. However, I was constantly reorganising data and the procedures I took to facilitate the final analysis. Even in the final analysis, interpretations of implicit criteria changed when I re-read early transcripts of the self-evaluation task and studied my fieldnotes with greater intent.

At some time during Stage 3 it became clear that managing data collected from 18 children, single-handed, was an onerous task. I began to rethink the logistics of the project, bearing in mind the case study model employed in Graves' (1975) study of writing development. I selected four children, and then reduced this number to two children. However, it seemed that observing writing development was a different task from eliciting criteria in a self-evaluation task for the finished pieces of work. The data collected thus far was rich and compelling. None of the 18 children was willing to forego the interaction that had started in Year 1 about their writing. I assumed from evaluative statements and from their behaviour towards me that they enjoyed the challenge that the task entailed, and for this reason I observed and interacted with the whole group as closely as time would permit. However, I did

allocate more time to the two case study children who, I assumed, would throw more light on the learning process that is involved in self-evaluation.

#### **Stage 4: 1994-1995**

At this stage I had a much clearer picture of the patterns that were emerging from the data. However, it was evident that I needed to make a decision about the selection of data for the purposes of analysis. The accumulation of data demanded a critical review of what had been collected and its significance for the study. I partially overcame the problem of selection by posing questions about the data collected. Two main questions gave tentative direction:

- Which data yielded the most significant insights into children's learning?
- Which data indicated the children's ability to reflect on their own writing and articulate evaluative information?

I had to consider the context of the data, the conditions under which data had been gathered and the interactional strategies I had used during conferences.

Furthermore, there were questions related to what Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe as 'dimensional locations' of data (p.107). This related to data about events and happenings in the school and, more importantly, in the classrooms.

The search for provisional answers required constant reading and re-reading of sections of the transcripts with cross-references to my fieldnotes to help throw light on ambiguous responses and situations. The concentrated reading involved checking on frequency, range and distribution of evaluative statements. For example, I needed to know how many children at any one year level decided that a particular criterion such as handwriting was an important criterion for 'good' work,

and if a criterion became more important, disappeared or changed with development. When I vacillated about attitudinal matters, as often happened, I examined incidental conversations I had had with the children and recorded. I examined handwritten notes children left on my desk. I valued all sources of information. However, not all sources contained the evidence I was seeking.

#### **Stage 5: 1995-1996**

I now had to make sense of the data collected in the classrooms. I had to decide on a final framework for the analysis and discussion of the interpretations that would attribute meaning and significance to the children's performance as evaluators, systematising the criteria they valued in 'good' writing. At this stage I again re-read the transcripts in order to look for clues as to the circumstances in which the writing had taken place.

Later in the chapter I explain how I drew on the broad categories of functional linguistics to develop an analytical framework that would allow me to describe and interpret the children's evaluative statements.

For the remainder of this section, I describe the strategies used for gathering data.

##### ***4.3.1 Strategies for Gathering Data***

Fieldwork incorporated a range of activities: participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews, spontaneous conversations, writing conferences and a documentary approach. I give a brief description of each of these strategies.

## **Participant Observation**

As a participant observer in the school and the classrooms, my observation notes varied. First, there were descriptive observations. These observations were general descriptions and features of what happened in the classrooms and the school environment. The observations I made were of routine activities and special events organised for the whole school community. Data collected from these sources highlighted aspects of school organisation.

The second kind of observations was more focused than the descriptive observations. These observations focused on smaller units in the classroom in order to observe the behaviour and the conversation of a group of children working at one table, or a group of teachers in the staffroom. Observations also included situations where there was interaction between the teacher and the whole class.

The third type of observations was more focused than the previous types. I asked specific questions to find out how the children organised their knowledge of writing and how the teachers organised their knowledge of writing instruction and their ideas of the learning process. The descriptive and the focused observations enabled me to make tentative generalisations about external behaviour, which, later, I attempted to link with what the participants actually said about their learning.

In order to capture more detailed data, I observed individual children closely. I was able to listen more carefully to personal responses and explanations of a problem as opposed to social properties I observed in small or large group situations. (See Appendix 5 for excerpts from interviews). In my interviews with children I noted idiosyncratic characteristics such as facial expressions, a shrug of the shoulders and tone of voice. The open-ended questions I asked the children provided the

opportunity for them to talk about writing instruction and the classroom environment from their own perspective.

### **Unstructured Interviews**

I held interviews with the principal, the classroom teachers involved in the study, and the parents of the children in the research group in order to elicit information for the purposes of the study. For each interview I negotiated about time and place that were most convenient for the interviewee. There was no rigid order to items in the questionnaire I had prepared in advance as a framework. Very often an incident irrelevant to the topic provided an opening.

#### **(a) *Interview with the principal***

It so transpired that I had several unplanned meetings with the principal about pedagogical matters and curriculum documents. However, I conducted a more formal interview with her in 1992. This interview relied on open-ended questions to elicit information. The focus was on her philosophy of teaching and learning, her leadership role, provision for professional development (her own and that of the staff) and the purpose of the mission statement - the framework within which the school functioned. The interview, in conversational style, opened with an invitation, for example, 'Tell me about...' Responses invited specific comments on issues that threw some light on children's learning.

#### **(b) *Interviews with the teachers***

The interviews with individual teachers followed the same format as that of the principal's interview. Appendix 2 lists the broad areas I explored with teachers and the questions that I asked them. The teachers were also invited to share impressions



of their teacher-training period, ongoing professional experiences and classroom experiences. Since teachers at this time were confused about writing instruction and assessment, the issues that had motivated the study, it seemed important to glean information about their values and attitudes towards both issues. It was also important to focus on their beliefs about how children learn and the strengths they brought to the teaching task. For the interviews that took place during school hours, the principal provided a relieving teacher for the class involved. These interviews were given in a meeting room located in one of the parish buildings and away from the school. Other teachers opted to come to my home in the weekend and the interviews took place in a more relaxed atmosphere.

(c) *Interviews with the parents*

Arrangements with parents were made by telephone to visit them in their homes. Because of their commitments, times varied. Hence, I made visits during or after school hours, in the evening when both parents wished to take part in the interview, and at the weekend. (Appendix 3 lists the guiding questions parents were invited to respond to).

The main issues during the conversation-style interview revolved around memories of their own school days, their expectations of the primary school, and their satisfaction, or otherwise, with the curriculum. I attempted to enter into the experiences of the interviewees and to empathise with them regarding educational and social events that had influenced their concern for their children's learning.

### **Incidental Conversations: Teachers and Children**

Another avenue for gathering data were conversations that came about incidentally. There were opportune moments, inside and outside the classroom, for the researcher to engage in spontaneous conversations with the teachers and the children.

### **Incidental Writing Conferences**

Interviews with the children are termed 'conferences'. The children were used to writing conferences, a strategy that emerged as a popular pedagogical event (Duke, 1975; Graves, 1983). Unlike most learning situations, it is a 'conversational dialogue' (Freedman & Sperling, 1985), which gives the teacher a chance to address the students' individual needs in a way that cannot be achieved in a whole class situation.

As a participant observer, I often sat at one of the tables, which seated four or six children. I usually spoke to one child rather than involve all at the table, although at times there were conferences with more than one child. I was not in the teacher's role with concerns about students' literacy needs; I wanted information about drawing and writing from the child's point of view. Hence, it was important to listen without too much probing for answers. The conference offered a setting for spontaneous and personal conversation.

These incidental writing conferences were different from the main task I had designed to gather data about ability for self-evaluation and criteria for 'good' writing, which I discuss in the next section.

## **Documentary Approach**

Fieldnotes provided documentary evidence with other forms of evidence: examples of the children's work, photographs and audiotapes. As mentioned above, I wrote my observations in descriptive form. All interviews with teachers and parents and conferences with the children were audiotaped, transcribed and word-processed. I discuss the coding method in the final section of the chapter. The children had folders in which they filed completed work that they evaluated during conferences. I also collected writing the children discarded and copies of worksheets the teachers used at different year levels.

A first attempt to videotape the children at work failed. The video recorder and camera distracted the children and interfered with the normal rhythm of the classroom. Although the teacher was agreeable, we had to weigh the advantages of this technology against the disadvantages. This particular class was by nature excitable, easily distracted and uncooperative whenever novelty was introduced into the classroom. I realised that the organisational problems and intrusiveness of the camera far outweighed the gains of a videotape. Hence, I tried to capture the normal hubbub of the classroom with the aid of pen and paper and on various occasions with photographs.

The strategies combined to provide a true and rich picture of class events in the lives of the children, allowing me to build a detailed and multi-layered account of the children's development as evaluators of their writing.

#### ***4.3.2 The Design of the Evaluative Task: Rank Ordering of Writing***

The content of the main evaluation task was the rank ordering by the children of several pieces of writing or drawing from which evaluative responses were elicited for the decisions about the ranking (see Hilgers, 1986). The children chose their own writing they judged as 'good', ranked it in order of merit, and then gave their reasons for their own actions. This task should not be confused with Elbow's (1993) account of ranking where teachers and not the students do the ranking. Elbow states that 'ranking is the act of summing up one's judgment of a performance or person into a single, holistic number score' (Elbow, 1993:187). Ranking students' work and allotting a number score is not an uncommon practice. It is equivalent to the teacher awarding grades to students and comparing results. The common feature in Elbow's account and the task designed for this study is the terminology 'judgment of a performance'. In my study, the role of judge differs, however, as also do the aim and the procedures. In one, the teacher assumes the role of judge; in the other, the children judged their own writing. The ranking fulfilled no particular purpose until the children were invited to offer their own evaluative statements for their decisions regarding the order of their pieces of writing. The task did not measure predetermined criteria as in teacher-controlled ranking.

There were two phases in the rank ordering task: 1) before ranking, and 2) during and after the rank ordering. The two phases involved specific questions to elicit information about evaluative skills and choices of criteria.

##### **Phase 1**

Phase 1 is termed a 'preliminary' conference. The preliminary conference was administered in November-December each year, but for different purposes,

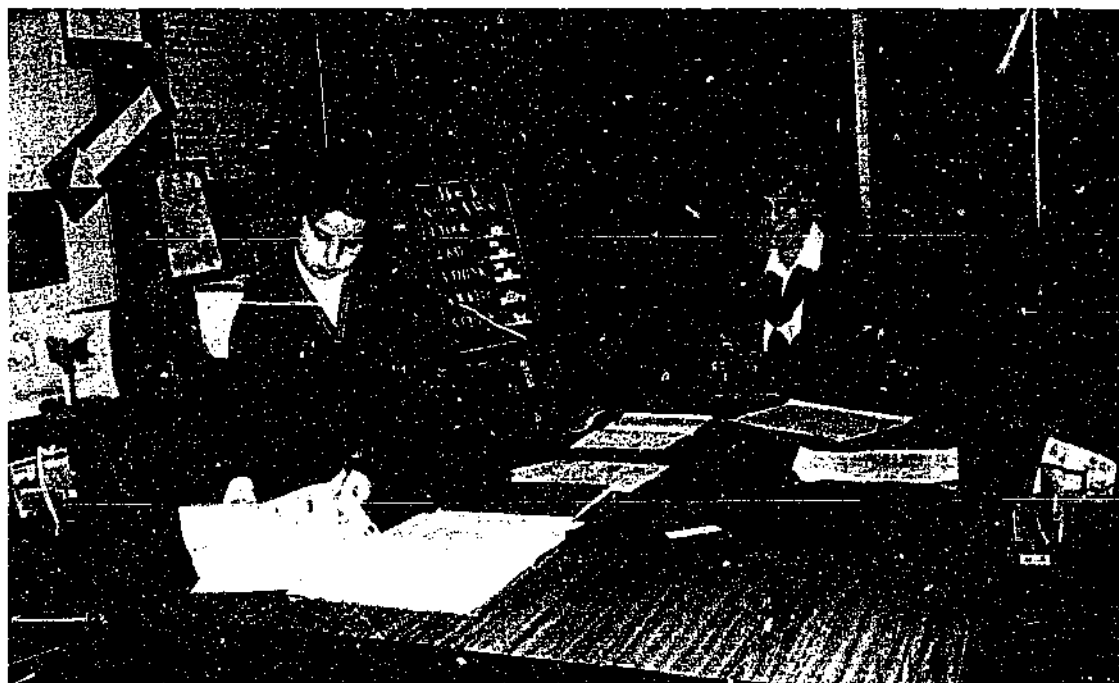
depending on to the teaching focus of the particular year. Years 1 and 2 had a large collection of single sheets of work; Years 3, 4 and 5 had several journals containing writing for different subject areas; Year 6 had a small and diverse collection of work. Here I will describe what happened in Year 1. In Year 1 when the rank ordering task was first introduced, the children had collected a large quantity of work, which they filed in individual folders separate from the daily writing folders. I held two conferences. In the first conference, I gave the children time to look through their work, to reflect on it and to choose several (4-6) pieces of 'good' work, which I filed in separate folders for the rank ordering task later on. During this conference I asked questions (see Graves, 1983), framed in the following manner:

- Can you show me some good work you're happy with?
- Why do you think this is good work?
- Can you show me some work that is not good?
- Why is it not good?

The language and the order of the questions varied as the children very often initiated the dialogue with relevant or non-relevant comments. I recorded responses as individual case studies.

## **Phase 2**

Several days after the preliminary conference, I conducted individual conferences for the rank ordering task, which was given in Year 1 to Year 5. I explain the omission of Year 6 later in the section.



**Figure 1: Jessica (Year 4) Rank Ordering Her Work**

Appendix 4 details the questions I asked children at the various year levels in relation to the rank ordering tasks. The children ranked the several pieces of work that they had selected or 'assessed' as 'good' work in the preliminary conference. They responded to the question:

How would you rank these pieces of work you chose as 'good' work?

After ranking the pieces of work, I asked the following evaluative questions:

- Why did you put this one first?
- Why did you put this one last?

At first, I intended asking the children their reasons for each position in the ranking. Very soon (in Year 1) I realised that requiring children to make finely drawn distinctions between each rank ordered piece was an extremely difficult and time-consuming task. Furthermore, it was very likely to elicit unreliable criteria. Hence, I confined my questions to first and last rankings. Both positions are important and indicate the weight a child gives to a criterion – either because the child's standards in relation to the criterion, however derived, are met (first ranking) or not met (last ranking).

After the ranking of the work and in the course of the interview, several children made changes to their original ranking. This action prompted another question:

- Why did you change this piece and put it in another place?

For the children, evaluation meant looking hard and thoughtfully at a piece of writing in order to explain what features or dimensions influenced their decisions. I was able to reframe questions to suit the child and to respond to spontaneous comments. The rapport that had been established as a participant observer during the language periods allowed me to press further for more explicit answers, for example, 'I don't quite understand what you mean by.... Can you tell me more...?' Or, 'What do you mean when you say, "*It doesn't make sense*"?'.

I assumed that, by the middle years, the children might regard the task of ranking their work, year after year, as a tedious and routine one, in which case the soundness of their criteria might be dubious. In order to sustain the dialogue and elicit criteria, I sometimes asked questions such as the following:

- Which piece would you say is your best piece? Why?
- Which is your favourite piece? Why?
- Which piece was the hardest one for you to do? Why?
- Which one did you enjoy doing the most? Why?

My initial plans to gain a sense of children's sequential development as critical evaluators through the medium of the rank ordering task were somewhat thwarted in Year 6. Except for five children, no others had filed writing samples in their portfolios, as in the preceding years. My fieldnotes and observations indicated that the children wrote various forms and completed a multitude of assignments. Work completed was left on the teacher's table for correction or pinned on the display board. When it was removed, the children were expected to be 'responsible' and claim their work and file it. There were no reminders from the teacher. The way the class of 40 children operated made it difficult for me to intervene for the sake of the 18 children. I also assumed that the children's Year 5 language teacher, now team-teaching in Year 6, would have continued on with the portfolios, in order to have information to write reports to parents about the children's achievements.

Although I was disappointed in not being able to complete the rank ordering task as planned, in hindsight it was probably fortuitous. I devised two activities that provided summative information about the children's ability for self-evaluation in Year 6:

(1) I had filed the children's 'good' work from the early and middle years and from Year 5 that they had ranked in order and evaluated. I invited them to review these pieces of writing. I asked open-ended questions, for example:



- Would you like to make a comment about these pieces of writing you said were 'good' work?
- What changes do you notice in your work?
- What have you learnt about writing?

(2) The second task was to write a letter. The environment was such that it suggested that an appropriate task would relate to the major transition the children were to make from Year 6 to Year 7. Consequently, in a letter written to a hypothetical Year 7 English teacher, the children evaluated their writing achievements. Information from the children's letters was collated, analysed, and interpreted in relation to the information from the rank ordering tasks given in the previous years.

#### *4.3.3 A Strategy for Ascertaining Consistency in Choosing Criteria*

Three months after the first rank ordering of work (except in Year 1), I repeated the rank ordering task to observe consistency in the children's judgments. Although I had contact with the children when they were in Prep. grade in 1989, at that time I preferred to engage them in general conversation about their work and why they 'liked' it. Hence, the omission of the rank ordering task in early Year 1. The strategy was first used when Year 1 transferred to Year 2 in 1991. In Years 3, 4 and 5, I repeated the task in March. I regarded the month of March as an appropriate time for the children had settled in to their new classes.

Although it was a time-consuming task that required ingenuity of approach in its repetition, I believed information could be gained from repeating the rank ordering task. I wondered if criteria for ranking work first and last might have changed

between November (the first rank ordering) and March (the second rank ordering) for the following reasons:

- Opportunities to write were less frequent after the first rank ordering, as the children became involved in end-of-year activities, which included preparations for the Christmas season and for the summer holidays.
- The six weeks' summer vacation might have proved to be a distraction, leading children to forget their earlier judgments.
- School resumed in February of the next year, when the children came under the influence of a new class teacher. For the first three weeks of the new school year there was no formal writing instruction. The class teachers organised activities to 'get-to-know' the children before formal instruction began in March.

One way to find out the children's consistency in choosing criteria was to repeat the activity. Criteria elicited from the two rank ordering tasks in November and in March were then compared. Except in a few instances, the order of pieces remained constant and there were no changes in the criteria given for first and last rankings. Significantly, I noticed that there were changes in the language the children used in the repeat task when they gave reasons for the rank ordering. They were more articulate than three months previously, giving an explanation rather than a monosyllabic answer, as some children had given in the earlier tasks.

The observations made in March are not part of the data analysis. They were used to ascertain the consistency of the children's criteria. At the end of the school year

(November) the children ranked work that they had produced in that year. Criteria gathered in November are analysed and discussed in Chapter 6.

#### **4.4 The Researcher and her Intentions**

I anticipated that my educational background would be an advantage to engage in an ethnographic study of children's learning. I had completed primary and secondary education in Catholic schools and tertiary education in Catholic and state institutions. Part of my tertiary education took place at the University of New Hampshire in North America, where I had the opportunity to study under the leadership of Donald Graves, whose research to which I referred, was well known in Australia. I also had reservations about interpretations of Graves' research. As an experienced primary teacher, principal and language adviser, I was conversant with the history and the expectations of the Catholic education system and of the parish primary school. I was aware of the changing focus of ministerial documents on curriculum development and planning that affected schools in all sectors of the community in Victoria.

Initially, my main task in the consultancy role was to assist teachers in schools classified as 'disadvantaged' in the teaching of reading. At this time (1970s), many reading schemes were available and children were 'locked' into levels. According to the authors of some schemes, children needed to be tested before being placed in a level and tested again before they were permitted to leave the level. Such cumbersome organisation was detrimental to learning and to behaviour, particularly in overcrowded classrooms. Reading schemes created problems related to literacy rather than helping children to develop a love for and competence in reading. Teachers with whom I worked were dispirited about approaches to teaching reading and unsuitable reading material. It seemed that the children's attitude towards

reading and towards learning in general earned for them more punishment than reward. Also, I was disappointed to find that 'creative' writing, which had been successful for me in the 'disadvantaged' country school where I had been principal and class teacher, was not included in the curriculum in schools I visited. Writing was based on textbook exercises, although teachers in Prep., Years 1 and 2 used the language-experience approach for reading and writing. The topic was based on the child's experience, while the teacher assisted with the writing of the 'story'. Hence, it was a change and a challenge to be introduced to Graves' classroom-based research on writing and child-centred pedagogy.

Before the demise of my first long-term study (see Chapter 1) to test the potential and problems of Graves' persuasively simple and child-centred pedagogy, I used the approach with a group of Year 5 children who had been labelled as 'misfits' with 'behaviour problems'. Although the writing produced could not be described as 'good' writing, the children's attitude towards learning and towards themselves as learners changed, with pleasing results. Their gratitude at the end of a few weeks' tuition in the process approach to writing convinced me of the need to pursue Graves' research further, hence, the long-term study which I referred to earlier. The focus for professional development programs for which I was responsible changed. The focus shifted from reading to writing, and, eventually, to the relationship between reading and writing, rather than isolating one from the other.

The early to mid-1980s could be summed up as a period of trial and error regarding the process-oriented approach to writing in primary schools. Few teachers understood the underlying philosophy of the approach. They tried to combine the traditional method that focused on the end product with the more enlightened method of process and product. Problems mounted for those who had difficulty in

understanding that the new approach implicitly meant a change of attitude towards the way children learn to write. I discuss these problems in Chapter 5. (See also Barcan, 1987.) As mentioned earlier, a far-reaching problem was the need for a fair and efficient method of assessing writing for the purpose of reporting students' achievements to parents. The educational climate towards the end of the 1980s appeared to be a propitious time to propose a study that addressed assessment and evaluation of writing. From responses I received from teachers, it was evident they were confused about terminology and they wanted an effective method for reporting children's literacy achievements and progress. The discussions I heard indicated that a wide gap existed between a priori beliefs they held about writing, assessment and learning and what learners could achieve of their own volition. Nevertheless, teachers wanted to do the best for their students. Their concern indicated they were seeking assistance that would enable them to make the changes necessary in order to adopt current theories of language development, writing practice and a compatible assessment method that would give results. Needs varied from one locality to another and at early, middle and later years of the children's development. However, for many teachers, the focus was on programs and classroom activities and a format for assessing and recording results. They wanted a format that would be true to the children's capacity for learning and one that would be convincing for parents.

In this climate of teachers' concern for their students and confusion about the best way to approach writing instruction and assessment, the notion of a research study was born and nurtured. As an observer, a listener, and a presenter of theoretical and practical issues, I perceived the goodwill and cooperation of teachers. They were always accepting of practical organisational matters. Some, however, tended to

believe that success lay with them and the programs they devised and which the children were expected to fit into.

My own philosophy had always been learner-centred. The teacher is an 'instrument' who facilitates learning and guides the learner to higher levels of achievement. Ill-devised programs were partially responsible for the frustrations I experienced as a classroom teacher, and I had searched for a long time to find the best way to understand children's learning. The works of Donaldson (1978), Graves (1983) and Bruner (1986) had helped fill gaps in my learning, and what Vygotsky (1962) had to say about learning and development was thought-provoking.

More and more studies of children's writing development became available to educators. Although the Ministry of Education in Victoria and Education Departments in other Australian states were aware of teachers' needs with regard to literacy and published useful documents - for example, Victoria. Ministry of Education (1990), *Literacy Profiles Handbook* - how to assess writing continued to be a problematic area. From classroom-based research in New Hampshire, I realised that self-evaluation of writing might be a dimension of assessment methodology worth pursuing.

#### **4.5 The Site for the Study: The School and its Locality**

Given my background and knowledge, I chose for the study a Catholic primary school - St Sophie's (pseudonym) - in one of Melbourne's northern residential suburbs. The locality, the history of the school, its intake of Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students and its management of the curriculum influenced my decision to seek permission to undertake there an investigation of self-evaluation. According to reports from teachers working in the school, St Sophie's was reputedly

a school with low academic achievement, linked to the children's socioeconomic and NESB backgrounds. This assumption provided impetus for a study of self-evaluation of writing in the school.

In recent years the locality where St Sophie's is situated has had a sharp increase in unemployment, although with its brick homes and attractive gardens, the suburb is more in keeping with a middle-class neighbourhood. Pockets of ultra-modern homes have tended to change the area's original status. When the study commenced, St Sophie's was classified by government and community agencies as 'disadvantaged' because of socioeconomic circumstances. Also, there were children who had been diagnosed as having learning difficulties. Schools categorised as 'disadvantaged' were eligible for financial help from the state government to employ additional staff to support literacy learning, to teach a second language (in this case Italian, to comply with the parents' choice), music, physical education and computer education. More recently, the term 'disadvantaged' has been removed and schools receive funding to develop programs that provide for the literacy needs of each particular school.

Enrolments have steadily increased at St Sophie's and over 400 pupils attend the school and are representative of 22 nationalities. Of these nationalities Croatian/Yugoslav, Greek, Italian and Maltese predominate. Anglo-Australian children comprise less than half the population. A percentage of students live in suburbs some distance from St Sophie's. The school is situated conveniently for relatives to collect children at the end of the day while parents are at work. Furthermore, the school has well supervised 'Before and After School Care' programs, which also operate during school holidays. There is no public transport

within close range of the school and there are no school buses. Children walk to school accompanied by a carer or they are driven to and from school.

School fees are compulsory, although the school makes liberal allowance for families suffering financial hardship through unemployment or other circumstances. Uniform for summer and winter is also compulsory, and is never waived except in the event of money-raising campaigns, when children are permitted to wear casual clothes. Parents are involved in school activities and assist teachers with reading, library programs, swimming and athletics programs. They are also represented on the parish council and the school advisory board. Mothers, on a voluntary basis, are rostered for daily canteen duties.

This is the setting where the study took place. I elaborate further on the internal organisation of St Sophie's School in the next chapter.

#### *4.5.1. Gaining Access to the School*

As I mentioned in Section 4.3, Stage 1, I discussed first with the principal about the feasibility of conducting a long-term study in St Sophie's school. Having gained assurance from the principal and staff, I approached, by correspondence, the Director of Catholic Education in Melbourne (Victoria) for permission to conduct the proposed study, giving details of its purpose and duration. With approval came support for the study, which was anticipated to be one that would make a valuable contribution to education. As a final step to negotiating entry to the proposed school, I made my request in writing to carry out the study.

I was not a stranger to the research site. In the euphoria of 'process writing' in 1983, by invitation, I had conducted a workshop to explore the current research on the



teaching of writing. In 1988, as mentioned previously, I was involved in a short-term project with Years 5 and 6. Nevertheless, I was unsure of how I would be received as a long-term researcher. Many teachers feel vulnerable with the presence of another adult in the classroom, particularly if the adult is a researcher and a member of a religious congregation. No matter how well-intentioned the researcher, there is an unspoken assumption that he or she is there as a critic to detect flaws in teaching rather than to gather data about learning. This assumed attitude was a cause for concern, particularly when I would be working in the school for a period of several years.

The principal's priorities for a 'good' school focused on literature, writing, a love of learning and parent involvement. She tried to imbue the staff and children with the same enthusiasm she had for learning. She understood the value of the study and supported it whole-heartedly. My reputation as a facilitator for teaching writing and for pragmatic organisational features that contributed to a happy and effective learning environment carried weight. Teaching experience, genuine interest in children's learning and a desire to support teachers rather than criticise were other factors that facilitated my smooth access to the school.

As a contribution to the school community for allowing me entry, I offered to share my expertise with the teachers. I envisaged a balance between 'taking' (the research project) and 'giving' (expertise), although it was difficult to maintain that kind of balance. The offer to help teachers in ways defined by them placed me in a favourable position as a resident researcher. The principal preferred the title 'writer-in-residence', a title that helped change the image teachers had of a researcher. As well, the school took advantage of the title for it claimed a certain status not available to other schools in the area. Thus, I was granted an 'honorary insider' role

in the school. As the study progressed, I developed friendly relationships with the staff, including those not involved in the study.

My researcher role was further facilitated when the principal provided a permanent office. A utility room converted into a comfortable room gave privacy, where I could retreat to organise my fieldnotes, examine the data collected, file the children's artefacts and transcribe audiotapes. With a permanent office I was able to continue the organisation and filing of data at the research site long after data collection had ceased. Thus, exit from the research site was not immediate, an important factor, as teachers can be disappointed with and critical of researchers who 'use' the school and do not return to share information gained from the research project. Having gained entrance to the school, I then had to choose the participants for the study. I describe how this came about in the next section.

#### *4.5.2. Selecting the Participants for the Study*

In 1989, there were two Preparatory grades in the school, Prep. C and Prep. S, with 24 children in each grade. The initials 'C' and 'S' signify the teachers' family names, a practice that distinguished one year from another, yet did not allow assumptions to be made about children's cognitive abilities or ethnic background as a factor for class allocation. This practice prevailed for all grades or years in the school.

When the principal first approached the staff about the proposed research study, Jane, the Prep.C teacher, immediately made her class available. (As noted previously, the names of the teachers have been changed.) Jane viewed the presence of a researcher in her room as an asset, giving her access to a resource person whose expertise would be able to complement her own experiences.

Earlier in the chapter I mentioned why I decided to observe and collect data in Jane's grade. This decision proved to be a useful one for me, if not for the children, as Prep. S had a succession of teachers in that particular year. Nevertheless, each teacher in Prep. S invited me to observe the children's writing development. In this way I became acquainted with the children, but on a level different from Prep. C.

My intention was to select Prep. C in its entirety as the research group and then to select case studies for closer investigation. Plans for this neat arrangement were not realised for, without my knowledge, the composition of grades in the following year changed. The teachers arranged for a single grade of 30 children in Year 1 and a composite grade of Years 1 and 2. 'Behavioural problems' were the main reason for dividing Prep. C and Prep. S between Year 1C and Years 1 & 2S. It was coincidental that the initials of teachers' family names were identical with the Prep. teachers' initials. For the purposes of my study, I selected 18 children from the single Year 1C -- nine boys and nine girls. From observations made in both Prep. rooms and discussions with the teachers, I discovered there was a range of ability with regard to writing, diversity in personality and diversity in cultural background. These traits seemed to be distributed in most classrooms I had visited or worked in. There were a few children of quiet demeanour in the group, but in the main they were talkative and gregarious.

From the 18 children I selected four case studies, two girls and two boys, for closer observation. I finally reduced this number to two -- a girl and a boy. Each child in the cohort had much to offer as a learner and for me to reflect upon. Hence, it took some time before I could make a final decision about the selection of the two case studies.

Later in this section, I give an account of the relationship that evolved between the researcher and the participants. Before that, I describe my role as a participant observer in the life of the classrooms and the school.

#### ***4.5.3 The Researcher's Role in the Life of the School***

As a participant observer I had the opportunity to track the children's learning along two interconnected pathways. One was the external view of their behaviour when they complied with instructions and produced work according to the teacher's direction. A portion of this work would be judged by the child as 'good' writing or 'not so good' writing. The other more complex and hidden pathway was the kind of framework children create that enables them to interpret their own thoughts, feelings and actions in classroom situations, which are structured and controlled by the teacher. Without fully understanding the way children's value systems operate, I attempted to capture the perspectives of the learners as accurately as I could, but without preconceived judgments about what was happening in the classroom between teacher and children and the exchanges the children made among themselves. Part of the difficulty I had in maintaining objectivity in the role of participant observer was due to the fact that I was totally immersed in education and committed to children's learning. I was critical of assumptions made about learners because of their backgrounds and of methods that placed more emphasis on the program than on the person. With knowledge of the education system, I was my own 'key informant' (Wolcott, 1975) and an 'encultured insider' (Spindler & Spindler, 1987). The ethnographic approach meant I had to be unusually thorough and reflective in noticing and describing everyday events in the classrooms and in attempting to identify the significance of actions in the events from the various

points of view of the children and of the teachers. I did this in overt and covert ways.

Although I gained much from spending several hours in the classrooms, three days per week, I realised that to rely solely on observation as a means of discovering how children learn and how they see themselves as learners did not provide me with the information I sought, which would have helped me answer the questions I was curious about. I really wanted to get inside the children's heads, to visualise their thought processes, how they made connections about new knowledge with what they had already acquired, and how they established a personal value system. The constant flux of social behaviour made it impossible to capture every single event that influenced their learning and evaluation of writing. There were other considerations that influenced the kind of data I was intent on gathering: changed conditions at the beginning and end of the school terms, the role of relieving teachers, practice for school events, money-raising projects and religious education commitments. These factors, important in the life of the school community, influenced the kind of observations I was able to make. My role was a dual one. As a researcher I was a participant observer, but I was also classified as a 'writer-in-residence'. The import of this role was that I became aware of how well the teachers understood the process approach to writing. The teachers sometimes requested help in questioning skills and organisational matters. Again, I had to make decisions about precisely what information to give them, as I did not want the data I collected to be influenced by my proposals.

I was able to make case study observations in the classroom and in the open area outside the classroom. The classroom was not a satisfactory setting for individual interviews because of the noise factor, which interfered with the quality of the

audiotapes. Mechanical problems with the recorder or forgetting to turn on the machine sometimes caused loss of data and I had to repeat a task with individual children at times that fitted in with the teacher's schedule. The open areas adjacent to the classrooms were convenient when those spaces were available. When occupied for other purposes, as frequently happened, I took advantage of any other quiet space to talk with the children. For case study observations, the children preferred to work in my office because of the quiet atmosphere. Apart from avoiding the noise level, there were other advantages in withdrawing from the classroom. There was space for a child to spread out the contents of the writing folder when selecting 'good' work and for ranking it. Furthermore, all the children were vitally interested in one another's achievements and did not hesitate to intervene during a conference in the classroom to make a suggestion about another child's writing or to voice an opinion. I wanted to avoid such interventions. How influential were peers' interventions is difficult to assess. While children acknowledged, for example, that a friend 'told' them how to draw car wheels 'properly', or how to spell a word, they wanted to take ownership for the way they constructed the text. Thus, it is impossible to be specific about the many influential factors that exist in the learning environment. I could not always be sure if a response was spontaneous, an echo of another child's interpretation, influenced by the teacher's perspective or, perhaps, was derived from my interactions with the child.

While there were invitations from teachers, I was also a 'privileged participant' in that I had the freedom to attend events such as the school sports, the annual school concert, assemblies, social and religious functions, class excursions, professional development days and staff celebrations. Data collected from these sources

highlighted aspects of school organisation, teacher interaction and the community spirit that prevailed. The questions I asked of the participants in conversation on these occasions provided descriptive statements of their activities. The comments gave insights to routines and to values the teachers placed on such events. From time to time I asked permission to attend a staff meeting to give an account of the progress of the study. As noted earlier in the chapter, I also had access to current curriculum documents, the school handbook and policies, yearly reports on the students' achievements, and literature left in the staffroom. Each week I received a copy of St Sophie's newsletter, which kept parents informed of events and activities. I continued to receive the weekly newsletter even after the conclusion of the study.

In the quest for information about verbal and non-verbal interactions between people in the classrooms, the playground, the staffroom, in venues and situations beyond the school and in the homes of the participants, I spent many hours each week observing and conversing with informants and making notes. The amount of time varied from day to day. Over a period of time I conversed with the parents of the participants when they were at home in the evening or the weekend. (See 4.3.1.) The parents agreed, amicably, to the taping of our conversations and from these meetings I learnt about their interests, values and expectations of the school.

The time frame for the investigation influenced participant observation. I had to strike a balance between 'over participation' and essential participation. The aim of essential participation was to collect data that would inform the study. There was a possibility that too much time might be devoted to routines and normal procedures, characteristic of primary school organisation, that did not yield data but which would generate speculation about learning. Balancing observations was part of the role and negotiating time away from observation allowed me to examine phenomena

and make modifications to speculations I had made about the data. Because of the contact I had with the children in my role as a researcher, it was essential that I establish and maintain a good relationship with their teacher and that I not be regarded as an intruder. In the next sections I describe first, the relationships that evolved with the participants, and then the researcher-teacher relationships.

#### ***4.5.4 Relationship with the Participants***

Whenever I was invited into their classrooms, the Prep.C and Prep.S children in 1989 seemed to view me as a visitor, another adult interested in their drawings and one who joined in with their respective teachers when they were seated in a group on the carpet to talk about their work. As I moved from one table to another, listening to peer exchanges, I gained information about Prep. children's attitude to school activities.

Most of the children were friendly and showed me their finished pieces of work. I observed how contented they seemed to be with the results of their experimental writing and drawings. The children were fascinated by the speed with which I wrote and the journal I used for my note taking. My behaviour when writing seemed to create a sense of wonderment, and probably curiosity.

I also gathered insights about children's cognitive abilities when, towards the end of the year, I asked open-ended questions about their 'good' work in individual conferences. It was during these conferences that I observed their ability to distinguish between 'good' and 'not so good' work. Every child of the 24 Prep. children I interviewed in 1989 showed this ability. However, not everyone revealed ability to use evaluative language. Those who ventured an answer, replied with 'Cause', 'I like it', or 'It's my favourite'. Of this group who gave replies, several



were able to qualify their reasons with a criterion when I pursued further with 'why' questions. In Year 4, Karen and Patrycia, two of the participants in the study, informed me they did not like 'why' questions. They liked to talk about their writing, they said in individual interviews, but they did not like having to answer 'why' *'all the time'*. This was valuable information to know.

Thus, when I chose the 18 Year 1 children in 1990 for the study, I was aware that they were able to make a distinction as to features in 'good' work and 'not so good' work. Two children were unable to articulate a reason in Prep. and three children were more hesitant than their peers but gave reasons. By the end of the year all children were articulate and willing to talk about their work.

In Year 1 when the study commenced, several weeks passed before the children showed any sign that they recognised me as a regular person in the room. They had acquired a new teacher and made more friends. During the language period I moved around the tables while they were writing. I also wrote my fieldnotes and listened to the interactions among the group when they talked about their work to the teacher. There was also talk about things extraneous to their classroom. Although I showed interest in the conversations, I was rarely included in them. The children operated at a level of control among their peers, and independent of an adult.

The interest in my own writing shown in the Prep. grade continued and several children chose to stand and observe as I wrote my fieldnotes. Apart from curiosity, I was not sure why this happened until I heard exclamations such as, *'I can see my name!'* (As five of the children's names commenced with 'J', I had written the name in full.) I understood this to be a sign of cognitive and language development in their ability to read an adult's writing. It could also have been an indication of

people's innate interest in themselves. It was a signal to reconsider my method of coding.

Publishing the children's 'stories' in book form as a postwriting strategy was a time-consuming task for the newly qualified Year 1 teacher. The children wrote short stories, which were edited by the teacher before being published. To complete the task, they needed to illustrate and staple the pages together to make a book. In view of the large class (30 students) and limited space and time, I offered to help the teacher, and in this capacity as a resource person, I received most attention from the whole class. It was every child's goal to have a story published in book form to read and share with others. I knew I had been accepted in Year 1 as a non-threatening adult and valued member of the classroom community when the class presented me with flowers at the end of each term as a token of gratitude for my role as 'teacher aide'. To a certain extent, however, this kind of relationship was an added pressure, particularly when I wanted to take a more objective position in the classroom.

The principal and teachers introduced me to the children as an author, which was correct. The principal added the title, 'writer-in-residence'. The assumption meant I was informed about writing, hence, I was often requested to talk to the children about writing. It is not possible to measure how meaningful these titles were to the children. There is always the risk that children might wonder why their own writing is so far removed from an adult's writing. However, there was no evidence to suggest that this really happened. Children watched intently, fascinated by the speed with which I wrote my notes.

More meaningful to the children, perhaps, was the role of 'teacher aide' and resource person, a role that continued in Year 2, mainly in the capacity of publishing

finished texts, a task that the teachers found difficult to accomplish. The children seemed to take for granted that I would always be available and willing to assist with this important part of their writing. Occasionally I received a recycled 'gift', a coloured-in worksheet, or a personal note. In the middle years, when some of the girls noticed that the folder I used for my fieldnotes was wearing, they replaced it with a new one, suitably decorated.

There were other occasions when individuals solicited help. For example, when they encountered a problem in writing and noticed the teacher was busy, children approached me for a 'conference' to help solve the problem. Some of the problems were identified as the spelling of an unfamiliar word, how to use the dictionary or to retrieve a lost idea. Sometimes the children simply wanted an interested person who would listen while they read their writing aloud. They either wanted to know if it was '*all right*', or merely wanted to share the pleasure of having composed a story.

The children continued to take an interest in my note taking, some as silent observers, others curious about the content. Several children questioned rather than commented as they did in Year 1: '*Can I ask you a question? Where do you keep the papers where you write all these conversations?*' I had never used the word '*conversation*'. When I was in my office, which was adjacent to their classroom, children arrived unexpectedly to chat about the filing system for the work they had ranked or to offer a small 'recycled' gift. They also asked to see their Prep. work, which I had also filed in a cardboard box for future reference. I noticed how they were developing as friendly and confident conversationalists.

In Year 3, the cohort of research children was divided. They were allocated between a single Year 3 and a composite class of Years 3 & 4. For the language period they

came together as a Year 3 group. I observed changes in their behaviour. Casual conversations ceased for a long period as they adjusted to a different environment. The Year 3 teacher expected the children to follow her directions implicitly and to work independently. If they needed help with writing they could refer to the attractive charts displayed around the room. It was evident from their external behaviour that they were preoccupied with whatever task had been assigned them. The teacher had organised a system whereby she could hold daily individual writing conferences. As she frowned upon interruptions to conferences, children tended to approach me for help, which was usually to spell a word.

Through the rank ordering task, I was able to maintain personal contact with the 18 children in individual interviews. As they were not allocated time for publishing the writing they had edited, boys and girls requested help. They sometimes left notes on my folder stating the size of paper they wanted, number of pages, and colour of binding for the cover and spine of the book. The rapport that had been built in the previous years continued. It seemed that they knew they could approach me and that I was interested in their writing. They assumed this because I continued to participate in whole class sessions when individual children shared their drafts-in-progress.

Gradually I withdrew from the publishing role to allow the children to take responsibility for their own work. However, publishing stories in book form was a problem for them as well as a disappointment because of the time schedule and the composite groupings.

The same system of grouping as in Year 3 occurred in Years 4 and 5, and the same procedures prevailed for the language period, which was scheduled for the afternoon in Year 4.

When I joined with the Year 4 teacher in walking around the room at writing-time, the children were not willing to answer questions or to converse about their writing. They did not like to be disturbed. It seemed that the writing tasks given them and their personal writing of narratives required concentration as they organised more sophisticated language to express their ideas. There were times, however, when individuals approached me for help. Then they asked questions such as: *'Can I have a conference with you? I have a deep craving for any kind of a conference'* or, *'Can I ask you for your opinion? Should I call it "Part 2" or "Chapter 2"?''*

Before the language period ended, the children were sometimes organised to sit in a circle on the carpet to discuss their own progress - a form of self-evaluation. The teacher asked questions of a child about the topic and the text. I usually sat at a table on the periphery and listened to the comments. I seemed to be accepted as belonging in this writing culture. If I observed the teacher was in a dilemma about the type of question to ask, I sometimes intervened with an open-ended question. Several boys often showed appreciation, making comments such as, *'Good question, Sister Kath'*, or *'Write that bit down'*. *'That bit'* was a child's lucid explanation of his or her intention to organise the information in a text. Their comments gave me an indication of children's awareness of the composing of a text. They appeared to be taking a genuine interest in the development of their writing. However, in providing a model for the teacher (at his or her request), I also had to take an objective position and guard against influencing the children's criteria.

Whenever I joined a group discussion as an observer, I never engaged in note taking. I tried to memorise and write later, guided by key words I recorded surreptitiously. Since Year 2, note taking had been covert. I felt I was a member of the group, and not an intrusive 'outsider'. Nevertheless, this did not simplify the problem of differentiating between the child's point of view and the teacher's or the researcher's values.

The location of the classrooms made it difficult for the children if they wanted to visit my office, as they had done in previous years. However, several children often left notes on my desk saying they had called, or with directions about how they wanted a story to be published.

As I have explained, class arrangements and timetable in Year 5 followed the same pattern as in Years 3 and 4. I observed that the children's first allegiance was always to the class teacher, no matter how restless or frustrated they might be about the changes to which they were subjected when they entered a new environment with different routines and expectations from that of the previous year. They were able to distinguish between the responsibilities of the teacher-in-charge and a 'privileged participant'. Unlike their teacher, I did not set homework or deadlines, and I did not scold or lecture, or make demands that are associated with the teacher's role. I was another adult who shared with their teacher interest in their writing. I was not given preferential treatment, for the children were aware of their role and obligations as students. However, they sometimes acknowledged my presence with a smile, a wave of the hand across the room if I entered in the middle of a lesson, or they would 'mouth' messages such as '*Can I have a conference? P-L-E-A-S-E!*' These messages were carefully relayed only when the children had been seated on the carpet for a long period of time, a practice older children did not enjoy. As an

adult and a friend - perhaps not as a researcher - they saw me as an influential person in the classroom, who might provide 'quick relief' from a situation. They assumed that any mention of writing would bring assent. I regarded this behaviour as an escape mechanism. The children never resented the fact that I refused to cooperate. It was never my intention to withdraw children from situations that they described as 'boring'. When I needed to withdraw a child, I always consulted with the teacher about a suitable time.

On the other hand, individual children often specified conditions for research-related conferences. Could I wait until they had finished a task? Could I have a conference at Italian, music or library times? I wondered if these were avoidance tactics or a sign of readiness on their part to discuss a particular aspect of their writing. I could not be sure of their thinking. However, when children 'arranged the terms' with the teacher's consent, albeit in their own interests, I found the conference to be a fruitful session for gathering information. It also caused me to query the right timing for conferring with children about their work. As a good relationship with the teachers had developed, I was always able to negotiate with them about interviews/conferences. I believe the children noticed the quality of our relationships. I often had to change day and time to accommodate the teacher's plans, which were influenced by events not planned for and that affected the whole school, rather than just my schedule.

In the final year of schooling it was difficult to gauge the children's attitudes. The classroom environment and group dynamics changed considerably. For the first time since Year 2, the cohort of research participants was together as a permanent group, still talkative and gregarious. This came about when Year 6 formed a single grade of 40 students in a team-teaching situation for the language period. Friends

were reunited and worked together again. An air of excitement prevailed as they were constantly reminded of their exit to secondary school at the end of the year and of the expectations secondary teachers had of children coming from primary school.

From the experiences of previous years, I felt the children took for granted my presence in the room. These were covert moments for gathering data for there was intermittent talk about things extraneous to the task in hand. Children complained about the structured timetable or discussed the particular secondary college they would be attending in Year 7. They seemed reluctant to discuss their own writing. They made it clear, respectfully, that I would have to wait as they had deadlines to meet. I perceived anxiety about the completion of tasks and did not arrange for interviews until later in the year. I continued to record general information about the classroom.

Towards the end of the first term, I began to rethink my role as a participant observer. There had been little or no verbal communication with the children and it was not possible to initiate individual conferences. In fact, they seemed to have distanced themselves from me as someone interested in their writing, just as they had done in the Prep. year, but probably for different reasons. Where I had once been accepted by the children into the writing community, I was now an 'outsider'. Although this objective position was advantageous, I wondered what course I should take for gathering information about learning and self-evaluation in order to complete the study. Like the children, I too had to fit in to a structured and completely different environment from that of the previous grades. I also queried notes left on my desk, saying, '*We were here*' with arrows and signatures.



It was a surprise to me when, one lunchtime, a group of girls (research and non-research participants) arrived in my office to ask if they could start a Writers' Club. I knew then that interest in writing had not waned as I had originally thought. As the children were not permitted to be in the classrooms during lunchtime, this group of girls met in my office at lunchtime on Thursdays. The Writers' Club was really a 'get together' to talk about their progress in writing. In a class of 40 it was difficult for the teacher to reach out to everyone at a time of need, or to organise a Writers' Club. While they were loyal to their teachers, the girls also recognised classroom difficulties. They wanted '*peace and quiet*' with '*more time for writing*'. I was the only adult not involved in staff commitments and able to supervise the group, which never exceeded eight children. With different activities and less pressure in the classroom towards the end of the year, the Writers' Club disbanded. It had served a temporary need and at the same time provided data in an unexpected way. In the final term I was able to negotiate time for the two planned data collection activities in Year 6, described in 4.3.2 – the review of work evaluated in Years 1 to 5, and the letter to the hypothetical Year 7 English teacher.

#### *4.5.5 Relationship with the Teachers*

As a participant observer, inevitably there were interactions with the children's various teachers in each year. I have already mentioned briefly some encounters. In this section I describe the relationships formed with the teachers during the study.

Before her appointment to St Sophie's School as one of two Prep. teachers, Jane gleaned from colleagues snippets of information about young children's ability to write sentences without help. She was puzzled and wanted to know more about this phenomenon but she did not know how to begin her own investigations. One

concern was how and when to intervene in order to guide children in their development of writing. Her philosophy about learning conflicted with several practices initiated in the school as ways of promoting literacy.

Against this background of uncertainty, Jane welcomed me to her classroom as an experienced teacher to whom she could address her queries. The joint interest we had in children's learning paved the way for discussions about child development and learning. The regular discussions that Jane initiated led to a sharing of professional reading about issues associated with education. I became a sounding board for a constant flow of questions regarding educational aims and literacy learning. Stimulating conversations in the preliminary stage of the study provided information I may not have had access to in a structured interview. Conversations started in the classroom were often continued in the staffroom and in her home, after she left the school to raise her own family.

Jane passed on information about the children that she thought would be useful for David, the Year 1 teacher. David was aware of the purpose of the study.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the school year I again explained my position in his classroom. He welcomed me, and a positive relationship developed between the inexperienced teacher seeking direction from the more experienced teacher-researcher.

Several weeks into the first term, David solicited help. He was unhappy about the noise level and the children's behaviour. His well-prepared lessons appeared to be ineffective, as he had difficulty in capturing the attention span of the 30 children in his class, who were excitable and eager to learn. I agreed to help him with the day-to-day organisation of the language period and, in particular, to organise suitable

activities for the children to work independently of the teacher, as they had been used to in Prep. I assumed he had some knowledge of the process approach to writing as set out in the school's language policy. This assumption proved to be misguided.

Agreeing to help David meant that my role changed to incorporate that of a 'teacher aide'. While he displayed initiative and goodwill in some areas of organisation, he still needed help with group dynamics and appropriate activities for young children. He was not always open to suggestion, as the excerpt from my fieldnotes reveals:

*As he often takes the children on nature walks, which they enjoy, as well as showing interest in things such as birds' feathers and autumn leaves, I suggested to David they might like to observe the growth and development of daffodil bulbs and write or draw their observations in diary form. It could be a class project & another form of writing. David objected, asking the question, "Who'll water them? ... The children would drown them and kill them, so what's the use?"... (Fieldnotes, April 30, 1990).*

David's needs regarding the teaching of writing were similar to those of Jane, although he was reluctant to admit this at first. After much trial and error, he requested demonstrations of prewriting activities, how to conduct individual and group conferences, and how to organise and publish the children's finished work. Initially I had reservations about the time given to tasks normally prepared by the class teacher. However, I gleaned more data from participating in these activities than by simply taking notes. I combined both methods. David also took a firm stand regarding his teaching schedule. He always asked me to defer my plans for

individual conferences if they interfered with his plans. At the same time he was also prepared to negotiate in the interests of the study.

Towards the end of the year, the teachers knew their class allocations for the next year. Angela approached me in the staffroom to say she would be teaching Year 2 and that she would be happy to have me as a researcher in her room during the language period, three mornings each week. At the start of the next school year in January, Angela welcomed me as a resource person rather than a researcher. She requested a meeting during the lunch break as she had questions to ask about the teaching of writing.

Several weeks elapsed, however, before the meeting took place. It was evident that Angela had made thorough preparations for the organisation of her classroom, yet, she confided, from the first day she had met with uncooperative behaviour. Of shy and quiet disposition, she was slow to solicit help in a situation that, to an observer, was unworkable. At the time I wrote in my fieldnotes:

*It is hard to put a finger on what is missing in this classroom, given the careful preparations Angela has made. Is there too much 'teacher talk' perhaps? No independent learning activities? Is the learning process understood? Or is it anxiety about fitting in the curriculum and frustration with interruptions to the daily time schedule? (Fieldnotes, April 1991).*

When she realised she had to take the initiative, and not I, to resolve problems, Angela arranged to meet with me to discuss her problems. Although I had occasional mini-conferences with her while the children were engaged in reading or writing, it seemed to be a wise move to have our discussions away from the class. In this way, I avoided any likelihood of the children losing confidence in her as their

class teacher. Despite disappointment that her careful preparations had not worked satisfactorily, she was prepared to make changes to improve group dynamics and to provide routine measures that helped to meet the needs of an intelligent and exuberant group of children. Typical of the teachers, Angela was grateful for advice about the theory underpinning the process approach to writing and practical ways for establishing an environment that would work for her and for the children.

Silvia, the Year 3 teacher, exuded much more confidence about teaching writing than did the two teachers in the early years. In 1989, when she taught Year 5 and always eager to learn more, Silvia invited me to her classroom to demonstrate areas of the process approach to writing about which she was unsure. Now in Year 3, she continued to develop her teaching techniques. Much to her advantage in gaining an understanding the writing process, she wrote short accounts of interesting events and shared the experience of writing with the children. Because of our earlier meetings, she appeared to be at ease with my regular visits to her classroom. However, my role as 'teacher aide' and resource person became redundant, for which I was grateful.

Communication between Silvia and me in the classroom was less frequent than in the previous years. She was totally committed to teaching and demonstrated a natural flair for organisation. She also had the ability to deal with unruly behaviour that resulted when the changeover of grades for the language period took place. She seemed to be oblivious of my presence as I sat at any available table and made observations about the classroom environment and the interactions that occurred between the children and their teacher. The positive relationship developed in 1989 continued. In the staffroom Silvia was relaxed, friendly and eager to chat about the outcomes of activities she had planned for the language period, and the way she

resolved behaviour problems. I knew then that she was well aware of my presence. I wondered again if she sought approval for her actions for, despite her competence, talents and outgoing personality, she was not a popular member of staff. During one of these conversations, she admitted her admiration for the cohort of research children whom she described as 'independent, dynamic, excitable, and articulate learners'. This was an accurate description of the children and high praise from Silvia, for, from my observations it seemed the children were not able to attain the lofty ideals she put before them.

Conversations in the staffroom with Michele, a new teacher to the school in 1992, developed into a friendly relationship. Michele told me before the close of the school year that she looked forward to having me in the classroom. Hence, I was not a stranger when I arrived in her Year 4 classroom in 1993 as a participant observer. Our relationship remained constant for the rest of the time I was in the school. Michele wanted to discuss organisational matters with regard to the teaching of writing. At this meeting I clarified my role and the implications this might have for her while she was teaching. She was not perturbed. She viewed the situation as one that would help rather than hinder.

Several months later I discovered one reason why she was so cooperative about having a researcher in her room. She confided that she 'hated teaching writing'. In my fieldnotes I wrote:

*Michele is unhappy about the way writing is taught in the school. She surprised me when she said she hated teaching writing...No other subject worries her as much as writing. She admits she needs help because of the frustration she experiences at planning-time. She is unhappy about the way her peers teach writing. She says that 'Phil [language co-*

ordinator] goes in one direction. Bruce in another. He's very structured. [He] gives exercises to the children. When they do personal writing he regards their first drafts as rubbish. Bronwyn [Y5 & a first year graduate] relies on Bruce's experience & support...' (Fieldnotes, Oct.5, 1993. The names of the teachers have been changed).

Despite the fact that she had attended ELIC (*Early Literacy In-Service Course*), Michele felt she had received inadequate training to teach the process approach to writing in the middle and upper grades. ELIC is a comprehensive project related to classroom practice and designed to help teachers in the early years, as the title indicates. The project comprised ten workshops and professional reading that addressed the topics for each of the ten units.

Except on one occasion when I was asked to be a relieving teacher in her absence while she attended a science workshop, I was able to concentrate on observational work. As Michele grappled with issues in administration, peer indifference to her suggestions about policy changes and difficulty in carrying out the basic tenets of the process approach to writing (as revealed in my fieldnotes); my role included that of a listener. However, she also expected response to the conversations about learning and the learners. She seemed to respect my opinions and remarked that I always challenged her thinking with the questions I asked of her.

As the next year approached, I could not predict what kind of relationships might prevail in Year 5. Bronwyn was one of three teachers who had been appointed to teach a composite group of Years 5 and 6 in 1994. She was the language teacher for Year 5, when the children merged into 'straight' grades for the language period. At the end of 1993 (her first year as a graduate when she taught Year 1), Bronwyn approached me and mentioned her concern about not knowing how to teach writing.

At her request, we met to discuss organisational matters and information sufficient for her to instruct the children during the first few weeks on their return to school. To avoid unnecessary discontinuity in learning, I gave her information based on the observations I had made in Michele's room and the routines to which the children were accustomed.

In the staffroom at the start of the school year, Bronwyn told me that she was nervous about teaching senior children for the first time. Hence, she preferred not to have me in her room until she felt comfortable with her class. She was apologetic about having to take this stance. I respected her decision. Occasionally during the next few weeks we met in the staffroom, and it was there I gathered information about what was happening in her classroom. Unfortunately, individual children in Year 5 (research and non-research children) had acquired a reputation among various teachers for traits that seemed at times to exasperate, and at other times earn respect and approval. They liked the children's independent and gregarious behaviour. However, they had difficulty in trying to curb their excitable and outspoken manner, more noticeable among the boys than the girls. These were traits I had observed in the children since they were in Prep. As they approached adolescence, such behaviour became more conspicuous.

As I had conjectured, the children's personal histories had preceded them. However, Bronwyn was willing to accept the children and their idiosyncrasies at face value. She did not want to be influenced by longer-serving members of staff, some of who held low expectations of the children.

At the end of three weeks Bronwyn informed me that she felt able to accept a researcher in her classroom. Her outgoing personality and sense of humour built a



rapprochement that helped her considerably with the day-to-day activities of the classroom. It was apparent that she was 'feeling her way' with regard to teaching writing. She believed she was setting the scene for writing with introductions that tended to go on for too long. Hence, the children became restless and inattentive. It was obvious that Bronwyn was unaware of the children's eagerness to write. The most profitable way to help her when she asked for guidance was to engage in a series of mini in-service sessions as I had done in the junior grades. While writing was in progress, it was possible to model different types of conferences for her benefit.

Bronwyn was always grateful for ideas about drafting and editing work, and a pleasant relationship developed. Part of her frustration was due to the class arrangement and loss of teaching time, as my notes reveal:

*At the end of the language period, Bronwyn mentioned how 'stressed out' she is and the frustration of only three days for writing instead of writing every day, as well as the difficult organisation of the grades she has to cope with. Both issues are beyond her control to change. Talking to me seems to be one way that enables her to cope with the situation, and she does not blame the children for misbehaviour. Although she does not admit it, probably teaching writing at this level for which she is not well prepared also accounts for frustration. (Fieldnotes, April 22, 1994).*

As an accepted member of the classroom community, I could not help feel that perhaps my role may also have contributed to her frustration, although she assured me, discreetly, this was not the case. The next year, Bronwyn opted to teach 40 Year 6 children in a team-teaching situation with Sue. On the first day of school, she welcomed me to the Year 6 classroom. She seemed more relaxed than in the previous year, partly due to the support of Sue, a more experienced teacher.

By this time it was taken for granted that I would continue my observations during the language period, as indeed I had intended. In Year 6, I was a participant observer with no involvement in classroom activities. This relieved the pressure of attempting to be objective without slipping unawares into a subjective role. Bronwyn and Sue had planned a very rigid timetable as a control mechanism. It was difficult to keep track of the two case study children, not to mention the cohort of research children, as the whole class was divided into four different groups that rotated from one activity to another. I explain the organisation of the groups in Chapter 5.

As assistant to the principal, Sue was informed and supportive of the study, although she never made any inquiries as to its progress. The two teachers believed their approach to teaching was 'child-centred' when, in fact, it was teacher-dominated, as in traditional methods of teaching. The concept 'child-centred' is discussed in the next chapter. Bronwyn maintained the friendly relationship that we had formed in Year 5 and was ever ready to enter into discussion in the staffroom about the trends in society that she believed affected education.

The congenial environment and the way the participants and the teachers adapted and responded to my presence as a researcher enabled me to gather data in a fairly relaxed manner. Nevertheless, there were difficulties attached to the task. Apart from inevitable changes in timetables and other factors already mentioned, I perceived the loyalty the children had for each other and for their teachers. The teachers also conveyed a deep sense of loyalty to one another and to the school. There was no sense of alienation or of being treated by them as an 'outsider'. It was the children's attitude in Year 6 that made me think that I was an 'outsider'. Still, I constantly evaluated my role to minimise the danger of taking on trust

misconceptions about the school and the people in it, as cautioned by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:104).

The modifications in participant observer role in the various classrooms enabled me to collect different kinds of data and to make comparisons that I expected would enhance the interpretation of the social processes involved. However, I did not anticipate that my role would involve that of a 'teacher aide' and a resource person upon whom the teachers relied for support in their teaching of writing. The extent to which I was involved in Years 1-5 often caused me disquiet, as I wanted to remain as distanced in my observations as each situation would allow. As mentioned, I was relieved not to be involved in Year 6, although the question of covert observations, and how I would use these observations, sometimes made me feel uneasy.

In the beginning, I mentioned that I would be available as a resource person, which helped seal negotiations for access to the school. I was happy to help the teachers resolve organisational problems. This facilitated their teaching of writing. It also ensured that the children would have their own collection of writing for the rank ordering task at the end of the year. I did not anticipate that I would contribute as much as I did regarding the protocols of the process approach to writing. Although I had a deep appreciation for writing, I did not attempt to infuse my own feelings about the finer points when I was not responsible for writing instruction or the children's progress. Earlier in this section, I singled out Silvia (Year 3) as a teacher who wrote herself, and this experience gave her an understanding of the process, or so it seemed. For this reason there was little intervention from me when gathering data in her classroom. Given the complexity of the writing process, as described in Chapter 3, the class sizes and timetable, and obvious uncertainty about what to do, it was not surprising that teachers questioned the process and solicited help. Since I

was not cast in the role of the teacher, to whom the children showed considerable loyalty, it is doubtful that my involuntary interventions influenced the nature of the criteria given by the children for 'good' writing.

Following on from this brief description of the school, the participants and the teachers, I discuss how I went about constructing a framework for the analysis of the data described above. This section includes an explanation of the categorisation and interpretation of the data.

#### **4.6 Management of the Data: From Fieldwork to Data Analysis**

The data collection represented six years of participant observation in the classrooms and informal discussions that occurred for six to eight hours each week for approximately thirty-five weeks each year. I also had available for analysis the following data:

- Transcripts of interviews with the children about the rank ordering task
- Transcripts of interviews with the principal, the teachers and the children's parents about their ideas of literacy, written language and learning
- Documentary evidence in the form of children's writing, photographs and material the teachers used for writing instruction

The wall chart, mentioned in 4.3, helped to impose some kind of order on the data. However, it was a laborious but essential task to identify and list themes, topics, patterns and other conceptual content. I identified conceptual patterns separately for their role in the investigation and for the major questions that motivated the investigation of children's self-evaluative skills. The values and belief systems that the principal, teachers and parents held were able to be coded as a separate explicit

category that may have had some influence on the children's evaluative statements. I was also able to set aside extraneous data that occurred during the interviews.

Other background information was important, but the information I was seeking was embedded in the participants' values and belief systems about 'good' writing and their decisions for ranking their work in order. This information was identified as central to the analysis. In this section I discuss how I set up a framework that enabled me to reflect on, and make tentative interpretations. I describe the way in which I finally interpreted the data in order to develop categories and subcategories that facilitated the discussion of the findings.

Naturally, I brought to the task of interpreting the data, theoretical dispositions of my own, derived from various sources. The literature discussed in Chapter 3 provided a background of information about early and later writing development. I had been guided by curriculum documents that shaped teaching practice. Furthermore, I had gained valuable insights about learning from my teaching experience and from a long association with teaching literacy in the primary school, using different approaches.

In Chapter 1:1.5, I gave a broad definition for 'good' writing. However, a concern was for the kinds of factors that characterise children's writing. I describe first how I overcame this concern by constructing a model that addressed early and later writing development. Then in the next section I describe how I developed the categories for the analysis of the data.

#### 4.6.1 Features of 'Good' Writing

Criteria for writing are thought to exemplify various properties of 'good' writing. According to Hillocks (1986) the properties of good writing are established by consensus and usage. As I pointed out in Chapter 1:1.5, there appears to be no general consensus on a particular group of properties that make for 'good' writing.

Among the models used for the assessment of writing in primary schools are those originated by Wilkinson et al. (1980), Murray (1982), Graves (1983), Perera (1984) and Moffett (1992). While the formulation and use of models can sometimes be guided by the (sometimes unconscious) assumptions of those who devise them and those who use them, models are nevertheless useful and necessary. However, it is difficult to select a model that satisfies both the reader, who is the assessor or evaluator, and the writer. In the primary school, the reader/assessor/evaluator is usually the teacher. Julia, (see Chapter 1) suspects that she gets marks '*because the teacher likes your story*'. This may be true, but for what reason does the teacher like the writing? 'Liking' a piece of writing involves the teacher's personal values and beliefs about writing as well as his or her expectations of the learner. However, it is difficult for a researcher to find out exactly what beliefs are held about 'good' writing and why particular skills are taught unless these are stated explicitly by the teacher.

Drawing on the models proposed by the authors mentioned in the preceding paragraph helped me to analyse the data I collected. I discerned in my data several of the properties included in their models:

- A predominance of graphic work/pictures (Prep., Year 1)

- The emergence of writing; pictures diminishing but still present (Prep., Years 1 and 2)
- Transition from surface features or lower level characteristics (for example, 'neat handwriting'), to higher level writing skills that demand knowledge of linguistic structures and linguistic features (Years 3 and 4)
- Further development of higher level thinking skills (for example, problem-solving and analytical skills) and development of linguistic structures in written language (Years 4, 5 and 6)

The allocation of 'Years' does not suggest that arbitrary boundaries exist around development. 'Years' indicates that the writing produced by the majority of children in a particular grade or year contained properties that indicated they had made the transition from one level to the next. In many instances there is overlap between the years, just as there is overlap in the levels outlined in the *English: Curriculum and Standards Framework* (1995). The taxonomy I developed is simply a guide for examining the text types the children evaluated and that appear in Chapter 6: 6.2.

The broad span of development from no writing to learning the mechanics of writing and then to mature pieces of writing had implications for the way the children evaluated their texts. The three models I chose as useful guides are as follows:

### 1. Graphic details

- colour
- cultural and symbolic effects of colour
- sense of balance

- movement/surprise
- expressiveness (e.g. happiness, sadness, anger)

(See Goodnow, 1977; Hubbard, 1990)

## **2. A model for beginning writing**

- topic information
- range of vocabulary (compare written with oral language)
- development of mechanics
- construction of sentences
- presentation (i.e. writing in relation to picture)

## **3. A model for extended writing**

- plausible content (meaning)
- a sense of order and coherence
- informative
- sense of detail
- conventions of spelling, punctuation, usage

The models encapsulate basic properties or features of drawing in the early years and writing in the early, middle and later years. They are features that are



recommended for the teaching of literacy in the most recent curriculum document, *English: Curriculum and Standards Framework* (1995) produced by the Victorian Board of Studies, and commonly referred to as the CSF.

The CSF document was not available until the final year of the study. While teachers' understanding of writing may have been shaped by previous documents, for example, *The English Language Framework P-10* (1988), the teachers in the study seemed to recognise the features mentioned in the three models presented in this section as important when reporting on children's writing development. However, in their instruction of writing, the teachers showed individual preferences for the criteria they selected, emphasised or treated in a seemingly perfunctory manner.

Against this background of information about writing, on the one hand, society's expectations for 'good' writing as demonstrated in curriculum documents and the teachers' preferences, and, on the other, a large collection of single and multifaceted criteria from the children's responses, I pursued the task of developing categories that would facilitate the analysis of the data.

#### ***4.6.2 Creating Categories for Analysis of Criteria***

First, I had to make sense of the data by examining the information closely to find out as well as I could what the children were thinking and what might be the underlying influence to their thinking in evaluative terms. This involved breaking down the data into manageable sections, a suggestion that comes from Strauss and Corbin (1990).

The procedure employed for analysing the data involved several stages. As explained in 4.3, I had made provisional and wide categorisation of the patterns and relationships between the concepts that I had interpreted in the evaluative statements collated in Years 1, 2 and 3.

From the evaluative statements I had recorded by hand on large sheets of paper, I had a broad overview that enabled me to trace the children's preferences for features that I believed were criteria, given by each of the 18 children. This was done in chronological order. For cross-referencing purposes, I also had a view of criteria that each age group from six to eight years of age had chosen. There were similarities and differences in the criteria the children preferred for their evaluations. However, criteria were not always explicit. In a number of instances, I had to decide if the criteria were about the writing or if the children were reporting on themselves as writers. Utilising the notion of grounded theory method, I developed a taxonomy or a system of classification. (See, for example, Hilgers' (1984) taxonomy of beginning writers' evaluative statements on written compositions.)

The taxonomy below gives some indication of the diversity and range of concepts across the first three years of the study. I made the following classifications:

- pleasure evoked by association of personal experiences
- awareness of surface features
- use of colour
- ability to make comparative judgments between pieces of writing
- ability to apply external criteria

- linguistic knowledge
- metacognition dimensions
- genre preferences
- self as learner
- uncategorised comments

The 'uncategorised' classification included comments from which, at the time, I was unable to deduce any particular property. For example, on some occasions dialogue elicited non-committal responses such as '*Because*' or '*I'd'n know*'. On other occasions, dialogue was effective and served to substantiate the children's comments.

I added to the chart the criteria the children gave in Years 4, 5 and 6. At the conclusion of the data collection when I had completed the chart, I then had the whole range of evaluative responses or criteria for 'good' work from Year 1 to Year 6 and a taxonomy that represented a range of criteria from the 18 children. I gained some sense of continuity and also discontinuity of certain criteria. I noted when and where children had elaborated on criteria and when they had difficulty in choosing language to explain. However, I had yet to establish categories that would relate to the core category of self-evaluation of written language and encapsulate all criteria.

In the early stages when I first began to analyse the children's responses, I returned to key questions, but not necessarily in the order given below:

- What are the children attempting to say about their writing?

- What knowledge of evaluation do these children have?
- How do they acquire such knowledge?
- Was the choice of a particular criterion prompted by assumed expectations of the researcher? (For example, 'Good question...' (See 4.5.4)
- Were criteria influenced by explicit teaching?
- How do I differentiate between the child's point of view and the teacher's values?
- At what particular time/year did the nature of responses change? What were the circumstances for change?

I applied these questions to the evaluative statements at each year level to discover what criteria dominated the children's thinking and how consistent they were in the kind of criteria they chose to explain why they had ranked one piece of work first and another piece last.

A clue to the children's thinking and an aid to the interpretation of the evaluative statements they gave in Year 1 was the generic term 'I like'. When they stated, categorically, that the writing was 'good' because *'I like it'* I had to probe further to find out what generated the 'liking' response. Was it a particular component of how a picture had been drawn or a text written? Or was it the actual experience that provided a topic the child 'liked' and, therefore, enjoyed? Both interpretations were possible and either one could be important to the writer as a criterion. Rather than

make assumptions about criteria, I engaged the children in conversation that enabled them to think more precisely about criteria, as the following excerpt illustrates:

**Researcher:** Frances, you put this one first because it's  
'good' work. Can you say why it is 'good'?

**Frances:** Because ... Well, I like it, and, um ... um ...

**Researcher:** Why do you like it?

**Frances:** I just like it. I like the drawing. I like what  
Debbie did. She put stars all over it.

From this kind of dialogue I interpreted *'I like it'* to mean Frances was pleased with the 'presentation' of her work. She was preoccupied with the surface features. Where it became obvious that 'presentation' was valued by other children as well, this attribute emerged as a subcategory of a major analytical category (surface features). Through dialogue as above, in Years 1 and 2 the children were able to substantiate their likes and dislikes for their work with reference to the content or to surface features. By Year 3, the phrase 'I like' was used less frequently. On most occasions, the children viewed their writing objectively and talked about their writing in specific terms, which facilitated decisions about categories.

In the initial analysis of data elicited in Years 1, 2 and 3, I had marked statements using four different colours to distinguish the criteria I had found. The coding system reflected the questions that initiated and structured the interpretations. My own theoretical predispositions also were influential at this stage. However, the initial coding remained constant and enabled me to organise and reorganise the criteria systematically.

During the time I devoted to the analysis of the data, I read and re-read transcripts of the conferences for the rank ordering task. I also referred to my fieldnotes many times to make connections between what the children were saying about 'good' writing and the learning environment I had observed in the various classrooms and also the environment I had created for individual rank ordering conferences when I withdrew children from the distractions of the classroom. With persistent examination of the data from these various sources, concepts that eluded me in the early readings became clearer.

The data led to two broad findings: one concerned the writing and the other concerned the writer. The three provisional categories I had developed earlier related to the writing (the first broad finding) and encompassed the whole uninterrupted sequence of evaluations from Year 1 to Year 6. In relation to the second broad finding, concerned with the writer, I did not anticipate that when the children evaluated their writing, they would also include comments about themselves - the writers. However, I considered this kind of information to be important enough to be coded in a separate category, which I discuss later in the chapter.

The major dimensions of written language I perceived in the children's evaluative statements are as follows:

- Content
- Grammatical features, i.e. linguistic elements
- Conventions of written language

These categories became the major analytical categories. They encompassed features that were repeated in the literature on writing and in curriculum documents.

The work of Halliday (1975), and Perera's (1984) modification of Halliday's theories applied to children's writing, provided a framework for interpretation. In their writings the children used language to achieve a purpose that was appropriate and made meaning in the specific contexts in which they were writing. Thus, they used language for relating experiences they wanted to write about and that elicited response (experiential). Language also created interpersonal relationships. Their roles as writers related to the reader and to the subject matter or topic they were writing about. In addition, language also helped the children in the organisation of information. These three functions, of relating experiences, creating relationships and organising information, made meaning simultaneously.

At another level of making meaning in the writing, choices from the linguistic system were expressed through the presence and the ordering of particular grammatical elements – including lexical choice, and sentence and whole text structure. Punctuation, as a way to express meaning and the writer's 'voice' (Calkins, 1981) was also considered to be part of this category.

The external or 'surface' features of writing was another aspect that emerged. The conventions of written language help the reader to interpret the meaning of the text. Conventions are regarded as the 'etiquette' of writing (Graves, 1983:87). These external features can also be regarded as a 'semiotic' system about social conventions, which have a function and contribute to the complex question of semantics. Included under this category are handwriting and spelling, as well as the use of colour and factors associated with the presentation of texts.

The three categories - content, grammatical elements and surface features - related to the core category, evaluation of writing, and to each other. Once I had identified the provisional categories as definite categories I developed them from the data I had collected, in terms of attributes and dimensions, in other words, I created subcategories. The subcategories, based on the children's responses, derived from different sources, such as the literature on writing, the CSF, expectations of a literate society, words and phrases the children used in conversations and those they knew by intuition. The subcategories are detailed under the three categories, which I numbered as follows:

**Category 1: Content**

- ideas and experiences - in factual and imaginative writing

**Category 2: Surface Features**

- use of colour
- presentation of work
- handwriting
- spelling

**Category 3: Grammatical Elements**

- lexical features, i.e. word choice, use of words
- syntactic aspects, i.e. sentence structure, sentence grammar
- semantic features – i.e. related to the meaning and structure of the text as a whole



I was able to make connections and associations between criteria, the types of writing the children chose to evaluate and the sociocultural setting in which the evaluations took place. The method of coding and indexing made the task easier when thinking about the meaning of the data. It was not a substitute for thought, but a strong aid to thought.

In the analysis of the data I found responses that seemed not to focus on any one of the three categories discussed above. Underpinning these responses were references to the child's writing experience rather than to the product. For example, children used expressions such as *'I put a lot of effort into this one'*. This was important data because it revealed the children's ability to 'decentre' and reflect on the actual process of producing or composing writing. As a metacognitive skill, an issue discussed in Chapter 3, the responses indicated an awareness of the thought processes and control of one's own thinking (and writing) behaviour. The children's responses also indicated an awareness of the reader, including self and a wider audience. There appeared to be a close link between the ability to reflect about learning and the developmental levels of writing. In the examination of the children's responses, I found that associations could be made with the three categories discussed above. Thus, I identified a fourth category with two subcategories:

#### **Category 4: Self-Reflexive Elements**

- awareness of the composing process
- awareness of the reader

In relation to the children's responses overall, some patterns emerged early in the study and it was not difficult to identify similarities and differences. Where there

was doubt about meaning in other responses I had to re-read transcripts and fieldnotes many times before I could identify and associate concepts that belonged to the different categories and subcategories I had developed. In the development of major categories and subcategories I had created a network that allowed me to examine the data at closer range and to make interpretations. In the final analysis I was able to identify patterns more sharply and group the data accordingly and without change to the categories I had developed. Data analysis fits loosely into Perera's (1984) framework, discussed in Chapter 1:1.5.

In Chapter 6, I show how I analysed the categories across the entire age range. This analysis enabled me to focus on evidence of the development of the children's evaluative responses within and across the categories and subcategories.

In the next chapter I focus on the school environment, the classrooms and writing instruction given during scheduled language periods.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The School, the Teachers and Their Classrooms

*'... My personal writing is what i like and what I want to do. This worksheet is totally opposite. It's what I don't want, what I don't like and what I would never want to do. I don't know why the teacher keeps choosing them'.*

Patrycia, Year 6

#### 5.1 The School Environment

In the preceding chapter I gave a brief description of the locality where the research school is situated. This chapter gives a detailed description of the internal structure and organisation of the school, and its own particular culture, which expresses what is believed and valued by the community of students, teachers and parents. This context is described in detail in an attempt to portray these various factors and their contribution to the atmosphere in which the research children spent so many of their formative years. The chapter makes reference to the school-based curriculum and to the leadership role of the principal. Following on from the description of the school and its organisation, I give a profile of each of the teachers who took part in the study. I discuss how they organised their classrooms as learning environments and how they taught literacy, and in particular, writing. This sets the background against which the children's self-evaluative comments on their own writing took place.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the name of the school has been changed as well as the names of the teachers.

As noted earlier, the history of the school is a comparatively short one. In 1965 it opened as a multipurpose weatherboard structure with three rooms that served as school, church, and social venue for the local Catholic community. Significant political events during the 1970s enabled the parish to respond to opportunities that government funding allowed: a new building program, reduced class sizes, opportunities for professional development and, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, additional assistance as a disadvantaged community.

The present modern brick uni-level building comprising classrooms, open areas, library, staffroom, administration area and other facilities was built in 1982 to replace former inadequate buildings and portable classrooms. A canteen, parents' meeting room and physical education area were located in the original building until 1996 when that building was demolished to make way for a staff car park. By 1995, the intake of students had increased to over 400, necessitating extensions, additional classrooms and relocation of the library, staffroom, administration area and the room that was my office. Despite the building program, portable classrooms are still in use. The staff comprises twenty-seven. This number includes administration staff and full and part-time male and female lay teachers, that is, they do not belong to a religious congregation, as did the pioneer women who opened the school.

The buildings are surrounded by landscaped areas where trees, shrubs and garden plants flourish. One family volunteers to take responsibility for this part of the environment. Garden seats are placed strategically around the grounds, and a barbeque, used on occasions, is erected in a shady corner. Although on a small scale due to confined space, there are playing facilities that cater for all age groups: an adventure playground, netball court, a small football oval and other playing areas around the buildings. The aesthetics and condition of the school grounds and

regular maintenance of the interior of the buildings are responsibilities shared by members of the school advisory council and parents on a voluntary basis. A cleaner is employed to vacuum the building and to attend to toilets on a daily basis.

Adjacent to the school and the football oval is the parish hall, which is used for general school assemblies once a week and for social events. More recently, this building has been refurbished and is referred to as the 'multipurpose building'.

On entering the main building, one is greeted with school photographs, an array of sports trophies and a display of children's art work, all indicative of the pride held by students and teachers in their school. The school motto scribed in Latin ('*Servus Dei Fidelis*') hangs on one wall of the main entrance. The Latin motto, a memoir of tradition, translates freely into a text that attempts to capture the task of the Catholic school, which is to provide a 'synthesis of culture and faith and a synthesis of faith and life' (Dwyer, 1993:14). Devised by the original staff of Religious women who migrated from Malta, the motto serves as a reminder for present and future generations of the ethos of the Catholic school. In the light of present economic rationalism that views schools as institutions to serve industry and commerce more directly than in the past, the motto incorporates virtues such as service, care of others, cooperation and mutual respect. The school policy embodies these virtues and also emphasises the need 'to provide challenges in education which enhance a love of learning'.

One practical example of how the motto and the school policy are interpreted in terms of a philosophy shared by humanistic educators is in the form of a letterbox constructed from a cardboard box and placed outside the principal's office. The children are encouraged to write letters on any topic that concerns the well-being of the school and 'post' them in the letterbox. The principal acknowledges each letter

and attends to the issues raised by the children with the same attention as to those raised by the teachers.

There are other opportunities for the children to feel they belong to a caring community. The student council, with representatives from each grade, including the Preps, meet weekly with a teacher in charge to discuss matters of concern raised by their peers. Issues might include changes to the school uniform, ideas for raising funds to support worthy causes, such as the Children's Hospital, the local community, annual school camp and appeals for the underprivileged or those affected in the wake of disaster.

The internal organisation is typical of most Victorian primary schools in that the graded primary school, reminiscent of the 19th century, prevails. In recent years, terminology has changed. 'Grades' are referred to as 'Years', that is, 'Grade 1' is now 'Year 1'. In Victoria the first year of school is called the 'Preparatory Year', and the children are referred to as 'Preps.' The school hours are from 9.00 am to 3.30 pm with one half-hour for morning recess and one hour for lunch. On one day each week, the children are dismissed at 3.00 pm so that the staff can meet as a group to discuss issues concerning organisation, the curriculum and professional development programs.

A feature of the large, airy, carpeted classrooms is the wide expanse of plate glass window that enables the teachers and children to enjoy the environment described above. There are no long corridors in the school. The children enter and exit from classroom doorways that open onto the school grounds. A second doorway in each classroom leads to a multipurpose open area shared by three or four grades. At the

rear of the classrooms and hidden from view is a small withdrawal area with open lockers for schoolbags. This area is termed 'the bagroom'.

The layout of the rooms is identical, and typical of primary classrooms. An electric clock is a fixture above the permanent chalkboard that is the length of one wall of the classroom. Beneath the chalkboards spacious cupboards are provided for storage. A display area takes up the entire space of the wall opposite the windows. There is also ample storage space for art, craft, and maths material beneath the wide workbenches on two sides of the room. Above one workbench is a display area. In another section of the room is a wet area fitted with a sink and hot and cold water. Heating and fluorescent lighting complete the amenities.

The rooms are furnished with tables and chairs, a teacher's desk and filing cabinet. The teachers rarely use the desk and chair placed at the front or side of the chalkboard. For teaching purposes, they prefer to stand or sit in front of the children, who are seated on the carpet before and after most lessons. Work programs are always on the teacher's desk and opened at the day's entries. The desk also serves as a repository for homework, work to be corrected, notes, textbooks to be used during the day, a box of tissues, and articles found around the room or removed from inattentive children. By the time the children in the research group had reached Year 4 (1993), one computer had been installed in each classroom. In the following year, a computer lab with twenty computers set up for weekly class lessons was installed.

Furniture in the classrooms can be arranged to suit different purposes. Teachers experiment with different designs for specific reasons. It is not unusual to walk into a classroom and find the table formation changed from the previous day. In some

cases there is not enough room for the whole group to sit on the carpet at the front, or for the teachers to circulate around the room when the children are working at their tables. At other times teachers arrange the tables in a way they hope will reduce the noise level, or to ensure that all children face the chalkboard without any obstruction. The teachers have considerable leeway in how they organise the decor of their rooms. The classroom community tends to influence the arrangement of the furniture, the decoration of the room, and how literacy materials are used. These factors give clues to the kind of interaction that occurs between the teacher and students and how a theory of learning can be interpreted.

In the 1990s, curriculum was understood to embody all that happens at school, and as such is regarded as the 'instrument' that is used to teach children ways of finding meaning and making sense of the world. The central and basic concern is the learner and learning. This concern influenced the move toward school-based curriculum development and a desire to make the curriculum better fit the child, rather than make the child fit the curriculum. Formal curriculum documents and guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education in Victoria provided the teachers with the framework, and sometimes specifications, for what should be taught and the procedures to be adopted for assessment and reporting to parents. As a consequence of the political agenda on literacy and concern about decline in literacy standards, revised curriculum documents explored a variety of ways for assisting literacy. In Victorian schools, *The English Language Framework P-10* (1988) replaced the *1975 Language Curriculum Statement* (Victoria. Education Department. Primary Schools Language Committee, 1975). It provided a series of 'milestones' to look for in literacy development. *Growth Points in English* was replaced by *Literacy Profiles Handbook* (Victoria. Ministry of Education, 1990). The *Literacy Profiles* mapped



out the continuum of student learning. The teachers at St Sophie's were familiar with these documents. When they were informed of the most recent curriculum document, *English: Curriculum and Standards Framework* (1995), mentioned in the preceding chapter, they spent a considerable amount of time discussing its content. This document (the CSF) provided guidelines to help 'build a curriculum tailored to meet the needs of individual students' (1995: iii) and strategies to refine assessment and reporting procedures. The CSF is also concerned for standards of literacy. This concern is expressed in terms of 'learning outcomes' and an assessment component - the *Learning Assessment Project* or LAP. This assesses basic skills in literacy and numeracy at two grade levels, Years 3 and 5.

The events surrounding the refinements and amalgamations of a different set of curriculum documents involved considerable change for the teachers. Nevertheless, from the three strands of policy, programs and activities outlined in the curriculum documents, the teachers incorporated ideas and approaches. Part of their responsibility was to ensure that teaching practices and the day-to-day events in working with the children were consistent with the Catholic school philosophy. The philosophy, which is summarised in the school's mission statement, is placed firmly in the total culture of the school.

The content of the school's program was divided into discrete areas, which were the basis for the teachers when planning curriculum. Language (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and mathematics were retained as separate subjects. Other basic subjects combined into a broad area that the teachers termed 'general studies'. This was not a static term. It referred to the combination of subjects as 'thematic, integrated or environmental studies'. While the acquisition of knowledge in the traditional subject areas was important, underpinning the school's program was

concern for the whole person and for other experiences, which included the creative arts (drama, music, and art), self-development (human relations, physical education, health, practical skills and craft), and religious education.

The school-based curriculum entailed a redefinition of the teacher's role. It also had implications for management structures, resources, community expectations and professional development.

Professional development was an important issue on the school's agenda. Its purpose was to provide opportunities for the teachers to reflect upon their teaching and to extend their knowledge and understanding of learning and teaching theories so as to enable them to be successful practitioners. Suggestions for areas to be developed came from individual teachers and from the principal. Each year, curriculum days were organised by a subcommittee. These were referred to as 'student-free' days, which enabled the whole staff to meet, listen to local or visiting speakers and discuss and extrapolate ideas and practices that the teachers believed would meet the needs of the children. Individual teachers had the opportunity to select, from a program of planned activities arranged at venues outside the school, an area of interest or concern to them and the specific grade they were teaching. These areas included early literacy, maths, science, music, physical education, the teaching of English to migrant children and behavioural issues. The principal was a strong believer in ELIC (Early Literacy In-Service Course), a program developed by the Education Department of South Australia. As a language consultant in her previous role, she perceived the value of all members of staff studying the theoretical underpinnings of written language and the practicalities of the process-conference approach to writing. To guide the teachers to an informed understanding of teacher-learner interactions, the principal initiated at various times the

introduction of the concept of 'cooperative learning', Gardner's (1983) concept of 'multiple intelligences', De Bono's (1993) notion of lateral thinking and Cambourne's (1987) developmental model for a meaningful, interactive and supportive learning environment, a concept also advocated by Vygotsky (1978). Professional speakers from outside the school usually introduced a new concept. While most other 'new' practices appeared to be of short duration, Cambourne's model was the one frequently emulated.

Although there were various subcommittees in the school to help with the running of the school, the principal was responsible for decisions made about finance, curriculum management, staff relations, school-home communication, enrolments and other matters pertaining to the organisation of the school. As an educational leader, she was the key person who promoted a more humane, sensitive and learner-centred view of schooling to counter the marketplace metaphor that emerged in the 1990s. She also played a pivotal role in the interpretation of curriculum documents and the application of these interpretations in curriculum planning. In her dealings with a comparatively young and enthusiastic staff with limited teaching experience, she was instrumental in providing regular opportunities for professional development. Her concern was for the well-being of the children and for literacy learning. In this regard she was committed to ensuring that the teachers developed essential skills for teaching reading, writing and spelling. In a school where a large percentage of children struggled to master the English language, this commitment to literacy made extra demands on the teachers. Throughout her principalship she was supportive of the teachers and sensitive to individual needs.

With her love for literature and writing, the principal proved to be a key figure in the way writing was taught. As a former classroom teacher, she was a strong advocate

of the process-conference approach to writing, which was discussed in earlier chapters. She was instrumental in 'reviving' this approach, which had been implemented in the school several years previously, and had been allowed to decline. She promoted the library as central to learning, and recommended, at various times, activities that were thought to engender a greater interest in reading and writing.

Prior to the principal's appointment to the school, assessing and reporting of literacy achievements was ad hoc. Teachers were at liberty to make assessments of their students' progress in a variety of ways, using anecdotal notes, checklists and samples of work. Reports were delivered to parents in oral form at parent-teacher interviews. The principal considered this an unsatisfactory method and insisted on two written reports on the children's progress - one in mid-year and one at the end of the school year. As an aid to collating information and writing reports, the teachers relied on *The English Language Framework P-10* (1988). The contents of the reports were discussed with parents with the child present in the parent-teacher interviews. Duplicates of the reports were filed and located in the administration area, accessible to the teachers for future reference. From this method of reporting achievement and progress, emerged a need for diagnostic testing, which the staff considered necessary for children 'at risk', that is, children who had difficulty in maintaining a level of confidence in learning to read and write. (Appendix 1 contains extracts from the school assessment policy).

Although the teachers placed emphasis on academic achievement, they also included in the curriculum a balance of social activities that involved the wider community of parents and friends. The focus in this chapter, however, is on how literacy was

taught. I give a brief account of the educational background that prepared the teachers for their role in literacy practices in the classroom.

## **5.2 The Case Study Teachers**

Tied to the principal's position of authority was the appointment of class teachers. In the normal procedure of interviewing prospective applicants, their willingness to support the ethos of the Catholic school was a major consideration. Although personal style and intuition about learning derive from experience, years of experience were not an essential criterion for employment. Rather, enthusiasm for teaching and a willingness to continue learning about effective ways of teaching were given priority over experience.

Six of the seven teachers who participated in the study graduated from the same Catholic teachers' college (now Australian Catholic University) situated in one of Melbourne's western suburbs. Angela (Year 2) graduated from a state tertiary institution. While teaching, she completed an accreditation course in religious education, a requirement for teaching in the Catholic education system. Teachers furthered their studies in other directions. Michele (Year 4) completed a fourth year from a Melbourne university and graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree. She and David (Year 1) also completed ELIC (Early Literacy In-Service Course). During her teaching career, Jane (Prep.) completed a Graduate Diploma in High Incidence Learning Difficulties, and Sue (Year 6) completed a Graduate Diploma in Administration from a Melbourne university. Jane and Silvia (Year 3) studied 'Philosophy in the Classroom', a sub-discipline of philosophy, with its own history and traditions (see Splitter & Sharp, 1995, for a detailed description). 'Philosophy in the Classroom' had attracted the attention of teachers as a way of creating a community of inquiry in the classroom. Professional development was regarded as

an important ongoing process that enabled the teachers to enhance existing competencies and increase their repertoire of teaching skills. Thus, voluntary undertakings for professional development were enriched by the opportunities the school also provided throughout the year.

Years of teaching experience varied among the seven teachers, from one year (David, Year 1 and Bronwyn, Year 5) to fifteen years (Sue Year 6). Jane (Prep.), Michele (Year 4) and Sue (Year 6) had taught at different grade levels in other schools before joining the staff at St Sophie's. Jane had spent one year in the workforce outside the classroom in order to broaden her vision of learning and the demands of a multicultural society. Angela (Year 2), of Italian background, had previously been employed in the school as a part-time teacher of Italian, and part-time in the 'New Arrivals' program, a program for non-English speaking children, before full time team-teaching in Year 1. Silvia (Year 3) joined the staff as a graduate and was in her fifth year of teaching when the cohort of research children reached Year 3.

There were similarities and differences among the teachers in the kinds of methods they used to solve problems regarding the teaching of literacy and in their dealings regarding order and discipline. In the daily routine of duty they managed similar kinds of contingencies in similar ways. While there were variations from teacher to teacher in the emphasis they placed on areas of the curriculum, their conduct was strongly patterned despite individual differences in styles of teaching.

The common trait among the case study teachers was an acknowledgment that they were ill-equipped to teach reading and writing. Collectively they had partial understanding of theories underpinning language acquisition gained from their

teacher training. They were aware of different approaches to teaching writing: the language-experience approach, the process approach and the genre movement. The language-experience approach gained credibility in the 1970s as a sound and useful approach for teaching reading and writing, when teachers began to use more child-centred humanistic approaches to teaching. The unique feature of the language-experience approach is the use of the child's language. Reading materials were created by the learners about their experiences. For young children, the teacher did the scribing of the language dictated by the child. The process approach and the genre movement have been dealt with in Chapter 3.

As an integral part of their training, observations and demonstrations during teaching rounds familiarised the teachers with classroom organisation and the teaching of writing. The various interpretations of the process-conference and genre approaches contributed to misunderstanding of theories and the confusion that ensued later when teaching. Their experiences were not peculiar to one small group of teachers. Confusion about competing theories was symptomatic of the times. Hence, when the teachers assumed responsibility for their own classes, they were unsure of the 'right way' to go about teaching reading, writing and spelling. They were also unsure about assessment and monitoring of literacy skills. They knew the educational jargon of the day, but the questions they asked about the teaching of reading and writing were indicative of the dissonance that existed between theory and practice.

As the children who participated in the research made progress from one class to the next, it became apparent that the teachers had given me an accurate account of their uncertainty about teaching writing. They had acquired strands of knowledge from different sources, mainly from one another when they met as a group at the different

grade levels to plan the weekly program. It is likely they were also guided by intuition. Although the language policy, compiled by the principal and staff members, was informative and provided practical guidelines, it seemed that the teachers had difficulty in putting it into practice. As far as classroom management was concerned, it was apparent that the teachers were not aware of the demands that the process-oriented model of writing makes in terms of organising the classroom.

Regular discussions with the principal about the contents of their work programs assisted individual teachers to plan for and develop effective teaching practices. As part of their professional development, teachers in all schools were allocated one and a half hours during the week to discuss and plan class programs and activities with their peers. The teachers worked in their appropriate group at the three different levels - junior, middle and senior. These vibrant meetings made possible critical reflection on teaching strategies and on the children's achievements. The exchanges during the meetings also gave support for teachers as they grappled with busy time schedules and unsatisfactory class arrangements.

### **5.3 The Teachers and their Classrooms**

As explained in Chapter 4: 4.6.1, the models for writing development that provide an appropriate framework for discussing self-assessment can be said to fit into three discrete phases: early years (Years 1 and 2), middle years (Years 3 and 4) and later years (Years 5 and 6). In this section I describe the writing environment I observed in the seven classrooms where I gathered data. Although data from the Prep. Year is not included in the analysis, I describe the organisation of the Prep. classroom and the teaching of writing. Their first year at school gave the children an awareness of the dynamics of the classroom and the beginnings of writing, hence, the importance of including the Prep year in my discussion. I deal with the way each teacher



organised the language period, which includes the prewriting, writing, and postwriting phases, and assessment of writing. I do this in four separate subsections: Prep. Year; Years 1 and 2; Years 3 and 4; and Years 5 and 6.

### ***5.3.1 Prep. Year: Jane and the Literacy Environment***

The first time I entered the Prep. classroom I was aware of a happy environment pulsating with such vigour and enthusiasm for learning that the children appeared not to notice my presence. The focus was on children as 'learners' and not 'beginners', a term often used with reference to Prep. children. Their encounter with 'school print' appeared on the chalkboard where Jane had written '*Welcome to thinkers and learners in Prep. C*'. This was the focus for the year. I was reminded of Plutarch's statement: '*The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled*'. It seemed that Jane was aware that these children had been learning about the world before they entered the classroom. It was her mission to guide them further as 'thinkers and learners'.

The children's first social interaction with their teacher began during the summer vacation before school commenced when Jane wrote a personal letter welcoming each child to her classroom. She soon discovered this diverse group of learners arrived with their own histories, expectations of school, and agendas. Although she did not have aspirations of teaching until she was in late secondary school, Jane believed she had an affinity with children. This affinity had emerged when, at age twelve, she cared for her younger siblings while both her parents were at work. From this experience she learnt that different forms of response and discipline are required for different personalities, knowledge she practised in her classroom.

To help bridge the gap between home and school and 'kindle the minds' of the children towards areas of the curriculum, Jane provided structured and unstructured activities. The influence of 'learner-centred' education was evident in the way she designed activities: a quiet reading corner with books and cushions, constructive floor games, blocks, maths, art and craft and dressing-up. Letters of the alphabet, numerals, and the names of the children and their birthdays were displayed around the room. Each week new words, sentences, titles and the names of characters from literature were changed or added to existing lists.

The day began with play activities that enabled the children to make the transition to more formal work for the remainder of the day. Assuming that the children had worked to the best of their ability, Jane introduced yoga movements, which helped them to relax and to make a quiet exit from the classroom at the end of the day.

The comparatively small number of children (26) allowed for effective interaction with individuals and small group work. Through professional reading, Jane studied the notion of 'cooperative' learning (later introduced to all classes). The idea of all working together on a common goal, of sharing resources and individual accountability, were criteria she developed for cooperative learning. This idea worked effectively at 'morning talk' or 'show and tell' periods, a daily routine when small groups assembled on the carpet to chat about special incidents or events. In place of the stereotyped teacher-dominated 'morning talk', the children were accountable for the way the group worked together. The teacher did not intervene, but when the children reassembled as a whole group, she questioned, evaluated the task, and modelled positive responses. Part of her strategy for teaching was to encourage small group and whole group discussions.

'Morning talk' and the play period were regarded as prewriting sessions. They were activities that provided opportunities for oral language development and for ideas that helped the children get started with drawing and writing during the language period. A child distributed single sheets of paper to the children sitting at their tables. The children had their own colouring pencils and pentel pens and they chose their own topics. Topics were influenced by characters they had encountered in literature, class events, personal experiences and favourite toys. Jane's method of teaching writing was based on the language-experience approach. As she circulated around the tables, she talked to each child about the content of the drawing and then wrote one sentence to summarise the 'story' given by the child. The children read the teacher's writing, and learnt to read sentences fluently with the visual aid of their own drawing.

Jane noticed that most children attempted to write words. From the writing spread over the page, she deciphered names, strings of letters and isolated words copied from charts around the room. The problem, to which she often referred, was knowing when to intervene in order to help the children move forward in their development. She queried how best to respond to their hieroglyphics, which represented true or imaginary 'stories'. Gardner (1991) raises similar questions about the quality of teacher intervention - when is it reasonable and acceptable, and what sort of intervention should it be? Jane's uncertainty about how best to respond to their work, however, seemed to have an influence on the children's development as writers. They were in a classroom where the teacher fostered play and drawing, preparatory stages in the development of children's written language (Vygotsky, 1978:118). They demonstrated a willingness to write, but they needed to collaborate with an adult in order to take further risks in writing.

Although Jane had an understanding of the stages of development in writing described in Chapter 3, she seemed not to encourage the children to take risks and explore the writing system by writing their own 'stories' rather than copying their 'language-experience' sentences or isolated words. Because of her fascination with the way the children tackled problems of representation in pictorial form, Jane emphasised art work. She queried the educational worth and professional appropriateness of some instructional materials and activities. She argued there was little value for the children's developing minds in worksheets or colouring-in exercises, which she referred to as 'time fillers'. From her teaching experiences she had observed that such activities were rarely evaluated for their learning potential and merely 'filled in the children's time'. Hence, she positioned the children from the outset to take interest in the evaluation of their own drawings.

At the same time, it seemed that Jane was not familiar with theories that argue the strong association between drawing and the beginnings of writing (Clay, 1975; Graves, 1975; Vygotsky, 1978; Dyson, 1986a, Hubbard, 1989).

Towards the end of the writing segment of the language period, the children sat in a group and talked about their drawings as forms of art, and not as a prelude or a scaffold to writing. The thrust of postwriting discussions was content - the choice of topic and what bearing a drawing had on the real object or experience. No distinction was made between 'good' and 'not good' work. Every child's work was displayed as a worthwhile attempt. This was a form of 'publishing', of sharing work with other people. Display areas were used to advantage to present, or 'publish', the children's work.

Jane kept individual checklists and anecdotal notes about each child's learning ability and achievements. For Jane, the conversations she had with the children about their work were an intrinsic kind of 'reward' system. Her aim was to demonstrate her appreciation for their learning, in keeping with the theme she had set at the beginning of the year. She believed that such an approach was the equivalent of a reward system and that it encouraged learning. It was an enduring substitute for commercial stickers and stars for 'good' work, a practice to which she did not subscribe.

In Section 5.1, I described briefly the guidelines that the school adopted for assessment purposes. I refer the reader to this section for information about the methodology that Jane and the teachers in Years 1-6 used in their respective classrooms.

This was the kind of induction to school life that the Prep. children experienced. In the following sections, in which I describe the language period and writing instruction in the early, middle and later years, I refer mainly to composition writing. The reader will observe that there is overlap at times with other components of the language period, such as reading and spelling. I do not draw attention to this fact in the discussion.

### *5.3.2 Years 1 and 2: David and Angela and the Literacy Environment*

As explained in Chapter 4, Year 1 comprised a combination of children from Prep. C (Jane's grade) and Prep. S (Helen's grade). In Helen's absence due to illness, Prep. S (1989) had had a succession of teachers.

David, the Year 1 teacher (1990), was responsible for thirty children, with whom he had had no previous social interaction. Also, this was his first teaching assignment. With a family background in which the teaching profession was well represented and highly valued, David brought confidence and enthusiasm to the task. He held an excellent reputation for his work with young people.

The Year 1 classroom was situated in an older building that did not have the amenities of the other classrooms. (Eventually, the interior was re-modelled for the administration area, staffroom and library). In addition, David had to deal with a relatively large number of children in an overcrowded space. Except for a reading area, he was unable to set up learning centres and there was little space for small group work. There were minimal resources for the children to use. Above the display area facing the class David had pinned handwriting charts and letters of the alphabet, high above the children's eye level. They were more decorative than useful. Lists of vocabulary compiled from class stories were pinned on one of the walls. The children stored folders for writing, reading and vocabulary (spelling) in plastic containers that they kept near their chairs. Hampered by lack of space, which made for a noisy environment and misbehaviour, David was resourceful in many ways. When the weather permitted, he took his class for short walks around the school grounds. These regular nature walks had a calming effect on the children as well as extending ideas for writing.

The next year (1991) David's class was divided into a single grade of twenty-two children and a composite grade with the same number. Angela was the teacher for the single Year 2. The cohort of research children remained intact in her group.

The physical features of the classrooms that the children occupied in Years 1 and 2 were identical. Angela, the more experienced teacher, changed her classroom into an attractive learning environment. In the absence of display boards, she strung lines diagonally across the room to display the children's work. Displays were changed regularly. Lists of words for building vocabulary dominated the scene. One of the advantages of smaller class numbers was that it allowed space for 'learning centres' and for movement around the room.

During the first few weeks of school, both teachers adopted procedures that are routine practice in the primary school. They concentrated on setting the tone of their classrooms by establishing rules and letting the children know their expectations now they were in Year 1 or Year 2. From the tone of the teachers' voices, it was assumed that learning would be much more difficult than when in Prep. The format for the language period (one-and-a-half hours three days each week) was similar for all grades in the school: reading, word study (spelling), handwriting and composition writing. These components were taught separately, but not necessarily in the above order. However, composition writing tended to be left for the final segment of the period. Whenever possible, the teachers endeavoured to integrate components of language.

I describe David's methodology first and then how Angela conducted the language period in Year 2.

### **Year 1**

In Year 1, at the scheduled time for language, several children were withdrawn by the language support teacher, leaving David with twenty children, eighteen of who were the research children. The remaining two eventually left the school. Before her

class of Preps. finished at the end of 1989, Jane had written anecdotal notes about each child's development and learning ability. She passed on this information to David to help him gain some knowledge of the children's background in writing.

David was familiar with the terms 'process writing' and 'story writing', terms the teachers applied to the process approach to writing. He knew that children had writing folders in which to keep pieces of daily work. He also knew that the teacher conducts conferences. From observations, it seemed that he was not aware of the necessary preparation for writing other than to distribute a writing folder to each child. He assumed the children would draw pictures and write their own 'stories', hence the term 'story-writing'.

After the daily 'show and tell' session, he read a story aloud, and then asked a few general questions about characters and plot, without using that terminology. The children were directed to take out writing folders and write a story. David walked around distributing single sheets of paper, which, because of size, restricted the amount of work they were able to produce. For Year 1, it seemed that the directions were inadequate. This assumption was verified by the volume of noise that disturbed the environment. It was not work-related talk, but petty squabbles about erasers and pentel pens, unhappy reactions because peers had 'copied' a word from someone, and other trifling matters important in their lives. A constant stream of children made their way to the waste paper bin to sharpen pencils or to discard work started and not completed. When seated at their tables, however, they tended to voice their plans for writing, saying, *'I'm going to draw... and then I'm going to write...'* Their main concern was how to spell the words they wanted to write in their stories. There were no resources or instructions for them to follow. David's main direction to them was to work quietly.



After several weeks there came a *cri de coeur* from David requesting my help for the kind of questions to ask in a conference and how to overcome the difficulty of numerous individual conferences each day. Most writing at this stage was brief and undecipherable. David wanted a routine that allowed the children to take partial responsibility for their own learning. In other words, he wanted some ideas on what he should suggest the children should do when they finished writing a story. Later in the year when he participated in the Early Literacy In-Service Course (ELIC), he gained some knowledge about theoretical and practical issues regarding the stages in writing development and the kinds of observations to make about the children's work.

It was apparent that David had gained from the in-service course. He approached the teaching of writing with greater confidence. He also made changes in his approach to the children and to the organisation of his classroom. After the preliminary reading of a story or poem, he discussed the story line. The focus was on content, the order of events, and feelings and emotions of characters. When the children wrote, they chose their own topics, usually about personal experiences. At times he prescribed a topic related to a theme, such as the life cycle of a chicken; at other times he banned topics that he did not approve of, such as the television cartoon, *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. He gave more explicit instructions to the children about the use of resources ('word banks') for spelling words, and what to do if they were unable to do any writing. There were language activities for the children to choose from, rather than disturb him during a process writing conference.

When it was time to write, the children collected their writing folders and sat at tables in groups of four or six. I assisted David in making booklets of several pages for the children to write in rather than single sheets of paper, which were hard to

control and were eventually disposed of in the waste-paper bin. Furthermore, a single sheet of paper restricted the content of their stories. Also, I needed to ensure there would be a collection of work produced during the language period for the self-evaluation task at the end of the year. Before long the children made their own books. They wrote their name on the cover and the date, which was copied from the chalkboard. They had a special folder for finished work. This practice carried into Year 2.

Central to the pedagogy of the process approach is the concept of *conferencing* (see Chapter 3: 3.6.1) David continued to help children in individual conferences. He gradually developed his own style for open-ended questions, which required the children to think about the content of their writing. However, writing development at this stage precluded them from adding '*more information to make the story interesting*', a criterion that the teachers often repeated. Teaching the skills of handwriting (script print) was essential for this age group. 'Having-a-go' at writing words by sounding them phonetically ('invented spelling') was intended to discourage children from asking, '*How do you spell...?*'. The children did not seem to refer to class stories and lists of theme and common words as a self-monitoring strategy for spelling, as they continued to ask David or me how to spell words. Invented spelling encouraged fluency for some children; for others, words had to be 'right', not invented. Children anxious to spell words correctly also approached one of their peers, Daniella, who read texts beyond her age group and seemed to have a photographic memory for words.

Handwriting and spelling were separate issues and did not count as requisites for 'good' writing. The accent was more on the development of writing from the experimental to decipherable sentences.

Before the language period ended, the children assembled on the carpet to talk about what they had written during the period. David called on individual children to read their stories aloud. Early in the year they asked 'first-order' questions of one another, Vygotsky's (1978) term for simple questions related to visual features, but which also implied cognitive ability. For example, they asked:

*Why did you put those colours?*

*Did you put the date on your work?* (a teacher directive)

*How did you know to spell the words?* (an assumption there was a 'right' way to spell words)

Occasionally, a question gave an indication of some awareness of the composing process:

*Did you think of the word you were going to write about?*

The content of the questions is not surprising as the children were absorbed in mastering basic skills. The interaction in the excerpt below indicates an awareness of the information and a higher level of thinking when a child read his story about the jungle, one of the themes David used for language:

Teacher:       What's the name of your story, Jason?

Jason:         *The Jungle Lion.*

Wade: (to Jason) *The Jungle Lion?* That doesn't make sense.

Teacher:       Can you suggest something better?

Andrew:       He could say, '*In the jungle the lion was sleeping*'.

**Tracey:** Where in the jungle? Faraway from the start of the jungle, or where?

**Bruno:** Maybe you could put a little word in the middle to make sense.

**Teacher:** What word?

**Bruno:** Like *'the'*

**Wade:** *'The jungle the lion'* doesn't make sense to me...

These kinds of exchanges among six-year-olds about a text required skilful questioning on the part of the teacher. This skill usually develops with experience. Nevertheless, David's questions and modelling of appropriate language sustained the children's interest in the discussion of the text. One can only speculate as to how they were influenced by such exchanges.

Although constant instruction was given on spelling and handwriting skills, these components were not emphasised as necessary for 'good' writing. Presentation on the page (neatness and straight lines) seemed to be more important. For the children, the 'publishing' or presentation of their work in the form of a book was paramount as it gave purpose to their writing. Publishing stories in any form was a time-consuming task and one that David avoided. In the absence of adult help, I assisted the children in the editing and publishing processes, and thus gained some insights into their thinking. David was generous with praise of the child's finished work and ensured that the 'launching' of the new 'book' was appropriately acknowledged by the class.

Towards the end of the year there were children who wrote first and then decided to make a drawing at the end, and there were others who wrote without any drawing.

This development implied they were learning to compose internally and did not require a drawing to help them. They were at this stage when they arrived in Angela's classroom in Year 2.

## Year 2

At the beginning of the year, Angela's plans to explore art and writing met with disappointment for her. The four teachers in Years 1 and 2 (single and composite grades) decided to work together and specialise in four separate areas: art, singing, health and sport. Each afternoon Angela's grade engaged in one or other of these subjects with a different teacher. While Angela taught art on a rotational basis to the four groups, including her own class, it was not the kind of integration she had envisaged. Furthermore, the method caused disruptive behaviour, which was a constant source of worry to her.

It was noticeable that Angela was thoroughly prepared for her first encounter with Year 2 and for each day's teaching. Some of her strengths were teaching basic English to migrant children, as well as Italian, her native language, which was the second language recommended by parents to be taught in the school. Unlike David, she had not undertaken any formal study that involved the theory of the process-conference approach to writing. Her knowledge of writing had been gleaned from colleagues at the weekly planning time and from the school's writing policy. How to cope with the actual teaching of writing and recording progress concerned her as much as it did the teachers in Prep. and Year 1.

Angela had succeeded in establishing a good working routine for reading by giving explicit directions. She was exact about word study, which usually took place after the reading session. While the children were expected to write words in

conventional form, the aim was to extend their vocabulary, and this was done in class lessons and worksheets. She did not highlight correct spelling as a criterion for 'good' writing. She did expect it, though, for the children were 'immersed in print' (Goodman, 1991). Lists of vocabulary and information derived from themes hung from every available space as a resource for self-learning. It is not possible to ascertain whether the children absorbed the print sufficiently to apply it to their writing. Most children did not like the 'have-a-go' strategy of guessing the spelling of an unfamiliar word. They wanted to know how to spell words correctly in the first draft.

The writing session began with the reading of a story chosen by the teacher. After a discussion of the characters in the story and a few general questions, the children returned to their tables to write their own stories. Angela put implicit trust in the children, as David had done, that they would write with minimal direction and inadequate resources.

The children were permitted to sit at any table with whomever they liked. Firm friendships had already been formed, some dating back to kindergarten. Moving around the tables it was possible for me to note a good deal of the children's talk about the content of their writing. Children asked me '*to listen to see if it makes sense*'. Making meaning with language seemed to be an important focus for them. By reading their texts aloud to me or to a peer, they seemed to know intuitively where to make slight revisions and decisions about the content. I was merely a sounding board whose advice was not needed.

There was evidence to suggest that Angela had learnt from her peers some of the essential strategies for writing, such as writing folders, free choice of topics, roving

conferences, sharing and publishing writing. She believed the children should be able to write different genres. The genres she encouraged were retelling of stories and humorous poems, fantasy stories, projects and entries in their science journals.

The arrangement of the tables encouraged friends to collaborate in a group story, an advance on writing that had not taken place in Year 1. While they enjoyed the companionship of a friend and the social advantages of talk, I observed how well several children were able to collaborate about the content of the text, although there were occasions when an impasse occurred. At these times, children approached me to help resolve the differences about the direction the writing should take. It is always hard to relinquish 'a good idea', as this researcher knows. It is much more problematic for the beginning writer, and very often collaborative pieces were not completed

Angela received the children's ideas and comments about their writing in a respectful and interested manner. She did not reject a point of view or an offer of information. On the other hand, she did not explore comments or generate discussion. Sometimes the children generated their own discussion, uninvited. Instead of demonstrating how information arising from discussion could be incorporated into a text, Angela's concern was for the noise that resulted from children wanting their opinions heard about information they considered should be in the text.

The children seemed to pay little attention to routine stereotyped questions framed as in Year 1, and that had become part of the orthodoxy: *What are you writing about? Where did you get the idea? What will you do next?* There were no reluctant writers, but there were children at both ends of the continuum of learning

who needed help. Children were producing texts of greater length than in Year 1. Hence, their concern seemed to be for the spelling of unfamiliar words and the basic vocabulary they had already learnt in Year 1. For these children, length was an important criterion; for children who wrote less, the aesthetics of a published story were important.

Angela's perceived role as one that supported learners seemed to have defeated itself by the amount of time devoted to what is known as 'teacher talk' (Delamont, 1976; Mercer, 1995). 'Teacher talk' took various forms: praise and encouragement for work regularly checked; reprimands and negotiations about work not completed; repetitive directions before, during and after every activity; lectures about misbehaviour and transgressions of classroom rules, together with necessary talk for teaching purposes. In this environment it was difficult to gain a sense of the teacher's values regarding writing. The children would have preferred more opportunities for positive interactions, as the following comment from Patrycia indicates:

*How come we write all these stories and we don't get to share them? We talk about handwriting and quiet, and then it's cut off... (Fieldnotes, February 5, 1991).*

'It's' refers to the short time given for discussing or sharing her text with the group in order to get feedback. This part of writing instruction was frequently omitted, much to the children's disappointment, as revealed in Patrycia's comment.

Writing-time often ended abruptly, in time to return folders to the plastic buckets provided for books and prepare for morning recess. Sitting on the carpet for an



unpredictable amount of time at the beginning of the language period curtailed writing-time. The children were relieved to move to their tables to begin their work.

When she initiated a lunchtime meeting with me to solicit help to resolve behavioural problems, I was able to inform Angela of the organisational procedures that had worked in Year 1. Underpinning her request for direction on learning centres was belief in the way children learnt through self-directed activities.

Through a series of informal unscheduled classroom 'in-service' conversations with me, Angela was able to make changes in writing instruction. Her methodology is better described as a 'fragmented' rather than a haphazard approach. Once informed, she was able to make connections. One of her main problems, however, was asking the right kinds of questions to elicit information. She had difficulty in asking open-ended questions that require manipulating information. Rather, she preferred closed questions that required recall and reporting of facts. Writing was valued for the descriptive words a child used and how well the child recalled details of a recount.

Eventually, Angela planned time so that children could share their drafts. Sharing had a two-pronged effect. It appeared to boost the child's self-esteem and it provided the writer with feedback about the content and the structure of the piece. The goal was to have the piece of writing published.

From my observations, the children were capable of spirited discussion about the way they had written their texts (narrative and recount). At sharing-time, the task to which Patricia alludes, the children advised or questioned one another as follows:

*'The writing doesn't tell us about the experiment'*

*'It's not a very good ending, but you could say...'*

They asked questions about 'plot' and 'characters', two concepts the teacher focused on when reading literature. They used more sophisticated language than in Year 1, and they persevered in finishing a second draft for stories they decided to publish.

As a graduate teacher in Year 1 (David) and a teacher who was not well-informed about the process-conference approach in Year 2 (Angela), it was not unnatural that the two teachers subscribed to 'orthodoxies'. Orthodoxies in this context are maxims of teaching writing that prevent teachers from being sensitive to the writer and that substitute for thinking (Graves, 1984: 184). Maxims include precepts such as sharing every piece of writing with the entire class or assuming that children should never be directed in their writing.

Both teachers grappled with two challenging situations: how to teach writing, and how to deal with the needs of a group of children with active minds who loved learning. The teachers persevered in developing skills that enabled them to observe, keep track of, and encourage learning. Writing was not labelled 'good' or 'not good'. Concern was held for development and this was gauged by the quantity of writing. The growth points in writing, documented in *The English Language Framework P-10* (1988), provided them with benchmarks for recording writing development.

Figure 2 shows the Year 2 classroom.



Figure 2: The Year 2 Classroom.

In the foreground L-R: Tracey, Bruno and Peter at a publishing conference.

### *5.3.3 Years 3 and 4: Silvia and Michele and the Literacy Environment*

Because of behavioural problems and clash of personalities among the children in Angela's Year 2 class, the decision was made to divide the group into a single Year 3 and a composite Years 3 & 4, as mentioned in the preceding chapter. Silvia was the class teacher for the composite grade. To accommodate traditional thinking in the school that reading and writing should be taught at specific grade levels, Silvia taught literacy to a group of Year 3 children drawn from her composite group and the single Year 3 class. The cohort of research children, divided between two teachers, was grouped as a whole in Silvia's Year 3 language group.

The same class arrangements were made the next year when the children were in Year 4. Michele, the Year 4 literacy teacher, taught a single Year 4. However, at the language period, the cohort of research children, who were located again in two different classrooms, arrived at her room while others (children who were underachieving) left the room to work with the language support teacher. This class arrangement gave the two class teachers a smaller number of children - twenty-two in each group

Although this method was meant to facilitate the teaching of literacy, it was a constant source of frustration for Silvia and Michele. The children's entrance to and exit from the classrooms rarely synchronised with the movements of the other teachers involved. Apart from the confusion that ensued and the inevitable loss of instruction time, many writing activities could never be completed. Nevertheless, the teachers did not allow these hardships to interfere with their teaching. Each had her own way of dealing with the learning environment.

I discuss literacy in Year 3 first and then Year 4.

### **Year 3**

An apt descriptor for Silvia as a teacher is 'passionate'. She was passionate about teaching, about preparation of class lessons and instruction, and about the best conditions for learning. She had high expectations of the children in her care, and she wanted every child to succeed to the best of his or her ability. Such was her passion for teaching and learning, in some ways it seemed she crammed the children's minds with too many ideas in too short a time and asked too many questions of them. On the other hand, her questions were stimulating and thought-provoking.

During the summer vacation, Silvia wrote to each child she knew would be in her class in the new year and asked them to make a drawing and bring it to school on the first day. Thus, a relationship began to build when they discussed the contents of the letter and their drawings on arrival at school. From the first day, the classroom was in readiness for stimulating instruction. Aware of young children's interests, she had sketched a picture of Bart Simpson, a popular television character, and attached it to the door as a welcome sign and also as a model. She explained that Bart made mistakes but he learnt from them, implying the children would make mistakes from which they, too, could learn. Beneath this picture she had listed the children's birthdays.

The arrangement of chairs and tables ensured that the children could see the chalkboard, and that Silvia, in turn, was able to supervise the class. There was sufficient space for everyone to move around the room, to select resources, such as paper for writing, dictionaries and ideas for writing, and to read information recorded on charts. Resources were labelled and the children were encouraged to be self-reliant in their use. On the surface of one of the workbenches she had arranged a collection of library books opened at various pages to attract attention. The books and the display board were frequently changed in accordance with the work produced around the theme that the composite class had studied. When their work was removed from the display board, Silvia insisted that the children take care of their own work by storing it in special folders for that purpose.

On the first day of school, she had written on the chalkboard: *'What makes a good learning environment?'* It was her intention to involve the children in defining classroom rules and procedures rather than impose rules dictated by her own values and beliefs. The children's initial response to *'environment'* was reference to the

'natural environment' outside the classroom. This was one of the numerous occasions when ambiguities about words occurred. Nevertheless, Silvia was ever ready to acknowledge to the children that she had asked 'tough questions' of them.

A trait that distinguished Silvia from her colleagues was her understanding of the underlying principles of the process-conference approach to writing. This was made obvious in several ways: the organisation of her classroom; demonstration lessons on the overhead projector; use of her own writing as a model, explaining the process and how she constructed a text to make it a cohesive whole, and the questions she asked to elicit information.

In readiness for literacy learning, new folders for writing and for word study activities were distributed on the first day of school. Portfolios for filing the children's best work were also provided. To assist children who might have difficulty in deciding on a topic, Silvia had selected suitable pictures from magazines and mounted these on cardboard with questions listed to help get started. Resources to aid self-correction of spelling were available. The sign on the teacher's desk - *'Please do not interrupt a conference'* - signalled the importance of the conference as a strategy to help the children understand the process and become better writers. Instead of queuing to see the teacher, who sat at her table to conference, the children wrote their names on a waiting list stating their need for a conference and the date. They continued with their writing until they were called for a conference, not necessarily on the day they had signed. From time to time Silvia circulated around the room and held brief conferences at the various tables.

In contrast to directions given for writing in the previous grades, the children were expected to plan a story in advance, using the format of a beginning, middle, and

ending. This information was printed on a chart together with suggestions for starting a story. The children were regularly told '*use [your] time well...don't waste your time...*' Silvia did not remind the children she expected 'good' writing. Rather, she insisted that they '*plan ahead*'.

Influenced by the pedagogic movement brought about by the writings of genre theorists in Australia (see Chapter 3: 3.6.2), Silvia introduced a variety of forms of writing. Using imagination and resourcefulness, she selected a range of genres that lent themselves to the thematic approach, the framework for teaching literacy. These included diaries, journals, letters, book reviews, instructions and the retelling of myths and stories. The children were already familiar with narrative writing. The focus for explicit teaching was to distinguish features of genres, such as form, usage and punctuation. Silvia expected the children to remember the features of a particular genre.

A feature of Year 3 was the range of prewriting activities that the teacher introduced for purposes of instruction or as motivation to write. Activities of ten minutes' duration took various forms: problem-solving based on an excerpt from literature, 'story starters', exploration of metaphors, such as the meaning of 'as big as life', implausible and fictional situations and demonstrations of different genres. From time to time Silvia demonstrated editing skills. She checked prewriting activities to ensure the children made the link between an activity and its application to composition writing.

Journal writing is one example of the children's inability to master a specific genre. Silvia recommended journal writing as a way of recording 'personal thoughts, feelings, and views of themselves and the world'. At the beginning of the school

year, she distributed A4-sized journals for this purpose. However, there was no evidence, such as voluntary entries, to show that the children understood the purpose of journal writing. Most entries were related to a prewriting activity, which the children were directed to write in their journals. At the end of the year there were numerous unfilled pages or incomplete writing tasks.

The discussion of writing at the end of the language period was rarely omitted. The children sat on the carpet in a circle. Silvia varied her approach. Sometimes she invited one or two children to read their writing-in-progress. She initiated and modelled the type of questions the children could ask of one another. The questions focused mainly on more detailed information and choice of action and descriptive words. At other times the children reported on their progress, and gave some indication of their plans for finishing their work. Silvia could develop a dialogue about an idea. She could take a child's line of thought and develop it in a direction she assumed would be useful for the child. Unfortunately, she discouraged spontaneous or unsolicited comments, and, unwittingly, stifled joint participation in discussion. This control mechanism marked most discussions, which reflected a teacher-centred approach more than a learner-centred one.

Silvia's method of learner self-assessment was goal-based. A few weeks into the school year, she wrote on the chalkboard: *'What do you expect to have done by Friday?'* Each child's plans for writing were displayed on a chart. At the end of the week, she checked if they had *'achieved their aims'* and whether *'setting a goal had helped'* them. She gave an oral assessment of their achievements, using expressions such as *'You over-calculated how much you would write ... You need to balance it'*. She urged them to be *'responsible'* and *'accountable'* for their time. Finally, she encouraged the children by telling them they had *'worked to [their] full potential'*.



At the end of the term, she invited responses to a self-assessment statement: *'What I've achieved this term'*. The children sat in a circle on the carpet with their daily writing folders and a second folder for completed work. Silvia elicited criteria, which she wrote on the chalkboard against the child's name. Responses below show what the children believed they had learnt about writing:

*Capitals* (Patrycia)

*Dates* (Daniella)

*I've learnt a lot.* (Jason)

Silvia did not pass judgment on the kinds of evaluative statements the children chose as important. It seemed that her intention was to focus on self-regulatory behaviour.

In the final term, she gave out a checklist on editing skills. Before the children edited their work, Silvia explained the purpose of punctuation and grammar usage, items listed on the checklist. The children edited a piece of work with the help of the checklist. Later, she questioned the children on the purpose of editing, to which the children gave replies such as:

*We do all the things that make sense.* (Frank)

*You can fix up the paragraphs.* (Joseph)

*It's the part before you publish. You fix up spellings [and] grammar.* (Peter)

*Sometimes the story is not finished and it helps to get [it] finished.* (Tracey)

Other tasks focused on the information the children chose to write in their projects. For the purposes of assessment, Silvia followed procedures similar to those of the previous teachers.

The transition from Year 2 to early Year 3 marked an important era in the children's history, moving from early childhood to the demands of middle childhood. It appeared to be a difficult time for the children. Silvia's methodology of setting goals at the start of the language period and accountability for attaining or not attaining those goals involved much concentration, judging by the children's behaviour. The notion of self-assessment was gauged by the teacher in quantitative terms - how much writing was achieved and how many goals were attained in a week. Despite the control mechanisms that characterised Year 3, Silvia's intention was to teach to the assumed needs of the children, whom she described as *'independent, dynamic, excitable, and articulate learners'*.

#### Year 4

In Year 4, the children transferred to a literacy group where the teacher, Michele, by her own admission *'hated teaching writing'*. Michele had always wanted to work with children. Her parents encouraged her to take up teaching, a career move she sometimes regretted because of the demands of the classroom. Two of her six years' teaching experience had been spent in the school where the research study took place.

Contrary to general opinion about misbehaviour, Michele perceived the Year 4 children to be well disposed to the teachers. She considered that transgressions were not a sign of hostility towards authority. Instead, she recognised the children's capacity for and interest in learning, as Silvia had also. She observed the strong

social bond that had characterised the children from their Prep. Year. Disruptive behaviour could be accounted for by the daily distractions in the school, which were not of the children's making. To forestall any boisterous behaviour, for which the group was noted, she outlined various ways that helped the children to practise respect towards one another and that linked with the school's policy on discipline.

Michele made the normal preparations for establishing a predictable and harmonious environment. On one of the cupboard doors at the front of the room, she had placed a poster with the slogan, '*Today is unique. Today will never happen again. Make the most of TODAY*'. A display of literature and stories the children had written and published in Year 3 were arranged in a reading corner. Several large cushions made it an attractive and comfortable area where children could retreat for quiet reading. On one of the benches were containers labelled appropriately for art and craft work. She had prepared coloured backdrops to display the children's work. However, display work was not an important feature as it was in Year 3. A display often remained undisturbed for a long period.

Rather than assign areas of responsibility, Michele introduced the children to a task in keeping with her vision of preparation for secondary school. Eleven tasks were listed on the chalkboard: collecting lunch orders, emptying the paper bin, distributing worksheets and so on. The children were directed to write Michele a '*convincing letter*' in the form of a job application stating the job they liked and would do well. When the applications were completed, she interviewed the applicants and then decided who was selected for the 'job'. The children were rewarded with a merit sticker for their efforts.

The focus in Year 4 was preparation for secondary school. Michele argued that it was none too early to begin this preparation, which concentrated on study skills, ability to write specific genres (report writing) and homework. New class books included a memo book for reminders about homework assignments, an issue that Michele frequently addressed. She assumed that the memo book was an ideal way to promote study habits, essential in secondary school.

Established routines were intended to help the children work independently, although constant teacher-oriented emphasis countered the full benefits of self-monitoring tasks. It was evident that Michele had the ability to coordinate small group learning as well as whole group activities. Where the teachers in the preceding grades allowed the children to work with a friend, Michelle emphatically discouraged the practice, assuming children could not '*concentrate*' on the task in hand if they sat with friends. She frequently stressed the need '*to work to the best [of your] ability*'. She was quick to comment that they were '*slack*' if little writing had been produced in a period.

Despite the fact that Michele did not enjoy teaching writing, she held firm beliefs about writing pedagogy. Through the ELIC program, which she had attended a few years previously, she had gained information and an understanding of some of the issues related to the process-conference methodology. As mentioned earlier, she considered that she and her colleagues were not well-informed about the teaching of writing, and this seemed to cause a certain amount of apprehension. Michelle wrote regularly in a personal journal, not as a key to understanding the process of writing, but merely to record events and experiences.

The language period followed the same routine as in Year 3, but with an emphasis on different aspects of literacy and of methodology. In contrast to Year 3, the main focus was on reading and reading contracts, an agreement between teacher and child to complete reading tasks in a stated time on his or her own initiative.

A large segment of time was devoted to the study of words. The children studied an extensive vocabulary of descriptive and action words from which they were urged to choose when writing. They studied the patterns in groups of words. Michele emphasised the self-corrective strategy called 'Look-Cover-Write-Check' – look at the word, cover it, then write the word and check it. As a reinforcement strategy for memorising spelling, she used work sheets. Correct spelling was rewarded with praise, for example, '*Terrific!*' '*Well done!*' or '*Excellent!*' while there was 'punishment' for errors, by way of picking up the papers in the school yard at lunch-time. The main class resource for checking spelling was the Collins Junior Dictionary.

By the time the children had completed reading, word study activities and handwriting exercises, there was little time left in the language period for composition writing, much to the children's disappointment. Each child had a writing folder for daily writing. Provision was made later in the term for filing 'good' work, and edited work for publishing. Guided by her own observations and her beliefs about writing, Michele enforced a set of rules:

- No colouring-in
- Write the date
- No interruptions

- Use grey lead
- Write everything you know
- No writing about violence

Sport as a writing topic was also discouraged. Michele considered that the children had written 'enough about sport in Year 3'. Over time, she wrote a different kind of directive on the chalkboard that required a 'high order' of thinking, for example:

- Read your writing aloud by yourself
- Read it to someone
- Make changes
- Tell someone what the story is about

As a successful maths teacher, Michele imbued the children with enthusiasm and a love for maths. During the maths period, she was oblivious of the working noise that emerged from group activities. On the other hand, she was intolerant of any kind of noise or discussion that might disturb the quiet atmosphere she expected of the language period.

A reminder about rules and directives, which varied from day-to-day, was often given to the children at the prewriting phase. On occasion it was omitted because of the short amount of time assigned to writing. At other times Michele delivered reminders while making encouraging comments, such as the following:

*'They [written reports] have to be ready by tomorrow ... It made me happy when I saw you involved ... reading it over, and when I asked a*

*question you all knew the answer. What is really a big step is that you know what your writing is about. Continue on. Put your old drafts in the file. Try your hardest. Read over your work. Try to solve problems ... Wade, tell us what you're going to do today...* (Fieldnotes, June 24, 1993).

Writing instruction was both informal and formal. Informal meant the children were given opportunities for narrative/imaginative writing, choosing their own topic. There were no specific instructions given to components of a text or how a text is constructed. The children were urged to add descriptive and action words to make the story an interesting one. Emphasis seemed to be on '*interesting*' and '*information*', implying these were valued criteria for 'good' writing.

Formal or explicit instruction focused on procedural writing. Unlike Silvia, who believed children should be exposed to any number of genres, Michele's focus was on the writing of reports. This focus, however, did not preclude the children from practising 'expressive' writing such as poems and collaborative writing of 'plays'.

By way of preparation for report writing, the children examined newspapers and collated different forms of report writing. From a study of the forms collected and their purposes, emerged discussion of report writing. One example serves to illustrate how Michele applied this exercise. A class excursion to the Melbourne Zoological Gardens provided the context for reports on animals and birds. The children collected information about habitat, colour, food, etc. Back in the classroom, Michele selected five animals or birds about which the children supplied information within a framework. The reports read as in autobiographical form, for example, '*I am a fairy penguin. I eat fish...*' A framework was provided to generate the five simple sentences that required the identical kind of information from every

child. Hence, conferences about content were structured to ensure that the questions had been answered.

The children tired of constant report writing with no set time for narrative writing. They were restricted by boundaries that this particular genre imposed upon them. Audible moans such as, '*Oh no! Story writing is better*' signalled discontent. Michele was sensitive to their demands and planned for a more balanced writing program to include narrative writing.

While the children were engaged in writing, she circulated among the tables checking on progress and giving help where it was needed. She had small group conferences about the content of the writing. As imaginative writing had no boundaries, as set by the teacher in report writing, there were implications for the kind of interaction or dialogue that transpired between teacher and child. Michele complained (to me) that the children were unwilling to make the changes she suggested should be made to the structure of their texts. Children rejected her advice to make changes to the storyline, responding, '*It's my story. That's how I want it*'. Such was her concern for the children to produce 'good' imaginative writing that Michele considered this unwillingness to make changes as '*problematic*' for the child. She was relentless about the writing of drafts, editing, and keeping to deadlines.

The postwriting phase, when children discussed writing-in-progress for feedback from the group, seldom took place, mainly because of time and the inevitable exodus of half the class at the end of the period. However, children sought out friends, or the researcher, to act as 'sounding boards'. Their main questions were similar to those asked in Year 3: '*Would you listen to this to see if it makes sense?*' Or, '*Can I*



*read this to you? It doesn't sound right?*' The Zoo reports were published (by the children) in book form, with emphasis on the presentation of each page. The children endeavoured to publish their own writing in their own time. Publishing seemed not to be an essential part of the writing program.

Michele kept anecdotal notes of the children's progress she had observed during conferences. In mid-year she carried out a form of child self-evaluation of skills learnt. She wrote on the chalkboard a checklist of several items, which included paragraphs, question marks, talking marks, full stops, commas, use of dictionary and other people (how they helped). The children were instructed to read silently all the drafts they had kept in their folders to check if they had learnt the 'skills' listed.

Response to the instructions varied from intent reading of a draft to extraneous talk and restlessness, as no provision had been made for recording the results of the task. Since the exercise was never completed, there was no way of finding out what had been achieved or how this kind of checklist influenced criteria for 'good' writing.

The children noticed Michele's deviation from the norm, as far as they had experienced norms among teachers in primary school. They told her she would 'pass' meaning that they approved of her teaching and disciplinary methods. They also informed her that she was 'unusual' or 'different' from their previous teachers. Michele informed them she was 'unique', not 'unusual'. They accepted the way she taught writing as unique to this particular teacher.

#### ***5.3.4 Years 5 and 6: Bronwyn and Sue and the Literacy Environment***

In Year 5 (1994) classes at the senior level followed the same arrangement as for the middle level. Bronwyn was responsible for a composite class of Years 5 and 6.

Several of the research participants were in this group. The cohort came together for

the Year 5 language period. Bronwyn was their language teacher. However, when class arrangements for 1995 were discussed later in the year, several options regarding Year 6 in 1995 were available to the teachers. Bronwyn requested one of the options: a single grade of 40 students with help at language time three days each week for one-and-a-half hours. She had enjoyed her time in Year 5, but she was disenchanted with the class organisation and the deleterious effect it had on the teaching of literacy. Sue teamed with Bronwyn in Year 6. She was one of the language support teachers in Years 3-6, and also assistant to the principal.

Bronwyn was a mature-age graduate and mother of two children with a daughter in Year 5 at another school and a teenage son in secondary school. Interest in her children's learning and the unfulfilled expectations she had of teachers prompted her to take up a teaching career. The previous year - her first year of teaching - she had been appointed to St Sophie's School, where she taught Year 1. She brought with her a maturity that helped in her dealings with older children.

### **Year 5**

At the end of 1993 Bronwyn requested a meeting with me to discuss my role in her classroom. At this meeting she talked about learning and the beliefs and goals she hoped to bring to the classroom.

She considered herself to be a 'progressive' teacher, eager to create 'a learner-centred' environment rather than a traditional teacher-centred one. She also mentioned other factors about her teaching:

- To work *with* the children, allowing them to be self-reliant, and to take responsibility for their own learning

- To study topics derived from current events in the lives of the children rather than prescribed themes
- To imbue the children with a love of literature

In the third week of the new school year I was invited to make my first visit to Bronwyn's classroom. There was a welcome sign attached to the door. Above the sign were the names of the teacher and the children. The words '*Valentine's Day*' and a drawing of a large heart took up part of the chalkboard space, implying there had been some discussion of the event before I arrived. Beneath '*Valentine's Day*' there were directions for a writing task: To write the instructions for making an article (unnamed). In the centre of the chalkboard she had written the theme for the year: '*Don't dream it - just do it*'. The theme applied to acceptable behaviour, to take '*a serious approach*' to their work, to '*apply*' themselves, and to '*use time wisely*'.

At this first visit, I observed a list of words ending in 'ion' placed at one side of the chalkboard as a reference point and also to be learnt, as in a spelling list.

Throughout the year, groups of words with different patterns were treated in the same way. Bronwyn had made a chart for maths vocabulary and another one titled '*Book Etiquette*'. This chart listed rules for the use of daily exercise books:

- Neat work
- Rule margins
- No spaces to be left on a page

Signs of Bronwyn's love of literature were evident in the books displayed on one of the benches with a sign in colloquial language, which she assumed would appeal to the children: *'Hey man! It's cool to read'*. Teachers chose novels, children's stories and poems, which were regularly collected from the school library. Pictures from a geographical magazine decorated the display board. Care of the display board devolved upon the children.

The learning centres that Bronwyn had intended to be part of her teaching never materialised. The design of the room, limited space and inadequate organisational skills accounted for this departure from her earlier planning. There were no visual aids to encourage self-monitoring of learning and no provision had been made for a 'quiet area' for individual children to read or write. Hence, the children sat at their tables for all activities unless seated on the carpet for teacher-oriented work.

Like all the teachers, Bronwyn pre-empted misbehaviour by stating clearly her expectations and establishing simple rules to ensure compliance. She frequently reviewed how well the rules had/had not been kept and reminded the children about the atmosphere that should prevail in a learning situation. She tried to resist the temptation to over-control. In this regard she was neither too permissive nor too stern.

To help her plan the week's work, Michele loaned Bronwyn her Year 4 work program based on the school's language policy and her own beliefs about the teaching of different genres. Bronwyn also gained help about teaching writing from colleagues with whom she met weekly to discuss and plan her work program. She often remarked that no one seemed to be confident about teaching the process-conference approach to writing.

Once the changeover of children had taken place, the language period proceeded with silent reading, when the children read a novel of their own choice. On Wednesdays they had permission to read sports magazines, banned on all other days. As a follow-up to the reading, Bronwyn distributed worksheets with a passage from literature and several comprehension questions about the plot of the story and the main characters.

The focus on spelling, which had priority over composition writing, was to some extent due to the wishes of the parents. At interviews, they had complained about incorrect spelling and careless handwriting. To reinforce spelling rules, Bronwyn relied on worksheets that provided a variety of activities for filling-in the correct word. She used the strategy Michele found helpful, 'Look-Cover-Write-Check'. Concern about spelling errors compelled her to correct the words the children had circled in their drafts as possible misspelt words (a strategy that had been introduced in the early years) before they had a chance to practise self-correction.

The teaching of writing fitted into whatever time was left in the language period, after reading, spelling and handwriting had been attended to. Essential resources such as writing folders, paper for drafts and directions for selecting a topic were provided. For the prewriting session the children sat on the carpet to listen to a story that the teacher read. The claim made that she loved talking about literature was borne out at these times when she talked at length about a poem or a story. She also talked about her personal reading, often 'wandering away' from her subject to talk about '*how powerful the mind is*' and what happens as one reads.

During these sessions, the children sat patiently on the carpet listening to diversions and then directives about writing. Bronwyn preferred to ask closed questions, or

even to supply answers. She tended not to give the children the time necessary to make discoveries for themselves. She admitted to me that she avoided open-ended questions because they might generate discussion or elicit a point of view different from her own. Once she discovered how capable the children were of sharing knowledge about their reading and writing, she was open to change.

Bronwyn believed children should know how to write in many genres. She was confident about giving instructions for book reviews and recounts, as she knew the kind of language and format that characterised these genres. The children enjoyed writing narrative. Their narratives had been slowly developing in style, format and use of language since Year 2. However, organisation of the language period was such that the children received little practical instruction through the conference, which is regarded as 'the heart of teaching the writing process' (Graves, 1984: 187).

In the absence of any theoretical and practical background in teaching writing to older children, Bronwyn relied on ideas suggested by her colleagues. It seemed that when the children were restless and noisy, she sensed a strategy had failed and she tried something else, without evaluating its worth as an incentive for writing. Her approach differed from Silvia (Year 3). If a strategy appeared not to work, Silvia assembled the class on the carpet and clarified, or modified the strategy so that it was effective. Bronwyn was at ease when she talked about the use of language in literary passages, for example, simile, metaphor, and alliteration. She gave the children tasks to 'test' how well they understood figures of speech.

By the end of Term 1 Bronwyn realised the inadequacy of her sources of information and requested help about teaching writing and how to organise her classroom to gain the best results. In time, she set up a conference centre where she

held small group conferences. Her approach was to give directives about the sequential order of information in a text rather than elicit ideas from the children. She could not resist telling the children what they should write and imposed her ideas, much the same as Michele had done in Year 4. While she seemed to perceive the 'right' moment to intervene, interventions were often so prolonged that the child appeared to have too much information to absorb and apply. Nevertheless, they were expected to follow directions. Although she made encouraging comments to the children, such as '*You're making great steps forward*' or '*You have moved forward*', Bronwyn expressed concern to me about the children's attitude and the small quantity of writing produced by the end of second term. Criteria for writing in Year 5 seemed to be about length and quantity of writing. At the same time, Bronwyn was concerned about the quality of the children's writing and that it should be 'interesting'. Children were urged to include descriptive and action words, but with little understanding of cohesion in a text.

To 'revitalise' interest and commitment, she initiated the production of a class newspaper. The children were assigned one page each to publish pieces of writing. They made decisions about what to publish. With emphasis on audience, Bronwyn focused on surface features and the presentation of the page. The quality of the children's writing did not change as they plagiarised jokes, puzzles and colouring-in activities, subjects they thought would captivate the readers' interest.

In the fourth and final term, Bronwyn and the three teachers with whom she planned her work decided on a course of action they hoped would bring about a 'revival' of interest in writing and at the same time produce a higher standard of writing than as far produced. The children (Years 5 and 6) were 'contracted' to write a 'compulsory piece' of work and an 'elective piece'. As the contract was given in

oral form, the children had to remember the conditions, which included a deadline for finishing both pieces.

For the compulsory piece, the children were divided into four groups and allocated a particular genre the teachers decided upon: a letter to the author of the novel they were reading, a poem based on the same novel, a newspaper report about the novel, and an interview with characters in the novel. The elective piece was to be 'creative', in the form of a 'fun pack' if they so wished. The cohort of research children was divided among the different genre groups, each with a teacher in charge.

Bronwyn was in charge of the poetry group. She conducted two workshops, during which she exhorted the children *'to show what fantastic writers'* they were. She told them she expected *'a lot of substance'*, to *'keep an open mind'*, to *'write from the heart'*, and that *'the pressure is on to produce quality writing'*. She encouraged them to set *'attainable goals'*. On completion of the writing, the groups displayed their finished products. However, no evaluation was made of the writing or of the project that had been planned as a motivational strategy.

A sense of humour and a respect for the children's intelligence enabled Bronwyn to cope with the vicissitudes of the classroom and the occasional self-appraisals she made of her ineptitude to teach the process-conference approach to writing. Behind the facade of humour, however, was concern for the children's progress which, she believed, was impeded by her lack of knowledge and understanding of how to teach writing. In a sense, the children seemed to know more about the process than she did, but at the same time they needed instruction on how to write a text. Bronwyn was aware that interest alone could not guarantee 'good' writing.



## Year 6

It is difficult to know how confident Bronwyn felt about the teaching of writing when she approached Year 6 the next year. Sue, the teacher with whom she teamed in Year 6, had been a class teacher in the school for several years, and had taught at junior and senior levels. She had experience with activities usually exclusive to Year 6, for example, the preparation of children for Confirmation, the school camp, and Year 6 graduation at the end of the year. Hence, her support was invaluable to Bronwyn.

As a highly organised and conscientious teacher, Sue also had a strong sense of community and demonstrated ability in the administration of activities that brought together everyone in the school on special occasions. She regarded herself as a 'progressive' teacher in that she subscribed to the latest theories on teaching and learning and to the ideas the principal introduced to the staff. Although the children were supposed to be the beneficiaries of 'progressive' theories, they were, in fact, exposed to modified versions and orthodoxies that tended to control their thinking rather than enrich learning. She was unsympathetic to the class organisation in Years 3, 4 and 5, which disturbed the teachers involved, arguing that children are '*flexible*' and '*don't mind timetable changes*'.

To accommodate the 40 Year 6 children, two classrooms were converted into one by manipulating the moveable wall. One of the rooms was familiar to the children, as they had occupied it in Year 3 and again in Year 5. Tables and chairs were arranged in two groups at either end of the room, allowing space in the middle where the children sat on the carpet as a whole group at various times during the day. The teachers had the use of two chalkboards. However, when only one chalkboard was

used, children seated at the furthest end of the room had difficulty in reading information. They were not permitted to leave their tables in order to have a closer look at the chalkboard.

The theme for the year - '*Memories and Visions*' - was written on a chart hanging at the side of the room. The main thrust of the theme seemed to be for the children to recall what had been learnt in the past, and then to make a commitment to using this accumulated knowledge in the future, when they entered secondary school, the next phase in formal schooling.

The children were responsible for keeping the room tidy and attractive. Given the length of the room and the number of tables and chairs this was a difficult task. In the junior grades, the teachers maintained the display areas, which were out of reach for small children. This time-consuming task frequently took place during the lunch hour or after dismissal time. In the middle and senior levels, the children were given responsibility for the task. For several days the display areas remained blank. Then Bronwyn pinned on the display area each child's name written on coloured paper. Once group projects had been completed, the children made use of all available wall space.

On one chalkboard Bronwyn wrote a list of items with the title '*Things I've got to do*'. Tasks for one week included the following items:

- Health and Safety poster (by Friday)
- Health and Safety brochures (by Friday)
- Maths homework (tonight)

- Language homework

The children copied the list into their daily workbooks for reference.

Two foci were evident in the classroom organisation: control of learning and avoidance of misbehaviour. As a mechanism to control the diverse personalities and active minds, Bronwyn planned a structured and rigid time schedule that she was unwilling to change. She wanted to avoid a repetition of the unnecessary movement that had disrupted classes during the previous year. She wanted to concentrate on instruction so that the children were well equipped with skills to make the transition from primary to secondary school.

To facilitate movement among the children, the class was divided into four mixed gender groups. However, depending on the kind of tasks planned, Sue sometimes taught the boys at one end of the room while Bronwyn instructed the girls in the middle or at the other end. Most times the groups were mixed.

Bronwyn and Sue were eager to set up 'learning centres' in order to promote 'self-monitoring of learning'. In reality, what happened in their classrooms was that the children completed different language activities sitting at their tables. There were no resources or guidelines for the so-called centres, or quiet areas for individuals to retreat to if they wanted to work alone or with a peer. The teachers solicited cooperation by giving precise directions, usually prefaced by, '*This is what we want you to do. Right?*' The children had no option but to follow explicit directions. Daily and weekly deadlines ensured that all assignments were completed.

At the commencement of the language period, the whole class sat at their tables and read a portion of a novel, in silence. One of the teachers signalled the children to

stop reading and to sit on the carpet as a group. Occasionally, Bronwyn read aloud a chapter of a novel she intended to use as a language activity. This reading was followed by open-ended questions and discussion of the content and the characters. Bronwyn was beginning to see the value of open-ended questions. Also, Sue was on hand to handle any disruptive classroom behaviour.

It is difficult to explain the four-group procedure and the impact it had on writing. After the silent reading session, there might be explicit teaching about various components of language, for instance, prefixes and suffixes, tense (past, present, future), adjectives and action words, planning for a story and character profiles. Or there might be directions about the various tasks to be completed during the period. Each group was given a specific task to be completed sitting at their tables. At a given signal, the groups rotated, that is, the task allocated to each group was changed. Unless a teaching group was seated on the carpet, there was no physical movement at rotation time. Children or one of the teachers distributed worksheets around the various tables. By the end of the period, everyone had completed the four assigned tasks (referred to as 'learning centres'). The children might be recalled to the carpet at any time for the purpose of self-correction of the activity.

The following is an example of tasks given orally or written on the chalkboard for each group. Groups were identified by the names of lollies:

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <i>'Jelly Beans':</i>  | Word study/handwriting (fill in worksheet) |
| <i>'Jaw Breakers':</i> | Main idea activity using a worksheet       |
| <i>'Red Skins':</i>    | Personal writing                           |
| <i>'Lollypops':</i>    | Teaching (clinic) session                  |

Whenever the whole group reassembled on the carpet to correct a specific task, the teachers asked questions applicable to the task, such as, *'Who has an excellent example ('paragraph') of first person, past tense?'* They were then given directives about worksheets and personal writing. Worksheets for word study (spelling) and grammar were commercially produced. Those used for comprehension of novels read in class were prepared by the teachers.

Three groups returned to their tables while the fourth group remained on the carpet for a clinic session with Bronwyn. The clinic sessions focused on weaknesses observed regarding the use of grammar and spelling errors. Sue circulated around the tables urging everyone *'to concentrate and [to] keep working'*. She informed the children they had so many minutes left to complete the task and to be ready to change to another 'learning centre'.

Although I have given broad mention in the preceding paragraphs of activities related to prewriting, writing and postwriting, I return to the scene on the carpet to describe in greater detail the 'activity' the teachers referred to as 'personal writing'. Personal writing meant the children wrote on a topic of their own choice, usually a narrative or an imaginative text. At some stage during the language period each of the four groups would have had a 'turn' to write, albeit a brief turn. The teachers endeavoured to create a writing environment. In an effort to expose the children to a variety of texts, they shared with them texts written by pupils in the same grade level attending other schools. While the children were seated on the carpet the teachers read stories by these writers, who were not identified by name. The children discussed the writers' styles and use of language to create suspense, humour, or mystery. They discussed drafting, redrafting and editing, and the standard of writing expected from 'Year 6 children'. The notion that children should be taught different

genres was not given the same priority as in Years 3 and 4. Emphasis was on an array of complex issues related to writing, spread over the four terms. The children were expected to apply worksheet content to personal writing. The following examples are the kind of directives given:

- Use language that will convince the reader
- Plan a story that has a beginning, middle and end
- Use interesting words
- Respond to a character in a novel
- Describe the plot
- Have a main idea that will provide interesting reading
- Think of three really good adjectives to describe the holidays
- Don't bring work [to be corrected] unless there are capital letters and full stops
- No second rate stuff
- Write not less than fifty words

The children were reminded to *'write in silence and not look around the room'*.

They were told that *'this is a chance to think'*, and *'remember, you're writing'*.

Consequently, there were few teacher conferences about writing-in-progress. When children requested a conference, they were instructed to find someone (a peer) in the class to help them. It is not clear what assumptions were made about learning -

whether the children were thought to be compliant individuals, able to respond to and apply every instruction, or whether the purpose of the conference as a scaffold to help achieve set goals was no longer needed. Whatever the assumptions, Bronwyn corrected drafts for spelling and punctuation. The children rewrote drafts in their 'best handwriting'.

Before the conclusion of the language period, the four groups came together and sat on the carpet. The teachers checked that worksheets had been handed in, and attempted to evaluate the morning's activities. The following excerpt illustrates how this was achieved:

*'Right, guys. Five minutes and then on the floor ... Lots of people are lagging behind ... Today was the first day people didn't get finished ... People have been looking around. [They] wrote four lines. The information's not good enough anyway. You should organise your time to get as much out of it as you can in the time allotted to you ... You're a bit lazy with your work...'* (Fieldnotes, May 3, 1995).

Unbeknown to the teachers, the children made covert complaints at their tables about the teachers' anxiety to get writing finished: *'You can't get it (writing) finished so easily'*, they argued. The teachers addressed evaluation in more positive, if not ad hoc ways. Children raised a hand if they thought they had *'improved from yesterday'*. Occasionally, they were asked to give an oral account of what they had learnt from a particular worksheet and then assess their achievements as 'good' or 'not good'. The judgement was based on the number of correct statements/answers.

At the end of the second term the children were asked to reflect on the work accomplished during the term and write about something good that had happened.

The teachers corrected the first draft. The children rewrote the evaluation, which was pinned on the display board.

After a class presentation of a project, the children were asked to write an evaluation of what they had learnt and what they thought about the class presentation.

'Self-assessment' and 'self-evaluation' were terms used interchangeably during the language period. No particular guidelines had been formulated for the children to follow. Formal assessments for reports to parents followed the guidelines in the *Literacy Profiles Handbook* (Victoria. Ministry of Education, 1990).

Despite the well-intentioned plan to establish a 'learner-centred' environment and to draw together all previous learning about writing, there seemed to be a decline in the quality and quantity of writing that I observed among the cohort of research children. Because 13 of the 18 children had not bothered to file any work, it seemed a laissez-faire attitude about writing had developed, although this is merely speculation. On the threshold of adolescence, friendships were surreptitiously developing between boys and girls. Writing genres now included covert notes to one another. The system for filing pieces of writing, which I assumed would follow on from the previous years, had disappeared, as explained in Chapter 4.

#### **5.4 Summary of Chapter**

This chapter gave details about the school, its setting, its routines and its ideas and ideals, in an attempt to convey the ambience of the educational setting. The observations and descriptions sought to capture the total learning environment of the 18 research children as they moved from Prep. Grade through to Year 6.



This chapter looked in detail at the teaching and learning of writing at St Sophie's School, as practised in the classrooms of the 18 children who are the focus of this study. It was in these classrooms that the texts that the children evaluated were composed. Furthermore, the directives the teachers gave, the manner in which they gave them and the value different teachers placed on certain types of writing could also be factors that directly or indirectly contributed to the children's choice of criteria. Hence, these factors were discussed in detail.

The observations uncovered the uncertainties that many of the teachers felt about teaching writing. Except for the Year 3 teacher, the teachers admitted they were not well-informed to teach the process-conference approach to writing, the methodology prescribed in the school policy as an effective way to assist learning. Without a clear understanding of theoretical underpinnings and the implications for practical issues such as classroom organisation, the teaching of writing was problematic.

Observations also revealed that although the school valued learner-centred education, there was dissonance between theory and actual classroom practices. However, despite obvious weaknesses in instruction and classroom organisation, the teachers held high ideals and specific goals. In most cases, they were eager to learn any strategy that would enable them to teach writing successfully.

This chapter attempted to present the background and set the scene in which the children studied and produced the texts they evaluated. The next chapter presents an analysis of the findings based on the responses of the children whose writing experiences took place in the environments described in this chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### What the Children Say About 'Good' Writing: Interpretation and Discussion of the Findings

*'It gets to your heart. It gets to your heart a lot. Yeah, it's a feeling kind of thing. Like, when I writ [sic] this, the ideas were in me. I like to do it. I wanted to do it'.*

Bruno, Year 5

#### 6.1 Introduction

The 'it' that *'gets to your heart'* is a poem Bruno composed as a requirement for a Year 5 writing assignment. The poem featured a character in the novel, *Boss of the Pool* (Klein, 1987). This was the response he offered when he was invited to explain why he had chosen the poem from three pieces of 'good' work and placed it first in rank order. Bruno's comment signals the main focus of this chapter, namely, the presentation and discussion of the data collected from the 18 children who participated in the study. The chapter examines the evidence the children provided of their ability to evaluate their own writing across six years of primary schooling. Changes in the children's judgements over time and the relationship of these judgements to the development and increasing maturity of their language and writing skills are also part of the discussion. The chapter seeks to offer at least partial answers to the major research questions posed in Chapter 1.

The range of responses or criteria which the children used to justify their rank ordering choices are grouped according to the linguistic categories reviewed in Chapter 4. These are sufficiently specific to allow for systematic discussion and

sufficiently broad to accommodate the range of evaluative comments the children offered across the period of the study. In Chapter 7, I describe two case studies examining the critical processes of two children (one of whom is Bruno) selected from the group of 18 as explained in Chapter 4: 4.5.2.

The chapter is organised in the following manner: I discuss, first, the range of text types the children evaluated and the strategies that they used when they ranked their texts. I then give a broad overview of the findings, followed by a detailed discussion of each of the four categories according to year levels. I provide examples of the children's evaluative statements to support the interpretations that are made. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the findings.

As Year 6 did not rank their 'good' work, as explained in Chapter 4: 4.3.1, I discuss Year 6 in a separate section (6.9) and the findings for Year 6 are recorded in Table 12. Tables 1 to 11 relate to Years 1 to 5.

## **6.2 Range of Texts Evaluated at each Year Level**

The pieces of good writing that the children chose to evaluate represent a range of different texts. For the purposes of my discussion, several of these texts need clarification:

### **Bookmark**

A piece of stiff coloured cardboard, 6cm x 16cm, on which the children wrote a slogan (one sentence) about a topic they liked. They decorated the bookmark and used it in their reading books.

### **Diary Entry**

As a writing assignment in Year 3 for a project about Sovereign Hill, a historic gold-mining town, the children wrote diary entries that a miner on the goldfields might have written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Debbie wrote diary entries about her grandfather's illness.

### **Journal Entry**

The journal was an A4 exercise book in which the children could draw or write any kind of entry - personal, descriptive or reflective. The teacher did not give instruction on content or check journal writing. However, at some year levels the journal also included teacher directed and monitored activities.

### **Narrative**

Narrative relates to the 'stories' the children composed themselves. They are distinct from a recount of an event witnessed or a retell of a story that the teacher read to the class and then asked them to rewrite. Narrative relates to personal experiences, both imaginative and factual.

### **Myth**

After a lesson on Aboriginal culture, which included the reading of myths, the children were asked to compose a myth based on Aboriginal themes.

### **Recount**

A recount is a description of an event that a child witnessed. It relates mainly to sports events and programs the children watched on television.

## **Retell**

A retell is the rewriting of a story that the teacher read to the children.

Other texts are self-explanatory.

The children who participated in the research commented on many texts in the process of rank ordering. This study focuses on first and last ranking.

Table 1 quantifies the range and frequency of texts ranked first and Table 2 shows the texts ranked last. Looking at Tables 1 and 2 together, it can be seen that the text type most frequently mentioned is narrative, receiving 64 responses (40 + 24). Projects and recounts were the next most frequently mentioned (28 and 25 responses respectively). The genres least commented upon are bookmark, diary entry and myth (2, 3 and 4 responses respectively).

**Table 1: Text Types Ranked First and Frequency**

Genre	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Bookmark						
Book Review					1	1
Collage	2					2
Diary Entry			2		1	3
Journal Entry			2			2
Letter			2		5	7
Myth (based on Aboriginal myth)						
Narrative	9	8	9	11	3	40
Poem		1			3	4
Poster				2		2
Project	3	2	1	2	3	11
Recount	4	5	2	2	1	14
Report					1	1
Retell		2		1		3

**Table 2: Text Types Ranked Last and Frequency**

Genre	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Bookmark			2			2
Book Review			2		5	7
Collage	4					4
Diary Entry						
Journal Entry		2	1			3
Letter			3		1	4
Myth (based on Aboriginal myth)			4			4
Narrative	1	2	3	11	7	24
Poem					2	2
Poster		6				6
Project	11	2		2	2	17
Recount	2	4	3	1	1	11
Report				4		4
Retell		2				2

**Table 3: Text Types Available at Each Year Level (See key below)**

1.6.1.1.1 Genre	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Bookmark	---	---	---	##	---
Book Review	---	---	##	##	##
Collage	##	##	##	---	---
Diary Entry	---	---	##	---	---
Journal Entry	---	##	##	##	---
Letter	---	##	##	##	##
Myth (based on Aboriginal myth)	---	---	##	---	---
Narrative	**	**	##	**	**
Poem	**	**	**	**	##
Poster	##	##	##	##	##
Project	##	##	##	##	##
Recount	---	##	##	##	##
Report	---	---	##	##	##
Retell	##	##	##	##	##

*Key to symbols*

## Genre was taught and writing compulsory.

\*\* Genre was not taught but children chose to write it.

--- Genre was not taught and children did not choose to write it.

(See Chapter 5: 5.3 for details regarding the teaching of different genres).



It is interesting to compare the children's preferences for texts - for both first and last ranking (Tables 1 & 2) - with the data presented in Table 3, which shows the types of texts that were available to the children for writing practice each year and indicates which texts received more (or less) explicit teaching than others.

It can be seen that over the first five years of primary school the focus of teaching was on posters, projects and retells of stories. Recounts and letter writing were also given prominence, with book reports, journal writing and reports to a lesser extent. For the rank ordering tasks, the children chose projects and recounts (which were the second and third most referred to texts), and the focus of instruction on these texts may have had a bearing on the children's choice of these genres.

It is also interesting to note that some children chose to write poems all through the year levels, although poetry was taught only in Year 5. Paradoxically, they rarely chose to rank or comment on their poems. Only six poems were chosen for rank ordering.

The tables show that narrative is overwhelmingly the children's preferred genre (for both first and last ranking) although it was taught specifically only in Year 3. It should be mentioned, however, that the children received some guidance when writing narrative in Years 1, 2, 4 and 5 in the conference situation. The focus of instruction, though, appeared to be on content more than on structuring a story and the use of language for this purpose. More frequently, the children were simply told to 'go on with your story writing'.

The topics of the texts chosen for rank ordering include both teacher-assigned and self-selected topics for narrative and for journal entries. Frances (Year 3) differentiates between the two in the following manner: *'My own brain told me to write "Story-Time". The teacher told me to do the book report, and that was hard and easy - about fifty-fifty...'*

*'My own brain'* refers to the self-chosen topic for narrative. 'Story writing' is the term most frequently used for narrative. In Years 1 and 2 a story is about an event or a happening of personal interest, sequenced in time. The 'story' consists of one or several sentences usually joined by 'and' or 'and then'. *Story-Time*, mentioned in Frances' quote above, is one of these narrative texts. In contrast, 'stories' about sport, where often the voice is unmistakably that of the commentator are, in essence, recounts of a game viewed on television, but not always. Nevertheless, the children (boys) believed the texts were 'good' writing because they had composed them and they could read them. The children drew pictures to accompany their texts, giving more detail than they were able to write in words. In Year 1, the children cut pictures from magazines, pasted them on paper and then composed a story about the picture. This collage activity was called 'cut and paste'.

Towards the middle of Year 2 and in the middle and later years, the texts are longer and narratives gain more structure with a 'problem' being introduced and then resolved. Plots are sometimes taken from stories in literature that appeal to individual children who then use their imaginations to elaborate or develop their own composition. Narratives are also the preferred text that the children liked to publish in the classroom in book-form so that other people could read them. Publishing also gave a sense of achievement and strengthened the relationship between writing and reading.

Writing in a range of text types, for example, factual reports, letters, diary entries and poems, was connected with thematic units. Projects about the environment and school excursions provided further opportunities for different types of writing. In the early years the children wrote their own 'stories' derived from particular projects, for example, from what they had observed in studying the life cycle of a chicken.

In the middle and later years, but particularly in Year 3, the children wrote across a number of different text types (see Table 3) including book reviews. Book reviews, also called book reports, took the form of worksheets in which children filled in key features about a story (*'The teacher told me to do the book report'*). In Year 4, the teacher linked report writing with class excursions. Several reports were stapled together and published as a book. She also gave capricious topics such as writing a day's menu for a spider and the ideas that the word *million* roused, to stimulate the children's imaginations.

In Year 5 the children concentrated on a range of shorter writing activities, which included postcards, posters and advertisements. The children continued to write book reviews and fill in worksheets. They also continued to write narrative texts as in the previous grades.

Towards the end of Year 5, the teachers in the four composite grades of Years 5 and 6 were concerned about the paucity of completed pieces of writing. Thus, they devised a task that required the children to choose and produce one of four types of writing: a letter, a poem, a newspaper report and an interview. The content of the writing was based on a novel they had read. (See 6.3). To ensure that every child had completed at least one piece of writing, the task was made compulsory with a

deadline for completion. The children referred to the writing as 'my compulsory piece'.

Texts in Year 6 were of the same type as in Year 5. The children were involved in a wider range of project work, which included health education. They wrote reports of excursions and events such as the school sports day and the school concert. They also filled in worksheets. The teacher encouraged discussion of current news and the writing of their own point of view about particular events. While the children enjoyed the range of writing types, they preferred to write narrative whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Thus, the children had accumulated a range of different types of texts. It was from this collection that each year they chose their 'best' or 'good' work to rank and evaluate. In the next section I describe the strategies they used when they selected and ranked their pieces of 'good' work.

### **6.3 Strategies the Children Used When Ranking Their Work**

The number of pieces of 'good' work the children chose for the rank ordering task varied from year to year. Several factors accounted for this phenomenon. More freedom for writing and drawing characterised Years 1 and 2 classrooms. As a consequence, the children accumulated a large quantity of work - a collection of homemade books of several pages stapled together. In Year 3 and the succeeding grades, the children used A4 size journals for each subject: language (reading, writing and spelling), science, general studies and religious education. They also had daily writing folders, which contained work-in-progress. There were also special folders for filing a selection of 'good' work completed during the year. In Year 6 there were no pieces of writing in the folders. The teachers at that year level

expected the children to take responsibility for the filing of 'good' work. Filing was difficult because of the journals, which often contained 'good' work distributed throughout the book. Before the children could rank their work, they needed time to sort through the various sources for texts that were 'good' writing.

When I asked Year 1 to show me some pieces of 'good' writing, they produced a number of short texts they wanted to talk about. For the purposes of the ranking task I restricted the number to six pieces, from which the children were to select first and last. Even so, they requested to add one or two more pieces '*because they're all good*'.

As the children overcame the initial difficulties of beginning writing (for example, handwriting and spelling), they wrote longer texts, although length of texts varied according to the topic. However, they still had difficulty in limiting their choices to six pieces, as suggested in Jessica's comment, '*This is tricky*'.

In the middle and later years, the children had a wider choice of different types of writing about which they had to make decisions. While the sorting process was time-consuming, it also had advantages. They read and re-read pieces of their own volition, made comments about them (*'I want to change the title on this one'*) rejected some (*'This is rubbish'*) and retained others (*'That can go first'*). I observed his kind of behaviour in the early years. In Year 1 children made comments to themselves (*'I need to write some more on this'*). At all levels children exclaimed when they discovered a forgotten piece of writing. Although they read such pieces and made comments, they did not always select them for ranking.

In the middle and later years writing folders were crammed with numerous pieces of writing at different stages of development: drafts not completed, some of which they liked and intended to finish, or disliked and would not finish; completed texts which had not been edited, and final drafts that had been published. From these three categories and the journals, the children chose several 'good' pieces. A draft-in-progress about a topic they liked might be evaluated as 'good' writing, but not necessarily ranked first or last.

In Year 3, the children were becoming more selective about their texts. They were content to choose six pieces, or less, to rank in order. In Years 4 and 5 the number of 'good' pieces decreased. The average number of texts in Year 4 was five, and in Year 5 the number of texts ranged from three to five. Classroom procedures appeared to affect the kind and quantity of texts available for evaluation. The more relaxed environment of the early years contrasted with that of the middle and later years. The tightly scheduled language periods and the way the composite classes operated, as described in the preceding chapter, limited the children's time to compose and complete their own compositions.

Differences in the number of pieces of work ranked in order combined with differences in the strategies the children used to actually rank their work. There were also differences in their behaviour. At first, some preferred to sit while others took the initiative and stood. This position seemed to give them control over the task in which they were engaged. Children signalled when they were ready to proceed to the next stage of the ranking with exclamations such as, '*Finished!*' '*There you are!*' or '*Okay. That's it.*'

Three groups emerged in Year 1 with regard to the strategies used when they ranked their work. The first group's decision-making processes were straightforward. They chose the number of pieces, reviewed them, and then ranked them in order. Most were satisfied with their initial decision and made no change to the order.

A second group made minor adjustments during the process of ranking. Usually, adjustments were made to pieces ranked first and second, or last and second last. Occasionally, during the course of the discussion about the criteria they were applying, a child would lean forward and make another change to the order. The following quote indicates why Frances when in Year 1 made changes to her initial ranking:

*I was going to put it last and then I changed my mind and I put it five [i.e. second last], and I thought, "Well, keep it. Look at it and read it" ... I didn't know how to write here. Now I know more writing. It's a lot easier when you know how to write.*

A third group was constrained by the task of having to make decisions. Children read each piece carefully and then ranked it accordingly. Just when it appeared to be 'right', they rearranged the whole order again. They repeated this behaviour more than once and until they were satisfied with the ranking.

In Year 2, these behaviour patterns took on two forms. All children would review their work before ranking it. However, one group of children would make no changes, as in Year 1, while the second group made adjustments, though fewer than in the third group observed in Year 1. The children invariably supplied reasons for making adjustments, as illustrated in Jessica's comment:

*I moved it to last. Really, it's not from school. I did it at home. My sister wrote it. I told her what to write. She writes neater than me. I picked it because I like a pet, but I don't like dogs. [The title of the text was 'My Dog'].*

These two patterns of deliberation remained constant in Years 3 and 4. The children reviewed their work thoughtfully as in Years 1 and 2. When Frances in Year 4 had difficulty giving criteria for the ranking, she made the following illuminating comment:

*I didn't really do it properly and I didn't think about it, and if I would have thought about it, I mean thought about it, I would have got it in order straightaway without changing.*

The same pattern of reviewing and ranking followed in Year 5, although the children's judgements were noticeably hastier. In fact, several children appeared to rank their work in a perfunctory manner, behaviour I had not observed in the early and middle years. Various factors may explain this change in their behaviour. Perhaps they needed less time because, during the search through their journals, they had time to reflect on their writing and make mental decisions prior to the ranking. Also, where they had already written a series of drafts for one text, they knew at a glance whether they 'liked' it or not. Having only one computer in the room at this particular time was also a factor, as children had to wait their turn to transfer a hand-written draft to the computer. Hence, some texts they valued were never completed on the computer or information was lost in the process. However, there seemed to be other factors underpinning Year 5's behaviour. One of these appeared to be associated with difficulties in composing and may be linked to the writing instruction given at this level. They needed help with the collection of unfinished drafts in folders. Signs of frustration observed in Year 5 gathered



momentum in Year 6. The imbalance between large numbers of worksheets and uncompleted narrative texts appeared to contribute to this frustration and to fewer pieces of finished work. This problem required me to develop a different data collection strategy for the children when in Year 6.

In the next sections I examine the evaluative statements the children gave for the texts they ranked and the findings that resulted from this examination.

#### 6.4 A Broad Overview of the Findings

As explained in detail in Chapter 4, I grouped the criteria the children provided in four categories. Figure 3 details the categories and the subcategories that make up each category.

Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
<u>Content</u>	<u>Surface Features</u>	<u>Grammatical Elements</u>	<u>Self-Reflexive Elements</u>
ideas	colour	linguistic features	awareness of the composing process
experiences	presentation	lexical	awareness of the reader
factual writing	handwriting	syntactic	
imaginative writing	spelling	semantic	

Figure 3: The Four Categories

At every year level children showed they were capable of offering a judgement about their writing and of providing a comment or comments to substantiate their judgements. The findings are quantified in the tables that follow.<sup>2</sup>

Table 4 indicates the number of children at each year level who provided criteria.

**Table 4: Children\* Providing Criteria for Categories 1-4**

Year Level	Category 1		Category 2		Category 3		Category 4	
	Content		Surface Features		Grammatical Elements		Self-Reflexive Features	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	13	72.2	10	55.6	2	11.1	3	16.7
2	10	55.6	12	66.7	3	16.7	6	33.3
3	11	61.1	9	50.0	9	50.0	5	27.8
4	11	61.1	1	5.6	8	44.4	8	44.4
5	6	33.3	3	16.7	9	50.0	11	61.1

\* 18 children at each year level ranked two texts. If a child used the same criterion to rank one text first and another text last at one year level the child was counted only once in that category in that year.

Table 4 indicates that at every year level children offered a judgement about their writing. It can be seen that overall, content (Category 1) is popular at all year levels, though there is a drop in Year 5, when the children focus more on self-

reflexive features (Category 4) and grammatical elements (Category 3). Surface features (Category 2) are important to the children in Years 1, 2 and 3 and lose their importance in Years 4 and 5. Category 3 (grammatical elements) is relatively unimportant in Years 1 and 2, but becomes more important in Years 3, 4 and 5. Category 4 (self-reflexive features) also appears to grow in importance for the children as they move through primary school. These trends are examined in more detail when I discuss the individual categories later in this chapter.

From Year 1 the children demonstrated ability to differentiate between their pieces of writing in order to justify their decisions regarding 'good' writing. On these occasions Years 1 and 2 children emphasise their preferences by using comparative language such as:

*... and because it's the best.*

*I like it, but all the rest are better.*

*Even if someone helped me, it would still be my best.*

In Years 4 and 5 the children offer their comparative judgements making comments like:

*I put it last because these two are better than that one.*

*I'm happy with it. I just like this one better.*

In a number of instances the children use the generic term 'I like' or 'I don't like'.

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<sup>2</sup> The numbers presented are descriptive only and are intended to show general trends. In order to display overall patterns more clearly, rounded-off values, rather than precise values, are shown in the tables presented and discussed in this chapter.

The phrase varies when used by different children or in different contexts. In Chapter 4: 4.3, I discuss how I have interpreted the generic response, 'I like' and the interpretative strategies by which I attributed meaning to the phrase.

There are instances at all levels where a child gave a criterion for 'good' or 'not so good' work but was unable to substantiate the claim made for the criterion.

Nevertheless, these responses are counted and included in my data.

From Table 4 it is possible to see trends in relation to the categories and get an idea of the criteria that are more or less important to children at each year level. In addition, a more detailed breakdown of the information gathered from the children is provided. Whereas Table 4 relates to the numbers of children, Tables 5 to 11 relate to the number of responses, detailed under categories and subcategories and according to first and last ranking.

Table 5 gives an overview of the total number of responses related to criteria for first and last ranking.

**Table 5: Responses Related to Criteria for Categories 1-4**

Year Level	Category 1  Content		Category 2  Surface Features		Category 3  Grammatical Elements		Category 4  Self-Reflexive Features		Total Responses by Year Level	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	14	7.2	16	8.2	2	1.0	5	2.6	37	19.0
2	12	6.2	21	10.8	4	2.1	6	3.0	43	22.1
3	13	6.7	10	5.1	12	6.2	8	4.1	43	22.1
4	14	7.2	1	0.5	11	5.6	10	5.1	36	18.4
5	9	4.6	3	1.5	9	4.6	15	7.7	36	18.4
<b>Total Responses by Category</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>26.1</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100.0</b>

N=195

The trends that can be observed in Table 5 are generally in accord with what Table 4 shows, in that the highest percentage of responses relates to content (Category 1). Content is mentioned in responses more often in Years 1 to 4 than in Year 5.

Surface features figure prominently, receiving the second highest percentage of responses. Table 5 shows that the criteria based on surface features decline after Year 2.

Responses the children made also relate to grammatical elements, which focus on lexical, syntactic and semantic features (Category 3). By comparison, the percentage is the lowest of the four categories. However, Category 3 projects an interesting pattern. From a low percentage in the early years when the children are negotiating with language structures, there is an expected increase in the middle years. By this time language had developed and maturity was apparent. The children were more familiar with the use of language and the process of writing. However, there were fewer responses in Year 5 than in Years 3 and 4 to criteria related to word choice, sentence structure, and text organisation. The possible reasons for this are discussed later in the chapter.

Responses indicated the children's awareness of their own composing processes and an awareness of the audience for their writing - the reader (Category 4). Table 5 shows that from Year 1 through to Year 5 the children became increasingly conscious of their composing processes and of a reader other than self. In the early years they are not able to articulate the same reflective stance as they do when they reach Year 5, when they have made further progress as writers. However, this observation does not in any way suggest that younger children are not capable of reflection.

From this broad overview, it is clear that the children are capable of making judgements about their work as early as Year 1. It is also clear that the children are able to choose criteria based on a range of textual features. Over time, their criteria change. I deal with these issues later in the chapter.

Table 5 provides an overall view of the number of responses to all the four categories. Tables 6 to 11 provide a breakdown of the numbers of responses to each of the four categories and to the subcategories of Categories 2 and 3.

In the sections that follow, I discuss in greater detail the children's responses, under categories and according to year level. Sometimes each year level is discussed separately, at other times they are combined, depending on what degree of detail the responses warrant. The discussion is followed by a comment summarising noteworthy findings, when appropriate.

#### **6.5 Category 1: Content as a Criterion for Evaluating Writing**

All 18 children mentioned content as a criterion in judging their work. Table 4 and Table 5 show that content was the most popular criterion the children used. Their responses relating to content are classified in three broad groups:

- content dealing with positive experiences
- content associated with empathic feelings
- content relating robust factual information

These three divisions present a framework for my discussion of the children's responses to content. The data presented in Table 6 relate to responses regarding content as a whole. It is not broken down into the three divisions, because this grouping serves only to provide a structure for the discussion that follows.

Table 6 shows the number of responses of children at each year level who chose content as a criterion for ranking their work first or for ranking it last.

**Table 6: Category 1: Content**

Responses Related to Content for Texts Ranked First and Last

Year Level	Ranked First		Ranked Last		Total Responses by Year Level	
	No.	%	No.	%	No	%
1	10	16.1	4	6.5	14	22.6
2	9	14.5	3	4.8	12	19.3
3	8	12.9	5	8.1	13	21.0
4	9	14.5	5	8.1	14	22.6
5	5	8.1	4	6.5	9	14.5
Total Responses by Ranking (First & Last)	41	66.0	21	34.0	62	100.0

N=62

Table 6 indicates that when content is selected as a criterion it is to rank a text first almost twice as often (66%) as it is used to rank a text last (34%). It also confirms the high value the children placed on content as a criterion, which Table 4 and Table 5 give evidence of. When the children ranked a text last because of content they may have been dissatisfied with a topic or a genre that did not allow them to write what and how they wanted. This issue is explored further in the discussions under particular types of content.



In Year 1 when the children evaluated their work they tended to focus on the drawing rather than the writing, as it contained more detail about the experience than their attempts to record the experience in writing. However, by Year 2, texts were conspicuous for their length and comparatively few illustrations, though a small number of children still preferred to focus on an illustration that gave a more detailed rendition of the content. In Years 3, 4 and 5 the children produced several types of writing different from the narrative they produced in Years 1 and 2. Table 1 and Table 2 show the types of texts the children ranked first and last and that may have influenced their criteria.

Table 6 shows that in Year 5 the total number of responses in relation to content is the lowest among the year levels. The possible reasons for this are considered below. In the subsections that follow, I discuss the three different foci of the content.

#### ***6.5.1 Content Dealing With Positive Experiences***

##### **Years 1 and 2**

In Years 1 and 2 the texts the children rank first largely refer to enjoyable experiences, real and imaginary. They rank last teacher-assigned topics, or topics that apparently held little interest for them, even if self-chosen. There are significant differences in the kinds of experiences boys and girls prefer when they choose their own topics. Indeed, stereotyped gender preferences predominate. Boys privilege incidents about sport:

*[I put it first] because me and Lorenzo are in this story. Both of us are at soccer. That's why I wrote about soccer and I scored a goal.*

Conversely, sport is ranked last when it is not an enjoyable experience:

*[I put it last] because I don't like football much.*

Sport is also associated positively with the admiration of sporting heroes:

*[I put it first] because I like soccer, and when the player scores a goal I run out because I like [name incoherent]. He's the best player. And I like Schillaci. He's good. And I like [name incoherent] because he's the best goaler.*

Boys also frequently chose mechanical objects such as cars, bikes and speedboats.

Diverse reasons influence these choices. For example, Peter's real-life pleasure is in his bike:

*... I like bikes. I've got a bike and I like drawing bikes because one day I might make a real bike ... I think it's a good story. I like it.*

Jason, on the other hand, visualises himself as a racing car driver. Speed and rivalry among drivers are a source of appeal:

*I like it. It's a good one. I like racing cars. Because the car looks good and I like the way I put the spiky bits on it because other cars' tyres will get flat and he [the other driver] won't go fast and I'll win the race!*

The topics chosen by the girls centred around 'favourite things' and enjoyable experiences with family and friends:

*[I put it first] because I thought it was nice on the boat with my family ... When you go down to the canteen you can see the water, and my little brother got excited...*

The girls value friends, for they play an important role in their lives, at school and at home. Although friendships were often not lasting, they served the child's needs and provided a topic for writing:

*It's good because the people in the story are my best friends. These people always play with me.*

When the boys wrote about friends, it was in the context of sport, as in the quotation above (*'Me and Lorenzo are in this story...'*).

For the girls, as for the boys, pleasure in the actual experience is an important criterion:

*I put it here [first] because I like dancing, because if I didn't like dancing I would put it at the end. I go to dancing and I like dancing.*

Although Year 2 texts usually contained more written information about a topic than in Year 1, children continued to evaluate illustrations where they believed the visual representation expressed their ideas more accurately than the writing:

*Oh! I think this drawing of the haunted house is pretty good ... That's someone in bed dreaming...*

### **Years 3 and 4**

In Year 3 the boys continue to rate sport highly. The content of their writing refers to their own participation in a game or the pleasure derived from viewing sport on television. They now have the ability to provide more detail about sport and about their choice of criteria, features that were not available in Years 1 and 2. This development is evidenced in Bruno's comment:

*It's my favourite team and I feel like putting it first, and in the story I like the cheer song I did I like the players - players, not just for the team. I like the way they play. They play excellent. Some Australian players don't play good because they don't know how to jump. The ones I saw, they don't know how to slam the ring.*

Bruno is articulate about a number of content elements that support his choice. He has evidently enjoyed watching basketball games on television and knows details about the rules of the game and the different teams. He has the ability to compare one team with another and he is knowledgeable about the way the players perform.

Correspondingly, when interest in a sport wanes, as it inevitably does when its season finishes, a text may be ranked last, as Frank illustrates:

*I put the football one last. I don't like football anymore. Now the football season is over I don't like football.*

Although topicality was important, historic events proved to be of interest too and were ranked first in Year 3. After a class excursion to Sovereign Hill, a re-created gold rush township, boys and girls wrote about this, using different genres. Wade ranked first a letter that the teacher directed the children to write as part of the project:

*It was very interesting ... Sovereign Hill was very good. We had to write a letter ... I wrote a letter to Captain Cook. You had to pretend you were a miner. You had to tell him what you re doing and all that.*

Though Wade has got his history mixed up (Captain Cook has no association with mining at Sovereign Hill), he liked writing the letter and is pleased with the information in it.

Jason, on the other hand, ranked last his letter for the same project:

*Um ... The letter back home, like I said, it's not very interesting. It's boring because you have to start one line, then you have to think to start the second line. You say, "Did you like the olden days?" and that.*

Jason judges the content of the letter to be 'boring' and thus ranked his work last.

The girls' preferences in Year 3 favour family events, such as a cousin's wedding or a camping trip during the holidays. Karen ranked first an account of a camping holiday, giving the following criteria for her decision:

*... I reckon it's a good story. I like the bit where I wrote, "We heard a mate from my Dad's work. He snored".*

Both boys and girls in Years 3 and 4 rank non-narrative types of writing, such as projects and factual reports, first and last.

Criteria for projects ranked first are expressed in broad terms, as in comments on Debbie's project on 'Bears' and James' project on 'Cats':

*It's the best one ... The best one is always the first.*

*I put it first because I like cats ... This is a photo of my cat. And I did it [the project] myself.*

The children chose their own topics for this project. The teacher had ticked the short text that James had written, indicating approval for completing his project without assistance, hence the comment, 'I did it myself'.

Tracey (Year 4) ranked first a teacher-assigned report about animals:

*Well, the pictures I really love. Yes, the writing is good. I thought, "Oh!  
If we write just three sentences, that's enough to read".*

The task is really a description of the main features of several animals, which the teacher selected for instruction in report writing. (See Chapter 5: 5.3.3). The comment suggests that the pictures are valued as content and that the sentences complement the information that the child thinks is not available in the pictures.

Wade and Frank rank last the same form of writing. Wade gives the following reason for his decision:

*I put it last because I didn't want to pick much book things ... Not  
because it's published and it looks good and that ... It's in a book form  
and I didn't really want to pick one in a book form.*

'Book things' and 'book form' refer to the format that the Year 4 teacher gave the children as a guide for writing factual 'reports'. However, Wade is critical of the format, which controlled the content on each page.

Frank observes other features about which he is dissatisfied:

*Well, it's only a bit of writing, and, well, I don't really like writing about  
it, and it doesn't sound interesting.*

The content is not interesting for Frank and he does not like writing about it.

Julia and Peter (Year 4) rank last a bookmark, another example of teacher-assigned writing. They give their reasons for doing so. Peter finds it difficult to understand how a bookmark allows scope for writing:

*It [the bookmark] hasn't got much writing. It's like little messages on it.  
The words are too small.*

'The words are too small' can be interpreted in two ways. It could refer to the size of the handwriting, which made the content difficult to read. It could also mean that the short sentence did not allow for expression of the content, which is what Peter was concerned about.

Julia also reiterates the limitations a bookmark has on content, as she understands the meaning of content:

*This bookmark is not important. I want to change it. I like doing favourite things like writing stories. It's not important.*

Unlike other Year 4 work the children ranked in order, Patrycia's work depicted drawings with no writing. The pictures represented the main characters in the novel, *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952), which the class had studied. For this teacher-assigned task (to draw and name the main characters), Patrycia hesitated before giving the following reason for ranking her work last:

*Mm ... Like, it's - well... I liked it [Charlotte's Web] ... I like the drawings, but they don't tell you much about the story....*

Patrycia here acknowledges the importance of content by noting its absence, '...they don't tell you much about the story...' She likes the story and though she likes her drawings, they do not illuminate the content. She thus ranks this work last.

## Year 5

As their world expanded, within the school and beyond, their wider range of experiences did not seem to provide the children with fresh ideas for writing. Popular topics such as sport, discouraged in Year 4, are taken up again by boys in

Year 5, although less frequently than in the first years. Texts in the early years and in Year 3 featured the scoreboard and sporting heroes. In Year 5 Joseph's evaluation indicates a more sophisticated concern about content:

*I put it last, but I'm not sure why ... It's a good piece of writing...but it doesn't have much excitement.*

His comment suggests that Joseph tried to capture the spirit of the basketball game - the 'excitement'. Such concern does not emerge in the early or middle years. *'It's a good piece of writing'* implies the description of the game is accurate and events are in sequential order. However, the 'excitement' is missing because Joseph does not yet have the linguistic skills to convey this. He may not be aware and is not able to articulate the need for higher-level linguistic skills, because he says *'I put it last, but I'm not sure why'*.

The titles given to narrative writing about sport also change in the later years. From functional titles such as *About Soccer*, typical of the early years, children compose, or plagiarise titles such as *The Dream Team versus Australia* and *The Ferrari Gang*.

True-life experiences, about which the children wrote voluntarily in the early years, do not appear in Year 5 as content for narrative texts. Rather, the teacher tended to instruct the children to write recounts of class or school experiences such as 'Family Day', 'Sports Day' or the school concert.

The children's preferences are for imaginative stories such as *Once in a Lifetime* and *Something made me Laugh*.



### 6.5.2 Content Associated With Empathic Feelings

#### Years 1 and 2

The children tended to rank first texts that conveyed empathy for the subject of the writing. For some children in Years 1 and 2, pets are important in their lives. Boys and girls enjoyed drawing pictures and writing stories about them, as the following evaluations illustrate:

*The first thing I like about it is because... I like stories about dogs and my pets. The most thing I really like is my puppy, and now he's run away...*

*I put it first because I like fish. Once I had a goldfish, but it died. I was always playing with it.*

Empathy is also expressed in negative terms. Children who have a fear or dislike of an animal rank their texts last. For example, in the recount of a story about a kitten and a turtle, the criterion for ranking the work last expresses strong negative feelings: *'I hate kittens ... but I like turtles'*.

#### Years 3 and 4

In Years 3 and 4 the children's empathy for pets extends to empathy for animals in general and concern for the environment. Empathic feelings tend to have an anthropomorphic dimension. Children attempt to transfer human behaviour to an animal, as in Jessica's narrative text about frogs. *'It's a very good story because the frogs are like people with feelings'*. In this imaginative story, the frogs *'do the same kind of things that people do'*. These *'things'* are based on incidents in Jessica's life, which she uses for the content of her story.

Content of this nature appeared to appeal to girls more than to boys. It extends beyond animals to inanimate objects, such as in the story titled *The Rubber That Came to Life*. As a human entity, the rubber can talk to the girl who bought it and a friendship develops between the two. Carly ranked this text first:

*Well, it's got my best thinking. I think it's a good story because it's imagination. The rubber acts like a person ... It has a wash and it goes to bed, and then it ran away, and that.*

The writers here impose on the inanimate characters feelings they may have experienced themselves and events they have experienced or those they anticipate might happen in the future. As well as inanimate objects, the children also take characters from literature and create a scenario that enables them to give expression to feelings. Tracey, for example, adapted the titles of two fairy stories (*Goldilocks* and *Cinderella*) to write her own narrative text, *Cindy Finds Her Sister, Goldicinder, in the Snow*. She ranked this story first, giving a detailed evaluation, which is discussed later in 6.7.1:

*It's a new story and it really sounds better than 'Goldicinder', [a story Tracey had written earlier in the year, featuring the same characters]. It doesn't have 'and thens' and it's got just enough for a good story. You know how sometimes you reckon a lot of words describe more stuff, but it doesn't? Sometimes you use words that are really good. I wrote out all my ideas ... It tells you about Goldicinder and her sister and the things that happened to her.*

In 6.7.1, I discuss other dimensions of this evaluation. While the story may not be as dramatic as the title suggests, Tracey has the ability to take an idea from the story she composed earlier, in which *Goldicinder* features as the main character,

and extend it in a different direction. In real life Tracey has no sister. From the comments she made about her text, it is apparent that she has attempted to portray a relationship between two sisters. This portrayal might well be a fantasy about herself.

### **Year 5**

By Year 5 a criterion indicates a real-life situation where sickness occurs in the family. Debbie ranked her work first:

*I like it because it reminds me of my grandpa because he was sick in hospital. He's got cancer. He's real sick ... I like the way I wrote what I did at the hospital when I went to visit him.*

The writing is a diary entry. It begins with 'Dear Diary...' The evaluation of the writing conveys strong feelings about an incident that obviously affects Debbie's life. With her family she now has to deal with issues that, by their very nature of separation, affect a ten-year-old child: her grandpa's terminal illness and his hospitalisation.

The evaluation does not express sadness. Rather, she is happy with the diary entry that will preserve memories of her grandpa. In visiting him, she noticed details of the hospital environment. These details give her an authentic picture of what was happening and enabled her to write with confidence.

### **Comment**

In these examples spanning Years 1 to 5 it is possible to note the development in both the children's writing ability and in their capacity for empathic engagement with the topics they write about. There is a progression from the early years, where

empathy is directed mainly towards pets, to the middle years, where empathy extends to other animals and is also projected into imaginary situations. By Year 5 the children select and rank first their accounts of real-life experiences where their feelings have been seriously engaged.

### **6.5.3 Content Relating to Factual Information**

Children use the term 'information' as a reason for ranking work first or last. For example,

*It tells you about some information about worms.*

*It has got all the information about animals, but I put it last because these two are better.*

#### **Years 1 and 2**

In Year 1, evaluative statements do not provide any reference to factual information as a criterion for 'good' work.

In Year 2 the children use the term 'information' differentially. They are able to differentiate between information that is personal to them, as when Carly says '*My Dad's my friend and I'm writing about information that happened to me*' and information that refers to factual scientific information: '*It tells you about some information about worms*'.

Carly then elaborates more explicitly on this comment:

*I put it first because it tells you a lot about how the earthworm moves.*

## Years 3 and 4

In Years 3 and 4 the children were exposed to a wider range of texts than in the early years. Understanding the purposes and format of a number of different types of writing at Year 3 level was not easy for them. They were still in the early stages of writing development and had already shown strong preference for 'story' writing. However, they demonstrate an emerging awareness of the requirements of different textual forms:

*In the book report you don't have to find information because the information is just there. It's on the worksheet. You answer the right questions. [But] you have to learn how to write a letter.*

In Year 3 the teachers also taught library skills and how to find information. It is not surprising, then, that the term 'information' is a criterion for content associated with factual information, as given in the following examples:

*I like this one.... It's giving information ...about seals, butterflies, and all that.*

*This one tells you information about animals and dogs, and, like, I got ideas, sort of, from a book. I didn't copy it because it tells you a lot about dogs. We had to do our own work, like a project. I've written my own ideas - sort of.*

*I got information about animals, and I wrote it down, and if you write it down you can do something about the report, and you've still got information to remember about that animal.*

In Year 4, children are more specific about the nature of the information than in Year 3. As discussed in Chapter 5, and in Section 6.2, report writing was the main

focus of writing instruction in Year 4. It is understandable that in the following comment, Frank illustrates preoccupation with information as a criterion:

*Probably the 'Zoo Animals' has got my best thinking. I put in all the information about them ... I'm happy with the information about it. ... I put that last because these are better. This [first] has got more information about it.*

## Year 5

By Year 5 the term 'information' is no longer used in the same way as in the middle years. As a criterion, 'information' now appears to be self-evident for a 'good' piece of writing. Wade ranks the following text first on the basis of the amount of detail he provides about a basketball match and the strategies used by the winning team:

*It's about Chicago Bulls versus Phoenix and Chicago Bulls give it their best ... Something happens in the story and they have to give the best players, but not at the start of play. They don't start at the start of the game to give their best [players]. They had lost a lot of players in the game. They were injured. They hurt themselves, so then they had to put in the best players, and then Chicago Bulls won.*

Children use the term 'research' in relation to the information in their writings, as in Joseph's evaluation of a project on *Outer Space*:

*It's good because I had to do some research on it. All I had to do was just read, grab some ideas out of books and just see if it was right ...*  
[inaudible comment] *I read about the same sort of thing.*

This criterion focuses on the research procedures that Joseph used to find the information for his project.

The children's comments in Year 5 indicate that they assume it is common knowledge that information is an important element in some kinds of writing. At this level they also focus on the methods they use to gain specific information for the topic.

### **Comment**

Interest in factual information developed in Year 2. By Year 5 the children are demonstrating the ability to internalise the importance of factual detail when producing informative texts. They can process information and make judgements about what kind of information is appropriate in particular kinds of texts. Such discriminations were not available in the early years where the child's criterion for selecting a factual text tended to be linked to her/his feelings about the topic - hence the generic phrase 'I like...' as in *'I like soccer'*. Specific instruction in report writing with emphasis on information cannot be discounted as an influential factor for ranking writing first or last.

At all levels children are able to justify their decisions for choosing content as an important criterion for 'good' writing. The criteria the children mention give evidence of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their texts about self-chosen and teacher-assigned subjects. In the next section I examine criteria that identify surface features related to the texts children chose.

## 6.6 Category 2: Surface Features as Criteria for Evaluating Writing

Surface features cover those aspects of writing that are readily recognised as the mechanics of written communication. As detailed in Figure 3, it includes use of colour, presentation, handwriting and spelling. Table 7 gives an overview of responses for work ranked first and last. Seventeen of the 18 children commented on surface features.

**Table 7: Category 2 – Surface Features**

Responses Related to Surface Features for Texts Ranked First and Last

Year Level	Ranked First		Ranked Last		Total Responses by Year Level	
	No.	%	No.	%	No	%
1	7	13.7	9	17.6	16	31.3
2	8	15.7	13	25.5	21	41.2
3	4	7.8	6	11.8	10	19.6
4	-	-	1	2.0	1	2.0
5	1	2.0	2	3.9	3	5.9
<b>Total Responses by Ranking</b> (First & Last)	<b>20</b>	<b>39.2</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>60.8</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>100.0</b>

N=51

Looking at the total responses by year level displayed in Table 7 it can be seen that surface features are of most importance to the children when they are in Years 1 and



2. In the early years the use of colour and the presentation of work are regarded as important criteria for 'good' work.

It can also be seen from Table 7 that when surface features are mentioned as a criterion it is more often used to rank work last (60.8%) than to rank work first (39.2%). It is interesting to note from Table 7 that the pattern of using surface features more often as a negative criterion occurs at all year levels from Years 1 to 5.

The information presented in Table 7 gives a broad overview of Category 2. This category encompasses several disparate subcategories needing specific treatment and discussion. The subcategories span such factors as use of colour (of more relevance in the early years) and spelling (a skill usually more applicable to the later years). Table 8 relates to the subcategories of Category 2.

The overall trends observed in Table 7, together with the specific patterns for individual subcategories discernible in Table 8, are discussed below under the subcategories.

**Table 8: Category 2 – Surface Features (Subcategories)**

Responses Related to Surface Features for Texts Ranked First and Last, Itemised According to Subcategories

Year Level	Colour				Presentation				Handwriting				Spelling				Total Responses by Year Level	
	First	Last	Total	%	First	Last	Total	%	First	Last	Total	%	First	Last	Total	%	No.	%
1	4	2	6	11.8	3	2	5	9.8	-	3	3	5.9	-	2	2	3.9	16	31.3
2	2	3	5	9.8	3	4	7	13.7	3	4	7	13.7	-	2	2	3.9	21	41.2
3	-	-	-	-	2	4	6	11.8	2	2	4	7.8	-	-	-	-	10	19.6
4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	2.0	-	-	-	-	1	2.0
5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	3	5.9	-	-	-	-	3	5.9
<b>Total Responses by Ranking (First &amp; Last)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>35.3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>35.3</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>100.0</b>

N=51

### 6.6.1 Use of Colour

Table 8 shows that colour is identified as important only in Years 1 and 2. It is not mentioned as a criterion for first or last ranking after Year 2. This is not surprising because as the children matured their focus shifted from colour to other features of texts.

#### Year 1

The children give diverse reasons for choosing colour as a criterion. In Year 1 they observe that a variety of colours contributes to the quality of the content ('a very lot of colour'; 'more colours'). Tracey's comment is typical of this observation:

*I think it's a good story. There are more colours than the other ones.*

In this particular piece of work, the actual words had been coloured over in such a way that they were undecipherable.

Conversely, the absence of colour in the drawing of a bike is a criterion for work that Carly ranked last:

*There are things that aren't right in it. It hasn't got colours and it doesn't look nice.*

There are any number of reasons why colour is a significant criterion for Year 1 children. At writing-time they are provided with coloured pentel pens, crayons and grey-lead pencils. They use these tools indiscriminately in order to get their ideas onto paper. Hence, for these children colour is an important aspect of the content. Usually the teacher did not comment on the use of colour in their work. He invited

a child to tell him about the story or to read what he or she had written.

Nevertheless, colour is an important a criterion for the children.

## Year 2

The way the children use colour in Year 2 changes, as Karen implies when she says, '*I used nice colours*'. The children use the same kind of tools as in Year 1, but they now tend to use them with discretion. Although they used grey-lead pencils for writing, in Year 2 they find pencils to be more appropriate tools than pentel pens for writing longer texts. Colours are reserved for illustrations and decoration.

Bruno's text and drawing about his uncle's jazz band record the trademark colours of the band, which he portrays in the illustration of the instruments and the band's dress. He ranked this work first:

*I like my uncle's band ... I like the colours of the band. They're my favourite colours ... I've got the colours on my watchband.*

The children are also critical of themselves and their misuse of colour, as illustrated in Frances' reason for ranking her work last:

*There's too much yellow. Yellow's wrecked the page ... I don't know why I did the colouring-in. It's messy. It's revolting - the pictures.*

Debbie also ranked her work last:

*I don't like the way I coloured it in.*

Their comments signal that the children are aware of the aesthetics of the page and how colour can enhance or detract from their work.

### **Year 3**

In Year 3, however, when the use of colour becomes integrated with the presentation of work, it no longer features as a criterion for 'good' work. Jason explains why this is so:

*I don't think of colour much. When I publish, I use it for pictures ...*

From this level on, the children no longer offer colour as a criterion for ranking their work.

#### **6.6.2 Presentation of Work**

Presentation of work is identified as important only in Years 1, 2 and 3. This criterion received about one-third of the total number of responses related to surface features.

### **Year 1**

In addition to the use of colour and the technical skills of colouring in, discussed previously, other features related to presentation are also mentioned by the children. Some children are aware of proportion in formatting a page. Bruno uses the following criterion for ranking a piece of work last:

*The picture is too big.*

The opportunity to 'publish' their work in the form of a booklet encouraged children to pay attention to the overall visual effect of their work. Daniella provides the following comments as justification for ranking a story first:

*It's got the date and I did a nice picture and because instead of colouring-in, I traced it. I'm going to publish this story. That's what it will look like.*

She had prepared a book cover in anticipation of her story being published and this is the main focus in her evaluation.

## **Year 2**

In Year 2 children are beginning to focus on technical skills like drawing, which they use in their work. Jessica's skills elicit pleasure and pride in the presentation of her work. She ranked it first:

*... I never do good pictures. This is my best picture I ever done. To me, it looks like a little fairy. People say that feathers come from her head. To me it looks like a real fairy. I love her feet.*

In contrast to Jessica, Daniella is dissatisfied with the results that her technical skills achieved. She says this in evaluating a self-portrait, a teacher-assigned task:

*This was a picture of me. I put it last because it's not a good picture, and because it goes - See how I did the face! I'm not happy with it. It's like - I mean it looks like something strange...*

## **Year 3**

By Year 3 the children begin to use the term 'presented' in evaluating the visual effect of their work, as Joseph illustrates when he ranked a project first:

*I like it a lot. I presented it well. I feel proud of myself ... I'd have put it last if I hadn't presented it well because it wouldn't be neat handwriting, and there wouldn't be much room. It would be a scrap of paper. You couldn't do decorations or nothing...*

Joseph has a clear sense of the criteria for good presentation of work: neat handwriting, formatting and decorations. Decorations imply that colour is still relevant. He signals a sense of achievement, and while one may discern that he has internalised the teacher's criteria, the point to be made is that he is able to make a judgement about his own work, applying appropriate criteria.

The cover of her published book and the formatting of the text are elements expressed in Frances' evaluation. The text relates to her cousin's wedding:

*Why did I put it first? Because this is my best one I ever did like that ... the first one I used glitter on the cover. And this is a good idea [a calendar in the text]. That was the day of the wedding. It was the fifth.*

Other criteria for ranking work relate to 'neatness', 'not much writing', and 'publishing'. The children have an expectation that all published work should be in book-form. They are not enthusiastic about unusual ways of publishing, for example, an Aboriginal myth, a Year 3 writing task, presented in the form of a rainbow snake:

*It [the text] is not in a book, and it's a strange way to publish a story.*

Daniella ranked the myth last.

### **Comment**

In Years 1 to 3 the children appear to be stern critics of their work, as far as presentation is concerned. Texts were ranked last (10 responses) more often than first (8 responses) because of presentation.

It is also interesting to note that in Years 4 and 5 the children do not choose presentation of work as a criterion for 'good' or 'not so good' work, even though the teachers in these grades emphasised its importance.

### 6.6.3 Handwriting

A confusing issue in regard to handwriting is terminology. At different times the children refer to 'writing', 'handwriting', or words related to handwriting, for example, 'upper and lower case letters' and 'joining the letters'. In Chapter 1:1.5.1, I raised this question of language and the possibility of misinterpretation of the children's intentions when they gave reasons for the ranking of their work. The word 'writing' can be ambiguous and I have used contextual clues and accompanying adjectives such as 'neat' or 'messy', to determine that the child's intention is related to handwriting and not to the act of composing or to presentation.

Table 8 shows that handwriting received the same percentage of responses as presentation (35.3%). These two subcategories are the most popular, together accounting for more than 70% of the responses in this category (surface features).

Table 8 also shows that at every year level there are children who choose handwriting as a criterion for 'good' or 'not so good' writing. In Year 3, Debbie ranked her work first because of the handwriting: *'I like the writing'*. She also chose handwriting for ranking a work last: *'I don't like the writing. It's not very good'*.

The most notable feature in relation to the children's comments on handwriting is that they are more often supplied as reason for ranking work last. Of the 18 responses related to handwriting, 12 of them ranked work last because of



handwriting. The possible reasons for this are explored in the discussion that follows.

## Year 1

In Year 1 Carly makes the comment:

*[I put it last] because I did a mistake. See how I did the writing!*

Andrew makes the comment '*I don't understand the writing*' meaning that he is unable to understand his own handwriting. In Year 1, the coordination of conventions such as letter formation with names and sounds of the letters is a difficult task for most children. This fact can be inferred from the comments they make for ranking their work last.

## Year 2

In Year 2, the level at which handwriting is most frequently mentioned, the children's comments indicate dissatisfaction with the appearance of their handwriting on the page. This seems to be their main preoccupation, as indicated in the following comments:

*I did dumb handwriting.* (Wade - for work ranked last)

*The writing's messy.* (Debbie - for work ranked last)

Proficiency in technical skills associated with penmanship is indicated in Joseph's comment for ranking his work first:

*Now I know how to do upper and lower case letters ... How you keep on lines ... And I like my 'm's'.*

As illustrated in Carly's comment above, '*... I did a mistake*', the children are aware of 'mistakes' in the formation of the letters.

Constant classroom practice and focus on handwriting may be a reason for the judgmental view the children take about their handwriting in Years 1 and 2.

### **Year 3**

In Year 3 the children learn a new process whereby the letters are joined ('cursive' handwriting). Jason's comment for ranking his work first focuses on how well he is able to use cursive handwriting:

*I like how I wrote it by joining the letters.*

At first, this process involves concentration, as the children practice joining letters in a word, thus reducing the pace of the writing. Once handwriting skills are established, the children are able to speed up their writing. Preoccupation with the appearance of her handwriting is also evident in Carly's comment for ranking her work last:

*I don't think it's very neat writing.*

### **Year 4**

In Year 4 only one evaluative comment relates to handwriting. Debbie explains why she ranked her work last:

*I don't like this much [a report on animals]. I don't like my handwriting on it.*

Debbie does not like her handwriting and does not appear enthusiastic about her text.

## Year 5

Debbie and James are dissatisfied with their handwriting:

*I don't like the writing. (Debbie)*

*I don't think it's got good handwriting. (James)*

Debbie's persistence in offering handwriting as a criterion for last rankings in Years 2, 4 and 5 may be related more to her particular concern about presentation than to inadequate handwriting skills. She is an artistic child who concentrates on accuracy and precision in her work. It may well be that she regards surface features to be as important as content. For Debbie, both features contribute to a satisfactory final product.

Although James does not mention the fact, from my observations it is clear that he continues to write in the print form he learnt in Years 1 and 2. He does not attempt cursive writing and his teacher is tolerant of this behaviour. It is only in Year 6, in his letter to the Year 7 teacher (6.9), that he offers an explanation: *'I'm having trouble with my handwriting'*.

## Comment

Table 8 shows that a text is more likely to be ranked last because of handwriting, and the children's comments illustrate this. Several factors may have a bearing on this finding. Because it is an important basic skill in the curriculum, teachers are accountable for instruction in handwriting. In the early years they give attention to the formation of upper and lower case letters and demonstrate how letters are positioned to make words. In Year 1 learning involves the formation of letters for script print. By Year 2 the children are proficient in writing in script.

By Years 4 and 5 the assumption is that basic handwriting skills have already been acquired. Hence, no time is given to specific instruction in handwriting. Instead, the children are reminded to do their 'best' handwriting. This maxim implies correct formation and neat, legible handwriting.

It is difficult to interpret the children's evaluations about handwriting, as the teachers' instruction and emphasis may be a major influence. For some children, classroom instruction may be directly influential since there are frequent reminders, as mentioned above, to do their 'best' handwriting', particularly if the writing is to be published or displayed. Parents, also, are insistent on neat and legible handwriting. Despite these apparent influences, the children's comments give indication of personal values when they say they 'like' the handwriting or that it is 'good' and rank it first. They also have expectations of themselves. When they evaluate the handwriting as 'not good', 'messy' or 'dumb', they know they have not realised their own expectations, and rank the work last.

#### **6.6.4 Spelling**

Of the four subcategories, spelling is offered least (4 responses - less than 8%) and only as a criterion for last ranking. In addition, judgements about spelling occur only in Years 1 and 2.

##### **Year 1**

In Year 1, two children rank their work last because of 'mistakes'. Frances comments:

*Because I done a mistake. That's why [I put it last].*

Matthew uses language different from Frances to explain the same kind of criterion:

*I didn't get all the words right. I made a mistake on this.*

Frances and Matthew show awareness of conventional spelling and its relevance as a criterion for 'good' writing. They are aware of their inability to spell the words they want for their story writing. At this level the teacher encouraged the children to write words phonetically rather than constantly asking, 'How do you spell...?' (See Chapter 5: 5.3.2 for explanation of 'invented' spelling). However, this strategy does not undermine the notion that there is a right way (the norm) to spell words. The children's comments indicate their ability to make the connection between what is guesswork ('invented') and the conventional forms they know exist.

## **Year 2**

In Year 2, criteria about spelling are explicit. The children use terms that are synonymous with 'mistake', such as '*not right*' and '*wrong*' to indicate misspelt words. Mistakes are again the reason for Jessica and Frances ranking their texts last:

*Some of the words aren't right and that's why it's last. (Jessica)*

*I don't like it much 'cause I got words wrong, and I got some pictures wrong. (Frances).*

## **Comment**

Spelling is evaluated only in terms of mistakes and work is ranked last. There are no occasions, for example, when a child says, 'I put it first because the words are right',

'I knew how to spell the words', or 'because there are no mistakes'. In the Year 1 and Year 2 classrooms, no adult used the words 'wrong', 'mistake', or 'not right' explicitly. However, teachers exert pressure and influence in other ways: through daily instruction in spelling, encouraging 'invented' spelling, and eventually through the introduction of editing skills, one of which is to circle words that appear to be 'not right'. Parents are also on the alert for misspelt words, aware of society's values regarding accurate conventions in writing, particularly with regard to spelling. Thus it appears that the children internalise the implicit and explicit messages which adult values and expectations convey. They view accuracy in spelling as the norm; spelling is cause for comment only when it is deficient.

However, the data raise an obvious question: Why is spelling not commented on after Year 2? In all classrooms, more emphasis was given to the teaching of strategies for spelling than for instruction on handwriting and presentation of work. Nevertheless, handwriting is mentioned at all year levels, while spelling appears to be a non-issue after Year 2. Furthermore, the teachers promoted self-editing and they, too, edited the children's writing for incorrect spelling. Yet, in the middle and later years, correct or incorrect spelling is not mentioned as a criterion.

An assumption that can be considered is that through writing and discussion of the content of their writing, the children had begun to internalise the notion of writing for different purposes and for different audiences. Words enabled them to get their ideas down on paper. As this particular group of children enjoyed writing and, at times, observed their own development, their attention focused on content. Some of the children were also concerned about whether their texts 'made sense' or otherwise. Thus spelling was not an issue of primary concern.

In the section that follows I analyse criteria in Category 3, which focuses on the children's comments in relation to lexical, syntactic and semantic features.

#### 6.6.5 Category 3: Grammatical Elements as Criteria for Evaluating Writing

In this section I examine criteria offered by the children that indicate their ability to identify and evaluate grammatical elements in their texts. Fifteen of the 18 children mentioned grammatical elements at least once in the process of evaluating their work over the years. Table 9 presents an overview of the responses in this category.

**Table 9: Category 3 – Grammatical Elements**

Responses Related to Grammatical Elements for Texts Ranked First and Last

Year Level	Ranked First		Ranked Last		Total Responses by Year Level	
	No.	%	No.	%	No	%
1	1	2.6	1	2.6	2	5.3
2	3	7.9	1	2.6	4	10.5
3	10	26.3	2	5.3	12	31.6
4	7	18.4	4	10.5	11	28.9
5	4	10.5	5	13.2	9	23.7
<b>Total Responses by Ranking</b> (First & Last)	<b>25</b>	<b>65.8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>34.2</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100.0</b>

N=38

Table 9 shows that overall this category is used for first ranking about twice as often (65.8%) as for last ranking (34.2%). This pattern of using this category for first ranking more often than for last ranking is evident in Years 2, 3 and 4. The

largest number of responses in this category is made in Year 3. The possible reasons for these findings are discussed below, together with the patterns observable in Table 10.

Category 3 deals with a range of linguistic features of written texts – ranging from sentence level grammar to structuring of entire texts and from word choice to writing style. Therefore, Category 3 is broken down into three subcategories, as explained in Chapter 4. Responses relating to the three subcategories are presented in Table 10, and discussed separately in the sections that follow.

**Table 10: Category 3 – Grammatical Elements (Subcategories)**

Responses Related to Grammatical Elements for Texts Ranked First and Last,  
Itemised According to Subcategories

Year Level	Lexical				Syntactic				Semantic				Total Responses by Year Level	
	First	Last	Total	%	First	Last	Total	%	First	Last	Total	%	No.	%
1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	2	5.3	2	5.3
2	1	-	1	2.6	-	-	-	-	2	1	3	7.9	4	10.5
3	3	-	3	7.9	-	-	-	-	7	2	9	23.7	12	31.6
4	1	-	1	2.6	-	-	-	-	6	4	10	26.3	11	28.9
5	1	1	2	5.3	-	1	1	2.6	3	3	6	15.8	9	23.7
<b>Total Responses by Ranking</b> (First & Last)	6	1	7	18.4	-	1	1	2.6	19	11	30	79.0	38	100.0

N=38



From Table 10 it is evident that of the three subcategories about 80% of the responses relate to semantic elements. The other two aspects, lexical and syntactic elements, together make up the remaining 20% approximately, with syntactic features receiving less than 3% of total responses under this category and only three children in Years 4 and 5 combined offering lexical features as a criterion. As discussed earlier, content is overwhelmingly the children's most favoured criterion. This may suggest that they are more concerned about what they have to say than how they say it. Hence the children focused on semantic elements related to the sense or meaning of the text as a whole, as Table 10 shows.

Also worth noting from Table 10 is the fact that syntactic elements are not mentioned till Year 5. When they are, it is by one child only – and to rank work last. These findings are explored more fully in the sections that follow.

#### **6.6.6 Choice of Words: (Lexical Features)**

##### **Years 1 and 2**

Except for unsolicited comments given at times not scheduled for the ranking task, such as 'All I've got are words, words, words' (Andrew, Year 2), there is little evidence in Years 1 and 2 that children are concerned about choice of words as a criterion for evaluating writing. This sits oddly with their day-to-day classroom experiences where focus on the use and spelling of words is paramount and interactions during reading and writing-time provide evidence that words are subject to close attention. It is possible to argue that the children view the use of words as self-evident and thus unremarkable as a criterion.

### Year 3

Table 10 indicates that there were only three responses in Year 3 to lexical features. Comments focus on words in a broad sense or identify specific words and phrases as reasons for ranking work first. Karen (Year 3) explains that she ranked her work first because:

*I just like the words I use.*

Bruno finds that words he needs to use in Year 3 are 'complicated':

*I wanted to write a story, so I read a story and it was a good story, and then I wanted to write about it, but some words were complicated.*

Karen shows an understanding of the importance of words and how the choice of words can contribute to a 'good' story. Bruno also values words but realises at this stage the difficulty he has with using them in his own writing. Karen and Bruno are not as articulate as Tracey in her response. Tracey comments on her use of words from another perspective, as shown in the following comment:

*It's a new story, and it really sounds better than 'Goldicinder'. It doesn't have 'and thens' and it's got just enough for a good story ... You know how sometimes you reckon a lot of words describe more stuff, but it doesn't? Sometimes you use words that are really good.*

In 6.5.2, I discussed another dimension of this evaluation in relation to empathic feelings. Tracey's focus here is on the choice of words, and she demonstrates some understanding of the fact that sometimes one can use fewer words and make the message clearer.

Tracey also shows awareness of the function of words. She expresses satisfaction in avoiding the overuse of 'and then' as a connective, a common characteristic of early narrative writing. As discussed in Chapter 5, the teacher cautioned against the overuse of 'and then'. Tracey demonstrates her awareness of the difference the omission of 'and then' makes to her text.

She is able to use words that were unfamiliar in the first years, but which Bruno sees as '*complicated*'

#### **Year 4**

In Year 4 there is only one reference to lexical features. Peter comments on a narrative he composed about a study of animals that the zoo authorities asked him to do. The study took him to the jungles of Africa. He ranked this work first:

*The words I used in it are like scientists' [words].*

Peter's writing has elements of a narrative as well as a research report. The zoo authorities asked him to study the habitat of animals living in the jungle. It is not surprising that his 'story' is a report, as this genre was emphasised in Year 4.

Peter's focus is on the appropriateness of the words he has used for the content of his 'story' ('*The words I used are like scientists*'). As discussed in 6.5.1, Peter found that writing a few words on a bookmark (in Year 4) had limitations. He is beginning to show an awareness of the power of words and uses this in his writing, particularly if he likes the topic.

## Year 5

The two responses in Year 5 relate to sensitivity to words. Frances knows that carefully chosen words can evoke feeling. The criterion for her decision to rank a piece of work first indicates sensitivity to the kind of words that make for '*peaceful writing*':

*It's got some beautiful words in it. It's peaceful writing. I really don't know what kind of writing it is. The baby is sleeping ... This one's so peaceful ...*

The '*peaceful writing*' is a poem titled *My Baby*.

Tracey ranks her poem last, apparently dissatisfied with her choice of words:

*That's just a little poem I did myself ... Yeah, you could say, "We see beautiful flowers" [instead of "We see flowers in the garden"] ... I s'pose you don't really need that [word] ... No. You put words in different places. There are places for different words.*

Reflecting on why she ranked the poem last, Tracey focuses on the choice of words she used to write her poem *In the Yard*. She is aware of how words should be ordered to give meaning and also to engage the reader. She finds she is able to rephrase the words to express her thoughts in a way that is more pleasing than her original words. Tracey is dissatisfied with the way she initially wrote the poem and therefore ranked it last.

## Comment

The comments on the lexical features in their work indicate sensitivity and awareness on the part of the writers. However, overall, lexical features receive very little consideration by this group of children.

### 6.6.7 Sentence Structure: (Syntactic Features)

A striking feature of Table 10 is that syntactic elements are conspicuous by their absence. Although the children sometimes referred to their ability to write 'a good sentence' in their day-to-day classroom activities, Table 10 shows that there is only one explicit mention of the sentence as a criterion for evaluating writing quality. This is offered by Frances at Year 5 level. This text is based on the television series, *Crime Stoppers*. The program appealed to Frances and she uses it as a model for her own narrative:

*Well, it's very long. I've changed it completely. It was ten pages, now it's five. It still needed some work into it, like, this sounds wrong. Listen to this sentence. [She reads...] And this one...*

Frances articulates the difficulty she has in revising a lengthy composition and is grappling with structuring the text as a whole. Her concern is also for the way she has constructed some of the sentences, which seem to be 'wrong'. Reading these aloud, she is dissatisfied with her text.

## Comment

Because of the approach the teachers took, the children had some knowledge of the conventions of simple sentences. As a participant observer I was made aware of how this knowledge might have been acquired. When the teachers gave writing

instruction in the first years, they demonstrated conventional features of a sentence (for example, a capital letter at the beginning and a full stop at the end of a sentence). They also taught vocabulary ('word families') and invited the children to write a sentence containing a particular word. In the middle and later years, they encouraged the use of descriptive words (adjectives) and action words (verbs) in order to write 'good sentences'. The children also completed worksheets that required filling-in parts of a sentence. Instructions given at reading-time at all levels often included the word 'sentence', for example, 'Read a sentence that tells you about ...' Thus, it seems, the children had opportunities to internalise some knowledge of what a sentence is. Furthermore, as native English speakers (except for Debbie), the children had acquired implicit knowledge of the structure of spoken English. Linguistic structure did not figure in the children's evaluations and the sentence as a criterion for written English was a non-issue for them. Even Frances, who comments on her sentences, focuses on these in relation to the meaning of the text as a whole.

#### ***6.6.8 Sense / Meaning of Text as a Whole: (Semantic Features)***

Table 10 shows that semantic features related to the meaning of the text as a whole were referred to most often. The children made more comments about the whole text (30) than about words (7) or sentences (1).

Developing an awareness of the text as a whole is indicated by comments made by several children who mention holistic processes such as 'reading' the text, or who make global judgements as to whether the text 'makes sense' or 'doesn't make sense'. Sometimes children link these comments to the necessary requirement to redraft texts till they 'make sense' to the writer.

## Year 1

In Year 1, Patrycia and Carly comment on the texts they produced in response to a teacher-assigned project about chickens. Patrycia knows by the 'sound' of the text when she reads it that it is 'right'. She knows this text is 'better' than other 'stories' she has written. She is pleased with the text, which she ranked first:

*[I put it first] because I like to make things sound right ... Because some stories are better than others. I know by reading it ... When I read it to my friends I get excited and comfortable.*

Patrycia's comment also indicates her self-awareness as a writer - 'When I read it to my friends I get excited and comfortable'. This is a dimension of Category 4, which relates in part to awareness of oneself as a writer.

Carly, however, ranked her work last:

*I don't really like it. Now when I read it, it wasn't so good. I just put anything on the paper and that's why it's yukky and I don't like it when it turns out yukky.*

'...When it turns out yukky' indicates Carly's dissatisfaction with her text as a whole and not with its external presentation. When she attempts to read it, she realises that whatever is written on the paper is not a coherent whole, ('I just put anything on the paper') and therefore has little or no meaning. Hence, she concludes that the text 'wasn't so good'. Both children have expectations of a 'good' text - that is, one that reads well. They give no information about the words or sentences they wrote.

## Year 2

'Reading' the text to gain meaning is also implicit in criteria given in Year 2, as in Jessica's response:

*I'm happy with what I did retelling. At first I didn't know what way to put it.*

## Year 3

Table 10 indicates that in Year 3 the number of responses related to the text as a whole is almost double that in Years 1 and 2. The children's comments reveal growing awareness of the need to organise content for different types of writing such as narrative, book reviews, letters and reports. Andrew attempts to explain the differences when he ranked his fictional story first:

*The book report is telling you about the story I read. The letter is telling you about Mr. Williams [the author of the letter], and the story tells you about the richest soccer player in the world. It's a fiction story.*

When the children use the phrase, '*making sense*', they know to apply the phrase to the content. This is illustrated in Jason's comment when he ranked his work first:

*... It's a good story. It makes sense ... It's my best because there are actions in the story.*

At this level the children wrote more than one draft for their narrative texts. Jessica (below) indicates ability to focus on the redrafting process that enables her to revise the text. She comments:

*This here you wouldn't find in anything -- ["He was as cold as a feather"]. See! This makes it important because you have to remember how it*



*didn't make sense-- what it was like before. It has to make sense before anything-- before it is published.*

In Year 2 Jessica talked about a text she was not happy with. In Year 3 she is able to be more specific about the change she made in her draft by inserting a sentence when she revised her draft. Since her first draft did not convey meaning ("...you have to remember how it didn't make sense..."), she concentrates on the language of the content and uses the feather simile effectively.

Debbie is not happy to rely solely on her own judgment as the main critic of her writing. When she wrote the text some time before the rank ordering task, she sought the opinions of others about an imaginative story she was not satisfied with. She explains this in her evaluation:

*I put it last because it really doesn't make sense. Even my sister and the teacher said it didn't make sense. I remember here at the end it goes like this. [She reads a portion of the text aloud]. I don't understand it.*

Debbie's older sister and the teacher, whom she recognises as more experienced readers, also find the text difficult to follow. Since there are no clues given, one can conjecture that the readers made comments such as, 'I don't understand this...' or 'This doesn't make sense to me...' When Debbie reads the text, she realises the content does not convey her intended meaning. She has not been able to construct a text with related sentences that give meaning to the whole. ('...it really doesn't make sense').

## Year 4

Evaluations in Year 4 mention '*changes*' the children made to the text when they wrote more than one draft. Changing the text gave them a sense of satisfaction that it '*made sense*'.

Peter mentions making changes to a text as a normal procedure for 'good' writing:

*I make changes all the time. That's why I write longer drafts and that. I just get an idea and I keep on writing ...*

Matthew, also, mentions drafts in the context of change to the text until he is satisfied with it:

*She [the teacher] tells you to write another draft, and I change it and it gets better.*

The teacher in Year 4 gave encouragement to redraft narrative texts and the children are able to recognise when they needed to make changes. The evaluations are not specific about what changes the children made or under what circumstances, for example, whether they were the result of interaction with the teacher. However, when they read the texts as a whole during the ranking process, the children were pleased with their efforts, which influenced the position of the writing in rank order.

'*Making changes*' to the text are implied in Debbie's evaluation for ranking her work first:

*The project is the best one because I did three drafts to make it make sense...*

Not every child, however, is satisfied with the changes made to the text, as Carly indicates, when she ranked her work last:

*Oh! I'm not sure why [I put it last]. I don't really like the story much because, like, I changed it around and it didn't make sense ...*

The text is an imaginative story (*The Day Kathryn's Pencil Came Alive*), and her comment implies Carly attempted to revise it without success. The events in the story do not come together to make a cohesive whole. Carly is critical of the changes, which did not work out. Her aim was to write a text that 'made sense'.

The teachers' writing pedagogy in the middle years emphasised the importance of rewriting and editing the final draft for each piece of writing. The children's comments suggest that they are aware of the potential of revision to improve the meaning of their writing although they may not yet fully understand how to go about revising a work.

### **Year 5**

Table 10 shows that in Year 5 the number of responses related to sense of the whole text declines in comparison to Years 3 and 4. Except for Frances, references as to whether a text 'makes sense' are not as explicit as in the middle years. Frances ranked her work first:

*I like to read my own writing, and as I read it -- Well, it helps my story to be, well, to make sense, I suppose.*

Julia disapproves of her imaginative story, which she ranked last:

*Oh, well, it's just - This one goes on and on and on. You don't know when it's going to finish. This one is not really true. It's a fantasy story.*

There is a note of weariness in Julia's tone when she comments that the story '*goes on and on and on*'. She has difficulty in deciding what information to include in the text and in drawing together the events of the story in order to bring it to an end. Julia (Year 5) and Debbie (Year 3, above) express dissatisfaction with the way they wrote their imaginative texts. They appear to be satisfied with the events (content) they chose to weave into the narrative. The evaluations, however, suggest they had difficulty with semantic and syntactic elements when composing imaginative topics, which they explain in their own way: '*...it really doesn't make sense*' (Debbie) and '*This one goes on and on and on*' (Julia).

Structuring whole texts requires attention to paragraphing. The one reference to paragraphing as a criterion occurs in Year 5, when Jason ranked his work first:

*Oh! I writ [sic] like, a quarter of the letter and then another quarter in another space. Like, I wrote paragraphs, and I made sure it was nice and neat and tidy, and I think that's about it.*

In Jason's classroom the paragraph was taught as an important convention in writing, presumably to enable the children to manage the information intended for their texts. Jason's understanding of a paragraph appears to be as something purely mechanical rather than as a means to enable the recipient of the letter to read the content in a meaningful and logical way. He is pleased that he has remembered the teacher's injunction about writing paragraphs.

The finality of the comment '*... and I think that's about it*' indicates Jason has no explanation to give about the purpose of the paragraph. The criterion, '*I made sure it was nice and neat and tidy*' relates to surface features.

## Comment

The texts that children commented on are chiefly narrative texts. Children also commented on poems and informative texts about sport (football and basketball).

As Table 3 indicates, the children had more practice in writing narrative. They thus may have developed some awareness of how lexical and syntactic elements contribute to meaning in a narrative text.

From Years 1-5 inclusive, the teachers devoted time to the use of punctuation. They encouraged self-editing at all year levels and provided reference charts for the children to follow. They also drew attention to punctuation signals in the literature the children read in class. However, this group of children do not mention punctuation as a criterion. They may realise the need for punctuation and value it as a directive from the teacher, but not as a criterion. They have a superficial understanding of punctuation: a sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop. They may also be aware, through their reading of literature, how punctuation can help the writer convey meaning, for example by signalling emphasis or emotion. However, the children seldom refer to punctuation even as a surface feature of writing, much less to its potential to contribute to the writer's meaning.

In the later years the children show some evidence of internalising the elements of fiction and applying these both in their narrative writing and in their comments about their written narratives.

Their comments also indicate that some children show evidence of beginning to understand the different structural elements of various text types. However, the children were not given specific enough guidance in how to use linguistic features to construct narrative or other types of texts. Overall, lexical and syntactic features

receive very little consideration in the criteria offered by the children through Years 1 to 5.

Responses coded in Category 4 give an indication of how a number of children are observant of their development as writers and are developing awareness of the reader. These responses are discussed in the next section.

#### **6.7 Category 4: Self-Reflexive Elements as Criteria for Evaluating Writing**

The criteria so far analysed focused on content, surface features and broad grammatical elements, aspects that relate to texts. However, the children also offer reflexive judgements involving perceptions about themselves as writers and make comments indicating awareness of the reader. In other words, they include in their responses information about the writer as well as about the writing (texts), and comments about the reader. As the children became more aware of themselves as writers, their awareness of the reader also developed.

The criteria coded in Category 4 relate more directly to the following issues:

- (a) The children's awareness of the composing process and their recognition of the effort they invested in a piece of work
- (b) The children's awareness of themselves as writers
- (c) The children's awareness of the demands of a reader (or differential readers) in influencing how they shape or edit a piece of writing

The section is divided into two subcategories. The composing process and awareness of the self as writer merge as one subcategory, while awareness of the demands of the reader is discussed in the second subcategory.

Table 11 shows the number of responses relating to Category 4. The responses are not broken down numerically into the two subcategories, though the comments of the children are discussed under these two headings. As will be seen in the discussion that follows, comments in these subcategories sometimes overlap. Hence a separate table and breakdown is not provided.

**Table 11: Category 4 – Self-Reflexive Elements**

Responses Related to Self-Reflexive Elements for Texts Ranked First and Last

Year Level	Ranked First		Ranked Last		Total Responses by Year Level	
	No.	%	No.	%	No	%
1	2	4.5	3	6.8	5	11.4
2	2	4.5	4	9.1	6	13.6
3	3	6.8	5	11.4	8	18.2
4	4	9.1	6	13.6	10	22.7
5	12	27.3	3	6.8	15	34.1
<b>Total Responses by Ranking</b> (First & Last)	23	52.3	21	47.7	44	100.0

N=44

Fourteen of the 18 children commented on self-reflexive elements at some time through Years 1-5. Looking at the 'Total Responses by Year Level' column a clear trend is observable. Through the years of primary schooling there is a steadily increasing mention of and focus on self-reflexive elements

Since the children talked to one another and to their teacher about their writing, it is not surprising that in the later years the children illustrate ability to reflect and provide specific comments about their development as writers and an awareness of their composing processes. This observation does not in any way suggest that younger children are not capable of reflection. Rather, it suggests that this is a capability that grows with maturity and experience. Some children's comments show that as early as Year 1 they can reflect on themselves as writers.

Table 11 also shows that from Years 1 to 4 when children comment on self-reflexive elements it is more often to rank texts last. In Year 5 this trend is reversed and children use this category to rank texts first (27.3%) more often than last (6.8%). The possible reasons for these patterns are explored in the discussion that follows.

#### **6.7.1 *The Composing Process***

In this section I analyse evaluations that show that the children express in diverse ways a vested interest in their writing and demonstrate their ability to reflect on themselves as writers. Their comments provide evidence of their active participation in the writing of their own texts. They rank their work according to the effort they believe they gave to the writing of the text. They use language such as 'effort' and 'hard work' and apply this criterion to their writing. The term 'effort', however, is not used explicitly until Year 4. In other levels the children use language such as '*all the work I've done on it*'. This kind of language identifies with 'effort'. Children also monitor their progress as writers and make comments that indicate a self-reflexive stance. Hence, in this section I deal with two elements



that interrelate (the composing process and self-reflection) when the children give their reasons for ranking texts first and last.

## **Years 1 and 2**

As early as Year 1, Julia and Carly note their progress in areas important to them:

*Now I know how to do good monkeys and not yukky ones. (Julia)*

*I do better writing than I used to do writing...before I just scribbled.*

*(Carly)*

In Year 2 Wade indicates that he is aware that writing a 'good' story does not come easily. It requires effort on the part of the writer. He ranked his work first:

*I worked on this one a lot. I like the way I writed [sic] it. I reckon it's a good story.*

Wade's comments indicate a developing awareness of the processes involved in writing, although he does not specifically say what these processes are. He has discovered that writing his ideas in narrative form is difficult to achieve, but not impossible.

Frank is also aware of the demands of the composing process. He distinguishes between 'good' writing ('*my best story*') and writing that is 'not good' by the amount of '*time and work*' expended on writing the text:

*It's my best story ... Because I put a lot of time and work into it.*

He ranked his work first. Jason on the other hand ranked his work last:

*It's okay, but I haven't put much writing to it.*

Jason has reservations about the quality of his writing. His comment implies that he knows writing requires work. He is able to acknowledge that he did not invest much effort in his writing. Wade and Frank attribute the production of 'good' writing to the effort they invested in it and ranked their work first. Jason ranked his work last because he is dissatisfied with the results, which came about because of little effort.

### **Years 3 and 4**

As mentioned in 6.2, in Year 3 the children practised a range of types of writing. Karen is able to articulate the struggle she had with writing a book review, a more formal text type than the narrative she has been used to in the earlier years:

*It took a long time to do, and it was hard ...I'm happy that I finished it.*

'Happy' is associated with relief in having completed the task rather than satisfaction with the writing, as Karen ranked this work last.

Despite the effort she made in order to recall events of a recent holiday, Tracey's writing does not meet with her approval. She ranked it last:

*... I don't think it's my really best work, but the thing is I had to think about it ... I had to really think back and see what I did and what I didn't do ...*

Tracey comments on the disparity between the quality of the final product and the cognitive effort in producing it. She notes the effort it requires to recall and write about events that really happened and put them together to make a readable account of the holiday. Tracey's comments point to the intertwining of thinking and writing.

When in Year 4, Jason ranked first a retell based on a story the teacher had read to and discussed with the class:

*I like 'The Street Fighter Turbo'. I looked at it ... I think I did a good job writing it.*

The 'liking' response establishes a reason for writing the story and then ranking it first. Jason substantiates this criterion by taking the time and interest to 'look at' the text again. His approval of having done 'a good job' or having given effort to the writing of it satisfies him that the writing is 'good'.

Their lack of 'effort' influenced the decisions two children made for ranking their work last. Frank expresses dissatisfaction with the writing task, which did not motivate him to 'put the best effort into it':

*It's only a bit of writing, and, well, it's a bit boring. I didn't really like writing about it. Like, if I want to do work, I want it to be fun. You know? I want to put the best effort into it. If you don't [put effort into it], then it's boring.*

The comment refers to the factual reports the children wrote about several animals they had seen when the class made an excursion to the zoo. Frank's comments provide an insight into him as a writer and demonstrate his own awareness of his preferences as a writer. He wants to enjoy writing ('I want it to be fun') and is prepared to put into it his 'best effort', implying that when there is effort the writing is likely to be 'good' work and not 'boring'. Implied also is the question whether a task or topic that the writer does not like is worth putting much effort into writing about.

Where they are constrained by the topic (for example, '*What I did in the Holidays*') or by teacher intervention, the children are not prepared to put much effort into the writing, as indicated in Andrew's comment when he ranked a work last:

*This I had to copy from the board, and, well, I don't like copying from the board much. Like, I'd rather do it myself.*

Andrew explained that what he had to copy from the board referred to the beginning of a text (a 'story-starter') about the school holidays that the teacher had written on the chalkboard. The children copied the beginning and then completed the narrative, describing their own experiences.

Although there were only a few lines to copy from the chalkboard, Andrew disapproves of the topic as well as the method that was imposed upon him. He is able to differentiate between effort vested in his own compositions and copying something that another person, in this case the teacher, composed. He sees this as giving him less ownership of the writing.

Like Tracey (Year 3 above), Andrew is conscious of his own ability to '*think about it*' (the text) and to compose a beginning relevant to his experiences.

## **Year 5**

The time taken to write a text and the hard work involved are translated into 'effort', which Carly values as a criterion in Year 5. She ranked a narrative text first:

*Well, I put it first, probably because the effort I put into it has been good.  
Like, when I read it, it sounds like it has got enough information for me.*

*For me, yes ... I think it's good because as I was saying, I put a lot of effort into it.*

The text that Carly '*put a lot of effort into*' is a fiction story titled *The Old Grey House*. It is modelled on a story she had enjoyed reading, and which gave her an idea for her own narrative.

As the teachers had explained about copyright, Carly created a text that she could claim as her own. To achieve this she had to create characters, a plot and events dissimilar from the one she had read and present the story as her own composition. If she is aware of it, the criterion does not acknowledge the fact that literature provided her with a structure for her own story. Nevertheless, it seems to be implied in the comment '*when I read it, it sounds like it has got enough information...*' The demands made of the writer when composing are recognised and accepted as a challenge, as revealed in the comment, '*...the effort I put into it has been good*'.

Julia also ranked her work first and appears to reflect on the '*time and effort*' it took to write an attractive advertisement for a class assignment:

*The thing is this year I haven't had a published story. I usually do like to publish. Oh! I like this one, though. It's not published like a book, but it took a lot of time and effort to do.*

The text (drawing and writing) that Julia produced is an imaginative advertisement (*The Witches' Wacky Shop*) that she contributed to the Year 5 newspaper. The class newspaper was another way of enabling the children to publish their writing. Julia's comments about publishing are important as they give insight into how one child values this final stage of writing. Julia's criterion also implies awareness of

the reader, as the notion of 'publishing' implies a reader. However, the 'time and effort' dedicated to the planning and final presentation of the advertisement appear to be of most significance to her.

The criterion that Peter offers for ranking his work first resonates with effort and an awareness of the composing process. For ranking first a fictional story titled *The Boy Who Ate the Sun*, Peter gave the following criteria:

*Oh! I think it's the best one I've got. Yeah, the way I've presented it and all that work I've done on it and that.*

The language Peter chooses to explain his decision for ranking his work first implies that he did not rush to put words on paper. He gave considerable thought to what he was doing (composing). He seems to take for granted that 'good' writing requires time and effort ('... *and all that work I've done on it...*') 'Yeah' is a significant word for it infers he is reflecting on how well he wrote the text, which he does not consider as merely another writing assignment.

### Comment

The children's comments provide evidence of their active participation and intellectual involvement in the writing of their own texts. Writing is not perceived as a mechanical act where ideas and language fall into place automatically and without effort. They articulate terminology indicative of their commitment to the composing process. In Year 2 and the middle years the children choose particular words such as 'time', 'work', 'a good job'. They are aware that writing takes 'time and work', and their evaluations express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the end result. They rank their work last if they consider their effort to be inadequate to the task. Their comments and the trend observable in Table 11 from Year 1 to 4

indicate that the children have high standards for themselves and are inclined to use this category to rank texts last if their effort has been inadequate. However, from the comments of the children in Year 5 and their responses as indicated in Table 11, it appears that they have reached a level of confidence in themselves as writers and this may account for their focusing on this aspect and ranking their texts first more often.

Their comments indicate that some children have the ability to make reflective judgments about their own writing and themselves as writers. Some are able to differentiate between writing that is copied and that requires little effort and the processes involved in their own compositions. They use words like '*effort*' and '*fun*' to indicate the involvement they have with their texts.

The children's awareness of themselves as writers is also evidenced in their emerging awareness of the reader.

#### **6.7.2 *Awareness of the Reader***

Awareness of the reader is a competence that grows with the progression from the child's self-centredness to the ability to adopt the perspective of another.

The focus on publishing their work throughout their primary school years gradually helped the children to become more aware of the reader and the necessity to cater for the reader's needs. This awareness is largely missing or unexpressed in the first years, but appears to grow as the children mature. This is not surprising because the detachment and maturity required to view one's own writing from a reader's perspective is acquired over time, and after reading and writing a variety of texts. Furthermore, awareness of the reader is put into practice when writers edit their

own texts with the needs of the reader in mind. This calls for a range of linguistic skills and strategies that are largely unavailable to children in the early years.

### **Years 1 and 2**

Andrew in Year 1 comments on two pieces of writing, one of which was published:

*When I looked at the writing, I couldn't read this writing, and I could read this one ... Even if my brother didn't help me, it would still be my best because it's my first published story.*

Andrew here displays his ability to stand back from his work and compare two of his texts. His pride in and ownership of his work is apparent. He explains that even if his writing were of lesser quality, presumably, (done without his brother's help) it would still be his best piece because it is his '*first published story*'. Andrew here demonstrates his ability to monitor his own progress as a writer by noting the milestone achieved by his first published piece of work. Not surprisingly, though, as a Year 1 child, Andrew does not appear to be aware of a reader other than himself.

Similarly, in Year 2, children do not demonstrate awareness of a reader (other than themselves) and their comments relate to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their effort or other features of their writing.

### **Year 3**

In Year 3, Daniella's comments for ranking her work demonstrate the beginnings of awareness of the writer's responsibility to the reader:

*I put this one first because I'm ready to publish this one now. I've changed it and I've written it out again and edited it. I put the date. I*



*started it in April and I finished it in December. I think the story is good.*

*I like it.*

Daniella shows awareness of the demands that writing places on the writer when work is to be published. She has revised and edited the text (*'I've changed it...and edited it'*). Though Daniella does not explicitly mention the reader, it is implied in the notion of publishing.

Overall, children's responses in Year 3 do not focus specifically on the reader but on various other aspects of their writing.

#### **Year 4**

In Year 4 the children's awareness of the reader can be inferred in their comments as they talk about publishing their work and reflect on themselves and their progress as writers. Patrycia, however, specifically refers to the reader:

*If you put information in, people can read it, like the funny things,  
interesting things...*

In regard to a science report on different kinds of concrete materials, Patrycia has this to say:

*I didn't like it. I hated it. Boring information. Who would want to read  
it? It's not boring for house-builders. It is for children.*

Here Patrycia moves from her own strong negative reaction to the text to imagining a reader's similar response. However, at the same time, she also concedes that for certain kinds of people who have knowledge and interest in concrete materials (*'house-builders'*) this text would not be boring. Patrycia shows understanding of

how general (non-specialist) readers may react to the text and its likely appeal to the specialist, displaying much perceptiveness.

### Year 5

Frank's comments give insight into his perception of himself as a writer and demonstrate his awareness that readers have different interests:

*To me writing is enjoyable. I don't know what other people think because they like different stuff. Like, just say a girl read my story. Right? She really wouldn't enjoy it much because it's about exploring and stuff ... Girls are interested in imagination and that stuff. Boys don't like imagination and that stuff. They like sport.*

While Frank makes stereotyped assumptions about gender differences in the choice of topic, he shows his awareness that readers have differing interests.

Tracey's comment demonstrates her ownership of her writing and her well-developed awareness of herself as a writer. In addition, her comments show that she actively sought out the reactions of her readers - her peers. The text relates to a newspaper she produced:

*Well, they're all my [her emphasis] writing. They're not [book] reviews or retells. I chose this one because I did it at home. I brought it to school and I let everyone look at it. People thought it was pretty good. I actually enjoyed doing it, so that's a good thing.*

Karen's evaluation also demonstrates a writer's awareness of the anticipated reader, and her uncertainty about how this reader might react. She made this comment when she ranked first a narrative about a genie who grants wishes:

*It's hard to judge your own story ... I've got to continue on with the next part ... I wanted people to be interested in it.*

A criterion important for Karen is the reader's interest in her story. She writes with an audience in mind (*'I wanted people to be interested in it'*). However, as the writer of the story, she does not place complete value on the judgment she would make about her writing. Her response demonstrates the challenge most writers face. As Karen observes, *'It's hard to judge your own story'*. It is also clear that Karen has a vested interest in her story and intends to finish it.

The response Patricia gave for ranking first a piece of writing about bushfires implies an awareness of the reader. She mentions criteria (*'so long'* and *'a bit boring'*) that readers are likely to use:

*It's about bushfires. I made it up. I watched the news and wrote it down.  
It's so long! It's a bit boring. What I mean is I've improved now. I  
don't make all those silly mistakes.*

It is only in the interaction that followed that Patricia gave more information about the text, which she intends to be a message to people about the dangers of bushfires. She realises readers may not get the message because of the length of the text (*'It's so long!'*) and from her comments in Year 4 (about the likely reactions of readers to the text on building materials) we know that Patricia is concerned about the reactions of her readers.

### **Comment**

The foregoing discussion sheds some light on the nature of the criterion 'awareness of the reader', which is a growing competence that is often interrelated with the children's reflections on themselves as writers, or with their comments on the

process of writing. This was demonstrated in the comments of the children over the years. It is possible to see growing awareness of the reader as children mature and begin to look at their own writing from the reader's perspective and take steps to edit and craft their writing with the reader in mind.

The discussion thus far deals with the responses of the children from Years 1 to 5. As explained in Chapter 4, a different method was used to obtain the responses of the children when they were in Year 6. In the following section I discuss the children's judgements and the criteria they applied in Year 6.

#### **6.8 Summative Evaluations of Writing in Year 6**

As explained in Chapter 4, the data gathered from the children in Year 6 were not based on the ranking of their work as in Years 1 - 5. In place of the rank order task, the children performed two different tasks:

- 1) They were asked to write a letter to a hypothetical Year 7 English teacher telling him/her about their writing, and
- 2) They reviewed the 'good' pieces of writing they had chosen from Prep. to Year 5, which I had filed, and noted changes in their development as writers.

The children's comments in their letters and from the interviews I had with them were then collated and coded using the four categories – Content, Surface Features, Grammatical Elements and Self-Reflexive Features.

Table 12 shows the number of children who gave criteria. The following discussion relates to numbers of children, not numbers of responses.

**Table 12: Children\* in Year 6 Providing Criteria for Categories 1-4**

Year Level	Category 1 Content		Category 2 Surface Features		Category 3 Grammatical Elements		Category 4 Self-Reflexive Features	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
6	13	72.2	8 (a)	44.4	12 (b)	66.7	15	83.3

\* 18 children provided criteria based on Year 6 self-evaluation tasks.

(a) 3 children referred to handwriting

5 children referred to spelling

(b) 8 children referred to semantic elements

It can be seen from Table 12 that more than 80% of the children commented on self-reflexive features (Category 4). In addition, content (Category 1) is commented on by almost 75% of the children. This is in keeping with the trend observed in Years 1-5 of favouring content as a criterion. I discuss the children's comments and the trends observed under each of the four categories.

### Category 1: Content

As noted, content retains its importance for the children when they are in Year 6. However, their range of topics and interests has expanded beyond content related to their own experiences. In the early and middle years, writing about real-life experiences was popular, but in the later years there is preference for fiction and fantasy stories. Preference for fantasy began to emerge in Year 3. Fantasy and fiction were stifled in Year 4 because of report writing, and emerged again in Year 5.

As in the early and middle years, several boys continued to give recounts of their involvement in sport, as indicated by James, a student with low ability, who had difficulty in providing detail when he ranked his work in the early and middle years. In his letter he wrote:

*'I write lots of soccer'.*

Andrew, who liked to write about soccer in the early and middle years, admits that he no longer writes on this topic. He and other boys expressed preference for writing 'mystery' and 'adventure' stories and stories that are 'funny' or 'aren't really true'. 'Funny' for Matthew means 'crazy stories'. He explains:

*... I mean crazy as in imaginative stories that make you laugh when you read them.*

Among the girls, Daniella wrote that she preferred to write 'adventure, horror and fantasy' stories. Eight girls preferred 'imaginative' and 'fiction' stories. These are the topics the children told the Year 7 teacher in their letters that they 'enjoy'

writing and like to 'publish'. Children mentioned that they are prepared 'to put a lot of effort' into the writing of narrative.

Peter is the only child who also likes to write poems. He explains:

*I like to write poems about all the things in our world, especially the beach because I love the sea, and water. I have some knowledge of poetry writing.*

The children do not change their view about the desirability of choosing their own topics. As Julia comments:

*It's easier to write your own topic. You own it.*

## **Category 2: Surface Features**

In Category 2 (surface features), three children mention handwriting and five mention spelling when they give an appraisal of their own development as writers. However, handwriting and spelling are not offered as criteria for 'good' writing. Frank, James and Jessica noted that handwriting and spelling continue to be problematic features as they were in the first years. However, Frank writes:

*... and my handwriting is getting neater.*

Jessica, an articulate and a competent writer by Year 6, writes:

*What I find hard about writing is how I [to] start a story and how to spell a word.*

Although the children inform the Year 7 teacher of problematic areas or that handwriting is 'neater' and 'spelling is a bit better', surface features are largely a non-issue for 'good' writing.

### Category 3: Grammatical Elements

Twelve children offered grammatical elements as criteria for their 'good' writing. Of this number, eight refer to meaning in the text as an important entity. One child mentioned she had written '*sentences that are right*' and three children mention their writing was '*good because I used better words*'. Tracey focuses on meaning and conveying it to the intended reader:

*I get my message across to the reader.*

In the interview, Bruno explains in another way:

*If you write a story, it has to make sense. It has to come out well.*

The children's summative judgements also yielded general comments about the purpose and the power of words: words helped them write '*a good story*' or '*the best piece*' ever written. They noted the limitations of their vocabulary when they were in Year 1, and showed an awareness of the progress made since that time. As Andrew comments:

*In Year 1, I wasn't capable of knowing interesting words, and now I can write a whole book with them.*

Eight children gave responses that suggest that they review the text as a whole, although they approach this in ways different from when they were in Year 5. Instead of using the phrase '*making sense*', in Year 6 they mention the importance of '*planning*' their writing. '*Planning*' for them meant '*having a topic, main characters, the plot, the theme*'. There is evidence that the children can identify the essential organising features and critical elements of texts. '*Planning*' is a key word that the teachers used in the middle and later years to help generate an ordered text.



The children regard themselves as 'good writers' if they are able to plan their writing.

Peter describes the process of planning and its usefulness as part of the composing process in the following example:

*I map it [the writing] out in my head -- the story line I want to be in there. I wait until it comes out. When it is finished and if I don't like it, I can always go back and change it - change the words.*

The evaluative responses the children make in relation to worksheets, of which there was a proliferation in Year 6, could be expected to be assigned to Categories 1, 2 and 3, since the question-and-answer format of such writing tasks are directed to content, skills and grammatical elements. However, the responses the children offered are more appropriately classified as Category 4 because they indicate the children's ability to differentiate between independent composition and the mechanical act of filling answers to questions based on pre-specified information.

Fifteen children signalled in interviews their dissatisfaction with worksheets while three found them 'helpful a bit' (Joseph), or 'pretty good' except when they were 'annoying because you can't get it right' (Tracey). Debbie's appraisal of her preferences is an honest one. It illustrates her understanding of the intellectual engagement and time involved in composing:

*I prefer worksheets because writing stories is harder and it takes more time.*

Julia, on the other hand, articulates clearly why she does not like worksheets:

*There's not much point [in worksheets] because we never do stuff like that in story writing. I reckon it's stupid.*

With the exception of Debbie, the children appear to prefer a writing task that is more challenging and thought-provoking than a worksheet. However, Joseph and Tracey consider that worksheets '*help a bit but not much*'. The children's comments reveal that they are better able to use their own cognitive abilities as writers and learners when they compose their own writing. This is revealed in the comments below by Jessica, Frank and Peter:

*With worksheets you just write down the word because you have to. The words are in your mind. In your own writing, you're flowing with it. You put lots of words down. With writing you can change it. (Jessica)*

*On the worksheet it tells you what to do. It says, "Answer the question". You have to do what it says, but when you are writing you can go as far as you like with your imagination. You can write anything you like, and I think that's good. (Frank)*

*The worksheets are more off the top of your head. Well, this one is off the top of your head. I'm doing what the worksheet tells you to do, whereas I like doing what I enjoy. I enjoy doing my own story better than this written stuff [worksheets]. It's more free and you can get ideas out. (Peter)*

#### **Category 4: Self-Reflexive Elements**

As explained and discussed previously, this category encompasses awareness of the composing process and awareness of the reader. The children do not change their beliefs about the composing process and the demands it makes on the writer.

However, they feel they can cope with these demands. As Bruno comments, '*...I*

*think I can do a better job now I'm bigger...*' By Year 6, the children judged that supplying answers on worksheets is not such a challenge or as satisfying as their own intellectual involvement in the composing processes. They refer to their own cognitive activities, as in Jessica's comment:

*You think of all your ideas in your head, and then you go to write it and it comes out different.*

And Matthew writes:

*I enjoy writing because when I don't get stuck on anything, I just write away.*

While the children recognise the demands of the composing process, they also consider it a worthwhile task, as Joseph did:

*I love writing because it gives me thinking time and it gives me new ideas.*

James notes:

*I enjoy writing because if I'm bored, I can write.*

In the final interview I had with the children, several made mention of the reader, indicating (as in Year 5) they had ability to consider perspectives other than self. Carly makes explicit comments about some of the issues involved in publishing and about the reactions of the anticipated reader:

*When I published my story I had to really think hard to myself about lots of things, like why I wanted to publish it. Was it up to Grade 6 standard? Was it what people wanted to read? All the things were*

*racing around in my mind, and at first I thought my story would never get published, but it did, and I was really pleased.*

Julia enjoys the fact that her writing can make people laugh. She acknowledges the boost to her self-confidence that this brings:

*Writing is very special because to get up there and to read your book the first time and to see people laugh, you feel good about yourself.*

The comments the children make about 'change' and development as 'better writers' or 'better writing than in Year 1' relate to narrative writing. Although the teachers taught various types of writing, as encouraged in curriculum guidelines, and the children ranked some of these types first as 'good' writing, they make no reference at Year 6 level to having learnt other types of writing. Julia indicated her preference for mastering one type of writing - narrative writing - because it had meaning for her.

The children's comments may offer some explanation as to why they had few or no completed texts they valued as 'good' writing. If this is so, it confirms the assumption made earlier, that in Year 5 the children had reached a stage in the development of writing where they needed specific instruction and guidance with narrative writing. They were not able to articulate that need explicitly.

Knowing how to write other forms of writing seems not to be of great concern. What is of more concern is that writing is 'enjoyable', that 'it helps me to relax', and gives confidence to write ('I was very confident in what I was writing. That is what made it so special'). Children commented that writing enabled them to give expression to their feelings ('I enjoy writing because when I'm angry or sad or excited about something, I can write it down').

The evaluations and comments in Year 6 are consistent with the evaluations given in the early and middle years. They suggest the children have retained the same interest in and awareness of the composing processes. They observe their development as writers since they were in Year 1 and tend to perceive themselves as 'good' writers. This perception is influenced by the changes they notice in their earlier work.

Although Debbie comments in her interview with me that worksheets are easier to do than writing (presumably narrative), she makes no reference to this comment in her letter to the Year 7 English teacher. Rather, she views her progress as a writer and learner in relation to drawing and writing:

*I've been looking at the writing I did in Year 1 and the writing in Year 6. There's a big, big difference ... In Year 1 I loved drawing and hated writing. Now in Year 6 I like writing and I don't really like drawing ... I like writing stories about things that have happened to me...*[Debbie's emphasis].

This information appears to be a contradiction to her earlier comment about worksheets. As mentioned previously, although she says she prefers worksheets to writing stories, this can be interpreted as a way of comparing the processes involved in answering questions and composing, which is the '*harder*' of the two '*and takes more time*'.

## **6.9 Concluding Summary**

The evidence from this study suggests that primary school children have the ability to evaluate their own drawings and writing and can do this from a very early age. However, the emphasis given to particular criteria changes over the years. The simpler criteria of the first years evolved to encompass more complex features, not

dissimilar from the models that adults develop for 'good' writing (See Chapter 4: 4.6.1).

The children developed criteria for 'good' writing derived from their own writing experiences, the instructions and interaction with their teachers and with peers, and through the reading of literature. These three components can be identified as contributing to the criteria the children applied to their writing,

The effectiveness of the ranking tasks was also dependent upon the social interactions that occurred during the interviews. The mediating force of language had major consequences for the development of the evaluative skills being observed. It is possible to argue that the dialogue with the researcher also supported, and at the same time empowered, the children to achieve greater articulateness in identifying features for 'good' writing, of which they may have been aware, but hitherto had taken for granted. In Donaldson's (1978: 123) words, the language of the dialogue 'prised thought out of its primitive unconscious embeddedness' to a higher level of learning.

Given the opportunity in Year 1 to make judgements about their own work for the first time, the evaluations offered by the children at this level might be better described as 'proto-critical' judgements, that is, the text was not viewed by the child as autonomous, rather, the child was reacting to the visual and surface features and the experience or facts recorded (Newkirk, 1982: 452). However, not all comments could be described as 'proto-critical' judgements. We gain further insights when children substantiate their judgements with comments such as, *'I was thinking about it'*. *'This is the best one I've ever done'* and *'I like it, but I think this one's better than that [one]'*. These kinds of comments suggest a movement away

from a focus on external features and aesthetics to an awareness of the dialogue between the thinker and his or her written words. They indicate the ability to apply comparative judgements and a potentially Vygotskian connection between language and thought.

From the end of Year 3 and beyond there was obvious change in the articulation of criteria. As the children progressed through the middle and later levels there was a growing awareness of structure, order, focus and cohesion in their texts. Criteria changed accordingly. The one element that remained constant was the children's preference for control and ownership over their own writing.

Although our understanding of the complex relationship among teachers, students' writing and reading behaviour as well as developmental and environmental factors is still incomplete, it would be naive to believe that writing instruction and the teachers' values did not in some way influence the children's criteria.

Findings in this study suggest, however, that the children were engaged in a much more complex process than merely imitating or mimicking the teachers' values. They did not set out to anticipate the judgements of an authority figure for the purpose of second guessing a 'right' answer. It would be more accurate to suggest that they demonstrated the ability to internalise and apply teacherly criteria to a text in a meaningful way. Mimicry has connotations of copying to impress or satisfy the interrogator's curiosity. Evaluative statements the children introduced with expressions such as *'I was thinking...'* *'I put a lot of effort into this'*; *'I love this one'*, indicate that criteria were not given in a 'parrot-like' fashion, as Hilgers (1984) also found in his study of beginning writers.

At times the children completely rejected the teachers' judgements of their work. In Year 5, Matthew, a child with low ability, ranked last a piece of work that had been awarded a red star, a smiling face sticker and the teacher's written comments, *'Fantastic production! I love the illustration'*. The enthusiastic response failed to convince Matthew that this text should be ranked first. He ranked it last because the worksheet format for writing a book review did not involve the same kind of 'challenge' (his criterion) or thinking as in the composition of a letter, which he ranked first.

However, the teacher's influence on his or her students is not ignored. While the children in the study were aware of their own learning and progress as learners, at the same time they knew they needed the teacher's (adult's) assistance, as the following excerpts from interviews with the children illustrate, reinforcing John-Steiner's (1985: 118) argument that 'children are both taught and they teach themselves'. Patrycia, Year 6, comments:

*Sometimes it's me and sometimes it's the teacher.*

The genesis of some evaluative criteria can also be traced to exposure to literature and to how the teachers taught the various types of texts the children wrote. In their pre-school years the children gained from being read to by parents and others in the home. They had handled books and responded to pictures and to print. What began in the home and in pre-school continued in a more formal way in school. As they developed and matured in their understanding of written texts, so, too, did the children's critical language change. The teachers' direct questioning about characters, plots and themes and about the components of various texts contributed to the repertoire of criteria available to the children in their evaluations.



In Year 1, to focus on their own artefacts and texts and evaluate them was a new experience for them. With each succeeding year the children became more aware of criteria and of their ability to write, after they had made the transition from scribble and drawing to writing a text. They were positioned in a way that enabled them to draw from the knowledge they had internalised at some time during the teaching-learning process.

From the responses and spontaneous comments made, it is clear that both language and cognition played an important part in the children's choice of criteria. While the classroom environment provided conditions for learning that promoted an awareness of criteria, the judgments made were their own. However, there were varying degrees of fluency among the children when they attempted to justify their decisions. Fluency varied for individual children and, to some extent, appeared to be influenced by topic choice and the type of writing the child evaluated rather by inadequate language to talk about their texts. At Year 5 level, for example, fluent readers and writers (Joseph and Karen fall into this category) were less articulate than when they evaluated their work in the early years, indicating, perhaps, an awareness of the complexity of text organisation for different genres and the difficulty of deciding what elements contribute to a 'good' piece of writing.

The findings lead to several recommendations about the teaching of writing in the primary school. These recommendations will be discussed in Chapter 8.

The next chapter gives an account of how two of the 18 children developed as evaluators of their own writing

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Two Case Studies: Bruno and Tracey

*'Now I can do writing in a sivelised [sic] way'.*

Bruno, Year 6

#### 7.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on two case studies that give a detailed account of how two children of differing ability develop and change as evaluators of their own writing. In the preceding chapter, I provided a description of the multidimensional criteria for 'good' writing demonstrated by the 18 children when they ranked their work in order. The case studies in this chapter make possible a more fine-grained description of the adult-child interactions that occurred during the interviews and that elicited criteria. Occasionally, there is overlap between the accounts of evaluative statements and writing development, as it is difficult to separate the writer from the writing. Furthermore, the reader will find that evaluative statements mentioned in Chapter 6 are discussed in greater detail in this chapter to illustrate the children's development. Due consideration is given to external influences, for example, how writing was taught across the years. However, the main concern here is to find out at what stage Bruno and Tracey begin to internalise content, strategy and skill, elements that determine their ability for self-evaluation, and how such internalisation changes criteria.

My role in the classroom was to invite the children to talk about their writing and to expand this dialogue by encouraging the children to explain their criteria. For the purposes of the discussion, the chapter is organised in the following manner:

- A brief profile of each child
- An analysis of the responses the two children gave for ranking their work first and last. I do this in chronological order from Year 1 to Year 6 and in relation to the four categories discussed in Chapter 6
- Discussion of results and some conclusions

## **7.2 Rationale For Two Case Studies**

In their assessment of writing, teachers look at the written products. In this study I was able to listen to what the cohort of children had to say about their intentions to write as well as view the written products. I reserved my judgments about the quality of the writing they evaluated. What emerged for me from the study is the children's ability to reflect on the composing process, the difficulties they encountered when writing, what helped and what was a constraint for them. This kind of information, I believed, might have some bearing on the criteria they chose for ranking their work in order. I was able to identify the children as fluent or not so fluent writers, and also as reflective or apparently less reflective writers. There is a distribution of children across all these domains. In making assumptions about a reflective writer, I took into account the different genres in which the children engaged during the language period - narrative, poems, recounts, book reviews,

projects, reports and worksheets - and their ability to articulate their intentions and respond to my questions.

There were common traits among the children and every child was a possible case study choice. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I chose two children, both of whom were able to articulate their reflections upon their writing and comment on themselves as learners. One was a 'non-fluent' writer; the other was a 'fluent' writer. One was a boy and one was a girl. One came from a non-English speaking background; one was Anglo-Australian. One was quiet and sociable and the other was noisy and volatile.

The two children, Bruno and Tracey, were articulate. They were able to combine 'remembering and thinking' (Meek, 1991) to explain their development, although there were unfinished sentences, sudden changes of thought and irrelevant comments interspersed with the topics they discussed. They contributed to class discussions and gave responses derived from their own experiences and emotions. In individual writing conferences with them, they conversed about issues they believed affected the quality of their writing and their progress.

In Chapter 3, I discussed how very young children represent their ideas, playfully or with an intended message, in scribble, mock writing, strings of letters and isolated words as a 'way in' to composing a text. Hence, the terms non-fluent and fluent do not immediately apply to this experimental stage. Fluency developed when the children had acquired the necessary skills of handwriting and knowledge of letters and words, about mid-Year 1.

I refer to Bruno as a 'non-fluent' writer. As a beginning writer he lacked confidence and was dependent upon others for help. In developing a text, he seemed unable to cope with the demands of the writing process. Tracey, on the other hand, wrote fluently. She seemed to have easily acquired composing skills. She also attempted to solve her own writing problems by reading and re-reading her texts aloud or silently. Although she had had minimal writing experience, she identified her writing behaviour in Year 1 with an assessment of self: '*My veins are strong...*' This assessment suggests that she was probably aware of her ability to concentrate on whatever task she was assigned, including writing.

Bruno is younger than Tracey by six days. The two children commenced school in Prep. on the same day and completed their primary schooling at St Sophie's.

In the discussion that follows I refer to the texts composed and evaluated by Bruno and Tracey and the writers themselves discuss their writing. In order for the reader to get a fuller picture of the writers, and to better grasp the significance of their comments and evaluative statements, I have included samples of their drawing and writing from Prep., Years 1, 3 and 5. Bruno's writing samples are in Appendix 6 and Tracey's writing samples are in Appendix 7.

### **7.3 Profile: Bruno**

Bruno is the older of two children. The parents separated when he was in Year 1, and Bruno remained with his father, who is a chef in a suburban restaurant. The family's cultural background is East Timorese and Portuguese is spoken in the home. Bruno acts as interpreter to his father, who has difficulty in understanding the English language.

In the early years, Bruno liked to draw cars. He was knowledgeable about models of cars and their particular features, such as depicted on the Lamborghini he drew (Appendix 6A). He said this was 'good' work because *'it's got antennae and my dad showed me [how to draw it]. I never drew a car like that [before]'*.

Bruno often accompanied his father to the restaurant. He also followed his uncle's jazz band. The band was a source of great interest and pride, and sometimes provided him with a topic for his drawings and writing. Association with the band also accounted for his love of dancing.

'Violence' was another topic Bruno said he liked to write about and which he gave as a criterion for 'good' work. The political situation in his parents' homeland encouraged his father to talk to him of war tactics whenever these kinds of scenes appeared on television news. His uncle taught him the skills of boxing, and together they viewed videos on boxing. These adult interests did not detract from Bruno's gentle and caring nature. He behaved cooperatively at school and earned the respect of his peers and teachers.

Bruno enjoyed the social life of the classroom. Endowed with a pleasant manner and an engaging personality, it was not difficult for him to make friends. He established a close relationship with several boys, with whom he liked to work at writing-time, or who had similar interests in science experiments and sport.

Whenever I walked into the classroom Bruno always gave a friendly greeting and ensured there was a chair at the table for me. He was softly spoken. He also spoke rapidly as one thought led to another. Unfortunately, parts of interviews when he

spoke softly were inaudible and difficult to transcribe. Nevertheless, the criteria he offered and the explanations for choosing criteria were usually clear.

Bruno's brown eyes twinkled whenever he used hyperbole such as *'I've had millions of conferences'*, *'I'm brainstormed out'*, *'I've done all my ideas in Grade 1'*.

Comments such as these were offered as explanations (or excuses) for little progress in his writing. The disruption of changing rooms for the language periods in Years 3, 4 and 5 affected his behaviour as much as it did his progress in writing. (See Chapter 5 for an explanation of the language period). Furthermore, he was not able to organise the various subject books prescribed for use in Years 3-6, or to organise his time despite constant reminders from his teachers to take responsibility for his own actions. He described himself as having *'a long memory'* and commented that he could *'think backwards'*. However, this applied to recall of experiences rather than to teacher directives regarding the use of his books and the filing strategies for drafts and completed pieces of writing.

The language period was not always a productive time for Bruno. Nevertheless, he was aware of his performance and progress as a writer. In the following excerpt from an interview in Year 2, he gives a picture of the environment and extraneous things, which, he argues, are a deterrent to completing his writing:

*When I started it, I was at the other table. It was noisy. They talked a lot. I got stuck, plus Tracey. Me and Frank are the quietest. Tracey screams her head off, and I hate people calling me names. That's why I get stuck when I'm writing, and the teacher speaks, and Wade interrupts. I won't speak in Grade 3 - that's if Tracey's not there.*

It is, perhaps, worth noting here Bruno's attention to the importance of an enabling classroom environment in facilitating his ability to write. This factor will be considered again in the final chapter.

Although Tracey was 'there' in Year 3, she did not exercise any influence over Bruno's behaviour or progress, partly because of the way the Year 3 teacher structured the language period. The children's interests were also broadening and petty negative interactions disappeared.

In Year 6, Bruno recalled his time in primary school. In retrospect, Year 4 was an important time for him: *'Yeah. Year 4 ... That's when I learnt a lot of things. That was my best year'*. He gave reasons for this assessment: *'The teacher gave us heaps of ideas ... and heaps of time for writing ... She helped us with our work and she didn't make us change our stories ... and she let us continue our writing'*.

Bruno regarded Year 4 as his 'best year' although sport was banned as a topic for writing and collaboration with friends was discouraged. In previous years Bruno had derived pleasure and made slight progress writing about sport and working with a friend. His memories of Year 4 are of the help he received, the adequate time provided for writing and the fact that ownership of his writing was not taken from him. This again underscores the importance of a supportive classroom environment in the development of Bruno's writing. Other teachers had made an impact on Bruno in different ways, and I discuss these later in the chapter.



#### 7.4 Profile: Tracey

Tracey is the youngest of three children, whose parents are Australian born. Her family is a stable one. Her two older brothers were in secondary college when she commenced school in Prep.

My first encounter with Tracey was in Prep S. Prep S had four teachers during that year, in contrast to Prep C, Jane's grade (See Chapter 5: 5.3.1), where Bruno was situated. When one of the teachers requested me 'to talk to the children about writing', I preferred to read a story as an introduction. Tracey, a tall child for her age, was on the edge of the group that was seated on the carpet. Her fair hair, neatly tied in ponytail style, was made conspicuous by constant movement as she successfully distracted those around her.

In Year 1, I discovered there were many facets to Tracey's character. She was unpredictable, abrasive and blunt in her manner of speaking. She often hurt with her candid remarks. Nevertheless, the children were tolerant of her behaviour. Displays of anger or displeasure were often caused by the conflict between her own 'personal philosophy' about learning and classroom rules, and the imposition of directives by the teacher. Her name often echoed across the classroom, compounding an unhappy situation for her. Although it may not be evident in Bruno's comment (7.3), the children seemed to adopt the same attitude as the teacher, and judged Tracey's behaviour as always a deliberate ploy to annoy. Noisy interference, however, betrayed her interest in, and natural curiosity about, what her peers were doing.

Unlike Bruno, she did not enjoy the same popularity among her peers. Until Year 5 when she became friendly with two new girls who came to the school, she had only

one constant friend, Julia, a quietly-spoken child who seemed to complement some of Tracey's attributes. A strong and lasting friendship had begun in kindergarten. Tracey envied Patricia, whose outgoing and warm personality attracted many friends. During an interview in Year 4 she once said, *'I wonder how Patricia gets all these friends? It isn't fair'*. She continued in a monologue: *'There are always problems. At netball there are no problems...'* "Wash your face... Go over there... Put it away". She talked about Julia's parents who, according to Tracey, were *'soft with her ... I'd never be their sister. No way!'* She sighed: *'There are problems'*. She continued with her writing as though I were not present.

There were other traits to Tracey's character. She was aesthetically inclined and passionately fond of colour, particularly yellow. Her choice of colour as a criterion appeared to be given not as an objective feature for 'good' work, but as though it had some personal value for her. Bruno, who also chose 'colour' as a criterion for 'good' work, did so without the same enthusiasm and feeling as Tracey. To share her love for colour with younger children, she made a book of colours in Year 3 for the Prep. children. She also loved nature and referred to herself as *'a nature lover'*. Much of her early drawing and writing were about trees and brightly coloured flowers.

Tracey appeared to have no difficulty in learning to write. Such was the measure of her engrossment in her own work that she demanded my full attention during interviews. In Year 1 she chided me for not listening to what she was saying about her work: *'I'm waiting for you to stop writing'*. She wrote fluently and was prepared to make minimal changes to a text, presumably because the text had meaning for

her. She did not rely on peer help, although she liked to talk to her peers at writing-time. In Year 2 she told me she had learnt three things:

*I've learnt not to scream.*

*I've learnt how to write,*

*And not to ask for help.*

She also had the ability to assess her own work, as evidenced in Year 2 when she discovered in her writing folder a drawing she had made of herself in Prep. At the time she told me that it was 'good' work 'because I done "Dreamtim" [sic] well. I did six ponytails because that's how old I am, and all those colours'. She had obviously copied 'Dreamtime' from the chalkboard, omitting the final 'e'. In Year 2 she surveyed her drawing with a critical eye and noted there was no other writing or 'story' about the picture on the page. Without comment, she drew two columns and wrote 'Bad' for the heading in one column and 'Good' for the heading in the other and numbered the lines. Opposite number 1 and in the column for 'Bad' features, she wrote 'words'. In the column for 'Good' she wrote three features: 'Lo's fo PoNy tails (Lots of ponytails), 'Colur' (colour) and 'Nos' (nose). (Appendix 7A)

Although Tracey was placed in composite grades in Years 3 and 4, she never moved at language time from one room to another as did Bruno. Her class teacher was also her language teacher, whereas Bruno had two teachers - his class teacher and a language teacher. Tracey had the ability to manage her books and her time, and until Year 5 she made use of the class filing system.

By Year 6 she was one of a group of loyal friends. She had grown more tolerant of her peers. She had been socialised by the school system in that she had learnt to be more diplomatic and to be silent in whole class situations rather than express an opinion she knew would run counter to the teacher's point of view. The interviews I arranged for this study provided an environment for her active mind and forthright spirit. Bruno also gave evidence of an active mind and a forthright spirit although his delivery of words was milder and less articulate than Tracey. Like Bruno, Tracey never relinquished the belief that she was a 'good' writer.

In Year 6 she explained how talking helped her to write.

*.... I think in the back of my head. I'm thinking about the story. This one little word could trigger off an idea. You don't know. That's what happens to me.*

Perhaps her independent spirit, unbounded energy, her capacity to concentrate on whatever task she was assigned, even though she complained about tasks she did not approve of, and her love for and ability to write, account for the fact that she makes no specific comments about the classroom environment, as did Bruno. However, her behaviour indicated that the environment for writing was important, for she and Julia often withdrew to a relatively quiet corner to write.

In the next section, I discuss the development of Bruno and Tracey as evaluators of their own writing. I summarise each child's choice of criteria as coded in the four main categories discussed in Chapter 6.

## **7.5 Bruno: A Non-fluent Writer as Critical Evaluator**

### **7.5.1 Years 1 and 2**

When I first observed Bruno in Year 1, I noticed that at writing-time he was content to draw a picture, write his name and add a few random letters which had meaning for him, if not for the observer.

He was not concerned about whether his work was 'good' or 'not good', nor did he say he 'liked' his work. His focus was on the technical skills that enabled him to draw pictures of his favourite topics, which at this time were cars and aeroplanes. The physical set-up of the classroom was such that he could interact with his peers about his drawings and share knowledge of models of cars, particularly racing cars. When he drew vehicles, he concentrated on how he would position the vehicle on the page so that it would indicate the speed at which the car could travel.

Most of the writing in Year 1 was referred to as 'stories' and the children were free to choose their own topics, except for the television series *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, which the teacher forbade. Boys who were interested in the Turtles and objected to the directive tried to disguise their drawings by making changes to the character or including irrelevant details. Occasionally, the children were asked to write about a class project. Towards the end of Year 1 and again in Year 2, I had interviews with Bruno to enable him to review his work and then choose several pieces of 'good' work for the ranking task a few days later. The first interview facilitated the second interview. Chapter 4 gives an explanation for this procedure.

Bruno showed competence in separating 'good' work from 'not so good' work. For the rank ordering task I asked him to choose six pieces of his best work from the

smaller collection. I explained the process of ranking, that is, the 'best' piece first, and so on, but I did not demonstrate as in the Vygotskian tradition of demonstrating a skill to be learnt. My non-interventionist relationship with the children was to allow them to solve the problem of choosing their best work and arranging it without assistance. Bruno listened to my instructions and then proceeded to look carefully at each piece of work in turn. He chose to stand while doing this. Unlike the rest of the group, he had few pieces in his writing folder from which to choose.

During this part of the task he talked aloud, addressing himself about how he might rank his work: '*Oh, this...*' '*This picture is too big...*' '*This can go first...*' '*Not this one*'. He rearranged four times the six pieces he had chosen and then sat, looking at his work, which he had arranged in the order set out below:

**1. *A 'Teenage Mutant Turtle' Car***

(Self-chosen topic: drawing and one word, 'TURTLES')

**2. *The Chickens***

(Response to class project. Eight lines of coherent words, spaced and written with a mixture of upper and lower case letters. Five unfinished words were crossed out).

**3. *About Soccer***

(Narrative. Published in book form: Six pages - 16 lines)

**4. *A Man Building His Own House***

(Drawing & one row of random letters)

### 5. *Our Adventures in the Jungle*

(Response to class project. Drawing and one sentence)

### 6. *A Baby Sleeping*

(Language experience teacher directed task. Self-chosen picture cut from a magazine titled '*The Victorian Christening Doll*' and one sentence, '*This is a babe*' [sic])

As Bruno rank ordered his work, the movement of his eyes indicated this was not a mechanical act; there were some elements in his work that he valued more than others. He was able to give a criterion for the way he ranked each piece of work. When I asked why he had put the car first, he replied that it was the first time he had drawn a '*Turtle*' car. He explained how he made it '*to look like it's moving fast*'. He was obviously pleased with the result of his drawing. (Appendix 6B).

As the interview progressed, his eyes were riveted on his work and he made other changes to the order of the pieces ranked from second to fifth place. I realised then the difficulty the children would have in providing criteria for these places, and simply asked why he changed his pieces around. He gave significant criteria for surface features (Category 2): '*It's all smudgy*'; '*I've been using a lot of rubbing*'; '*There are mistakes*', '*This one is better than that one*' and '*I use a lot of black. I don't know why*'. '*Black*' was his only mention of colour as a criterion. The piece he ranked last was a two-page advertisement for a long christening robe with a baby doll as the model. He gave the following response for ranking it last:

*My 'cut and paste' has only got two pages in it so I made it last. The picture is too big.*

He had coloured-in around the picture and wrote a sentence on the robe rather than commence a new page for more writing. He was aware of the size of the picture in relation to the writing. As the picture took up the space of two pages, he may have thought that more writing was expected of him.

When he had sorted through his work in the earlier interview, Bruno chose criteria that focused on external features such as shape, size and colour, which are elements that related to his drawings. In the evaluation interview, he repeated these features, giving additional information about himself as a learner and the aesthetics of his work. He talked about the effects he had achieved with the tools he used, which were grey lead or coloured pastels.

Bruno seemed to pass over his attempts to write words phonetically. His earlier writing consisted of random letters and isolated words. By August he had written several lines giving a coherent account of a game of soccer. The criterion for this writing was how well he had illustrated the trophy presented to the winning team. However, he assessed his learning in this way:

*I know now how to write 'ball' and 'soccer'.*

*I didn't do this [a drawing of a car] very good like I used to.*

Bruno had completed very little written work in Year 1. He had the ability and confidence to draw well. At the same time he was struggling to understand the written word. He appeared to be trying to make connections between thought and content. He was puzzled by phenomena that also puzzle adult writers: *'I do a story and then I get another idea before I'm finished'*. This kind of comment partially



accounts for why he had a number of unfinished pieces of writing in his folder.

Preoccupation with the composing process remained with him and was a factor that contributed to the difficulty he had in writing fluently.

While he had made some progress with his writing, Bruno's concern is for things such as quiet, a requirement that the teacher emphasised. When he asked for 'help' it was usually to spell a word. He did not make use of the strategy of writing words phonetically as more fluent writers did. As he had a poor memory for the patterns of letters in words, even common words, he relied on his peers to spell words for him or a resource such as a picture dictionary. As he progressed through the grades he relied more on these practices, which often infringed on his actual writing time. On occasion he wrote words phonetically.

It was noticeable in Year 2 that Bruno gave less attention to drawing than in Year 1. The children enjoyed the same freedom to choose topics for their 'stories' as in Year 1 and no topic was forbidden. They wrote retells of literature, simple accounts of projects and science activities and recounts of sport events.

Bruno achieved a balance between drawing and writing. For the rank ordering task in Year 2 he chose six pieces of 'good' work from his folder. He stood while he reviewed his work and then ranked it, satisfied with this first attempt. Then he sat, looked along the row and reversed the position of the first and second pieces. He ranked his work as follows:

**1. *About Afro Band***

(Narrative. Self-chosen topic: drawing of the band's colours and five lines of writing)

**2. *My Uncle's Band***

(Drawing, no text)

**3. *The Simpsons Play the Sega***

(Recount of a television program. Published in book form: Five pages -7 sentences and illustrations - in collaboration with Lorenzo)

**4. *About Downball***

(Instructions on how to play downball. Five lines of writing)

**5. *Hairy Scary Mountain***

(Poster. Teacher assigned. Drawing and title. No writing)

**6. *Hairy Scary Mountain***

(Retell. Teacher-assigned. Six lines of writing)

As mentioned above, Bruno enjoyed a good relationship with his uncle and the members of the band and this was the main reason for ranking '*About Afro Band*' first. He was also pleased with the way he had drawn the instruments. When I asked about the last piece he did not reply. He studied the poster, changed it to second last and moved the retell into last place saying, '*Because it's not the best I can do*'. He then compared the retell of '*Hairy Scary Mountain*' with science experiments:

*Because, like, when I do experiments, I can do them good. I like experiments. That's why I say it's not my best work.*

However, there was no evidence in his folder of science experiments.

'Hairy Scary Mountain' is a grotesque kind of jingle with repetitive words. The teacher-assigned task required the children to retell the 'story' but to imagine the mountain to be a person. Given the difficulty of the task, Bruno's effort was commendable. He offered the following criterion for ranking it last:

*Um, 'cause it's not true, and I don't believe in 'Hairy Scary Mountain'.*

*The only thing I like about it is the tree-house.*

Implicit in his criterion is dissatisfaction with the topic and the genre. At this time he is aware of what helps him to write. Experiments, for example, provided him with concrete apparatus he could see and handle. Although he gives the impression that he is able to write about experiments more fluently, he is more articulate talking about what he had done than writing about it.

At the end of Year 2 Bruno was able to list the things he had learnt:

*You have to be quiet so you can jog your mind up. First, I didn't like the tables, like, the way we were sitting at them. We got a lot of time to write, but sometimes we didn't get a lot of time. I've had millions of conferences. I like when I work with Peter. We do science and nature [together].*

When he makes a first attempt to evaluate his Year 1 work, Bruno gives preference to surface features such as the appearance of a speeding car and the size of the picture. (Category 2). He does not mention surface features in Year 2. He also

chooses criteria on the basis of content (Category 1) in Year 1. He is able to articulate his likes and dislikes about content in Year 2 and distinguishes between fiction and fact.

#### *7.5.2 Years 3 and 4*

Bruno did not have the opportunity to inform his new teachers in Year 3 what he had learnt about writing or the difficulty he had dealing with more than one idea. However, the teachers had access to his school reports, which were filed in the office.

For writing in all areas of the curriculum, as encouraged in the school policy, the children were supplied with an A4 size journal for each separate subject. One of the journals was called a language journal, in which the children wrote minor teacher-directed writing tasks, spelling and grammar exercises. In another journal the children were permitted to write anything they liked and this journal was not available for the teacher's inspection. It seemed that this privileged journal had a dual aim: first, to act as an incentive to writing, and second, to contribute to a friendly environment. The children also had a writing folder as in Years 1 and 2, and they had access to single sheets of paper for drafts and for publishing their work.

The teachers had their own unique ways of building relationships at the beginning of the school year. They also introduced their own ideas about literacy and learning. Writing instruction and teacher expectations varied from year to year. None of the unfinished pieces of writing in Bruno's writing folder was studied as a way of finding out his strengths and weaknesses as a writer. The language teacher assumed he could write narrative ('stories'). She was anxious to build on the children's

enthusiasm for writing, and she did this in a variety of ways. However, the main focus for the year was on a range of genres she selected as important for the children to be able to write and that they could apply to excursions and other activities she had planned. Bruno was taught about diary and letter writing, retells of stories read in class, book reviews and reports. He also learnt simple research skills for project work.

In Year 3, as in previous years, I had interviews preliminary to the rank ordering task for the children to choose their 'good' work. My questions first focused on their understanding of the different genres the teacher had introduced in Year 3, as mentioned in Chapter 5. From his responses, I discovered that Bruno had only a vague idea of the purposes of the genres taught and he had difficulty in selecting language explaining to me the difference between a diary, journal, book review, letter, recount and 'story'.

For the rank ordering task, he preferred to stand at the table as he sorted through his pieces of work, which had changed very little in quantity and quality since the early years. In an undertone, he said, *'Diary will go last. This is the first [narrative]. Book report is boring. It's a bit hard. I didn't like it'*. He returned the book review and his journal to the writing folder. He then included me in this monologue saying, *'I like that one [Chicago Bulls]. I'm never going to change that because that's my best team. Never, ever, ever'*. He ranked five pieces of work in the following order:

1. *Chicago Bulls vs. Nicks*

(Recount. Published in book form. Nine pages - 12 sentences & illustrations - in collaboration with Simon)

**2 *GI Joes***

(Narrative based on a television program - not a recount. Published in book form. Ten pages - 19 sentences & illustrations - in collaboration with Simon & Josh)

**3. *Sovereign Hill***

(Class project. A letter to his father. Four sentences & illustration)

**4. *Atlanta Olympics.***

(A letter to an Olympic soccer player written with help from the teacher. Seven lines)

**5. *Sovereign Hill***

(Class project. One entry in a diary. Four sentences)

The work he ranked first was a recount of a basketball game ('*Chicago Bulls vs. Nicks*'), which he had published in the form of a book. (Appendix 6C). He had memorised portions of the television commentary and included the cheer song that he had composed. '*Chicago Bulls*' was his favourite team and this was one criterion for ranking the work first. He '*liked the cheer song*', and this was a second criterion. He explained why the story was his '*favourite*':

*I like the players - players, not just for the team. I like the way they play. They play excellent. Some Australian players don't play good because they don't know how to jump. The ones I saw, they don't know how to slam the ring.*

The focus of his criterion is content (Category 1). He is observant of the skills of the game and his knowledge of basketball tactics enables him to expand the written text by relating detailed comments. Mention of the cheer song, modelled on other cheer songs, is significant, as it is his own composition. He is pleased with his work.

He ranked the diary last:

*I didn't get on with it. I didn't write much ... It's about the olden days when it's a bit hard to think backwards. I liked doing it. It's better than the book report ... The book report is very different. You have to get the author, illustrator, is it true or false.*

Bruno has a sense of text and the purpose of writing. He is able to differentiate between the diary and the book report, which was a worksheet that required him to fill in information to a set of questions. He is able to articulate the difficulty he had in finding sufficient information by recalling and imagining incidents of the past that he never experienced. The writing was meant to convey information about how he had lived and worked as a miner at Sovereign Hill, a historic gold-mining town, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

When Bruno selected his best work, he returned unfinished pieces to his writing folder. At the time he commented, *'I'm going to have this writing folder next year, so maybe I'll go on with it and finish it'*. The unfinished writing was about basketball and soccer.

Bruno's Year 3 teacher was aware of the difficulty he had in writing. She helped him to develop an idea by writing a series of questions related to the topic. By answering the questions he was likely to produce a text. She also showed him how

to draw a flow chart indicating directions he could take in his writing. The teacher was intent on helping Bruno, and she wrote in his final report that he would 'benefit from reading a range of texts that are stimulating'. She also wrote that he found difficulty in selecting topics that were of interest to him. She solicited the help of Bruno's father to help in his writing development - an optimistic but unrealistic expectation, considering Bruno's home situation, as described in 7.3.

The teacher was anxious that every child in her class should be able to write the various genres she valued and had taught. Evidently, Bruno's attempts did not meet her expectations. The type of writing rather than the topic may have been problematic for him. However, she believed that, in the interests of the child's development in literacy, this information should be communicated to his parents with the intention that they assist him at home.

As revealed by his first preference in the rank ordering task and by the pieces he planned to finish in Year 4, sport was considered to be one area in which Bruno could write independently and with confidence, although most of his pieces of writing were recounts of games. Much of the talk among the boys during the language period revolved around sporting heroes and events and this kind of talk helped him to write. However, the Year 4 teacher believed the children had written too freely about sport in Year 3 and discouraged them from choosing sport as a topic. She also forbade writing about violence because of its negative overtones. The children were not permitted to draw as a form of rehearsal before starting to write. For the imposed ten minutes silent writing time at the beginning of the language period, the children were free to write narrative. Three weeks into the school year I wrote in my fieldnotes:



*The ten minutes' silent writing without any introduction appears to work for some children, but not for Bruno and others, although he has mentioned quiet as a condition that helps him to write. The social environment of exchanging ideas helps him to get started. He takes a long time to put pencil to paper. He whispered to me that he wants to write about used cars but doesn't know what to write. In this case drawing might have helped him to get started. He likes to collaborate with a peer, & probably he & Simon would work well together as they did in Y.3, but this is not permitted ... (Fieldnotes, Feb.16, 1993).*

The rules for writing appeared to be a control measure as well as a means for providing a framework within which the children produced their writing. They complied with the rules as, as expected in all classrooms. However, there was also resistance, implicit in their behaviour, as they tried to adjust, yet again, to an environment different from that of the previous grade. While the children's opportunities to develop competence in writing may have been restricted, the rules did not deter them from writing.

As the teacher gained in confidence with regard to teaching writing, some rules were relaxed. For example, there were occasions when Bruno was permitted to work with Simon. Together they discussed ideas and resolved problems about arranging the information in the text. Simon usually wrote the text while Bruno was satisfied to propose the ideas. He believed he was contributing to the story in this way and that Simon was able to express ideas clearly in writing. How far collaboration contributed to Bruno's actual writing is difficult to ascertain.

Later in the year, the boys resolved the sport issue themselves (as they did the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* in Year 1) by approaching it from an angle different

from when in Year 3 and the early years. They gave titles such as *Ants Against Spiders in Football!* and *Life With a Rich Soccer Player*. Although he preferred to write narrative, Bruno did not choose to write about sport again until in Year 5. Report writing and an interest in machinery provided him with topics.

The teacher assumed the children understood how to write different genres because they had been taught in Year 3. To broaden their horizons about topic choice, she gave interesting writing activities that had a specific purpose. The activities involved everyone writing the same genre, for example, a job application for a classroom duty, the formation of a club, autobiography of Brer Rabbit, bookmarks, letters of apology to a teacher or a child for misbehaviour, and book reviews. In Year 4, Bruno attended to the writing tasks at his own pace. As mentioned in Chapter 5: 5.3.3, in Year 4 the teacher concentrated on report writing in preparation for secondary school. However, the reports were confined to describing a series of animals, chosen by the teacher, which the children had observed on an excursion to the Melbourne Zoo. They were expected to write more than one draft before the final copy of a report.

When the time came for the rank ordering task at the end of Year 4, Bruno was disorganised and needed direction to find pieces of 'good' work. He stood as usual and looked through his writing folder and the language journal in which he had written the four reports about animals: the fairy penguin, cassowary, echidna and platypus. He said a few words aloud: *'Um, how about ... Information goes in. These animals ... Like, how do you find the ones you don't want'*. By this he meant that all the reports were 'good' and it was hard to choose the best one. He said he had put some drafts in the classroom files but someone had taken them. The teacher

provided a filing system to ensure that drafts, written on single sheets of paper, were not lost. Bruno had taken home to show his father the published story he and Simon had worked on together. Finally, he located four pieces of work, which he ranked in order:

**1. *My Aeroplane Book***

(Report. Published in book form. Five pages - 8 sentences & illustrations)

**2. *The Fairy Penguin***

(Report. Four sentences)

**3. *About Basketball***

('Poem' - rhyming couplets - four lines.)

**4. *Used Cars***

(Report. Unfinished second draft. Five sentences)

The report on aeroplanes and the couplets that Bruno called a 'poem' were teacher-directed tasks. He ranked the texts quickly and then sat looking from one piece to the other. The aeroplane report derived from the teacher's suggestion to 'write about a piece of machinery that helps the world'. The criterion he provided for ranking it first related to family experiences when his grandmother travelled to East Timor to visit relatives. He liked aeroplanes '*because they help everyone to travel from one place to another*'. He did not mention that he had typed the information on the computer. He focused on the information he had found in the library

(Category 1) rather than on the presentation of the book, which he had published' himself (Category 2).

The piece about *Used Cars* was not finished, yet he chose it as 'good' work because of his interest in cars. He explained why he had ranked it last:

*It's last because I got started, you know, and then I stopped because I didn't have any more ideas.*

Implicit in his criterion is an awareness that more information is needed to complete the text. He was interested in cars and had written this piece without interaction with his teacher or a peer. Bruno appeared to be confused at times about classroom instructions regarding self-chosen topics. Hence, there was a tendency to choose a topic of interest to him, but one that was difficult for him to write about without help and guidance. He gives no indication of any plans, which might have helped him find the information he needed.

For the choices he made about 'good' work, Bruno continued to be influenced by the content of the writing. He was prepared to continue the dialogue with me about his grandmother and East Timor, content that he had not recorded in the text.

At the end of the discussion about the ranking of his work, I asked him which piece had his 'best thinking'. (An explanation for asking questions about 'best thinking' and 'hardest thinking' is given in Chapter 4: 4.3.1). Without hesitation and with finality in his voice he replied, '*This one*' and pointed to the report on aeroplanes. He gave reasons for this decision:

*I wasn't doing it just to write it all down. I still had ideas about it and I was thinking about it.*

He is pleased with the effort he made to find appropriate information and record it in writing (Category 4). He is aware that thinking about this topic (composing) made greater demands on him than other writing tasks (Category 4). He also liked this kind of topic and felt confident in finding the information.

For the piece that had the 'hardest thinking', he made two choices. For the aeroplane piece he ranked first and the fairy penguin report he ranked second he had to think seriously about the content, which was the best he could compose. The aeroplane report required him to find information, read it and translate it into his own words in the form of a report. The animal report was less arduous to complete as it was a response to the excursion to the zoo and the teacher had provided questions about four animals that required specific answers.

In Years 3 and 4 Bruno's criteria followed the same pattern and focused on 'ideas' and 'information' (Category 1). Surface features (Category 2) disappeared after Year 2. Criteria about effort in composing begin to emerge (Category 4). He seemed to understand the purpose of writing, but he was unable to make connections about the text that could be coded in Category 3 (grammatical elements).

Despite the adjustment Bruno had to make each year to the different expectations and values of the teachers, he was consistent in maintaining that he 'liked writing', and this appeared to be a genuine claim. However, the teacher wrote in Bruno's Year 4 report to his father that he 'needed encouragement to write...' and that 'he

must remember to include basic details when drafting his writing...' At the end of Year 3, Bruno was able to state explicitly what gave him 'encouragement to write':

*It's a long story and I like 'GI Joes' ... I did it with my best friends ... I don't like doing it by myself. That's why I don't get finished ... When you do it with people - like, it's easier working with people. When you work with people you can do something ...*

The strategy of collaboration that Bruno liked because it helped him to clarify his ideas was denied him in Year 4.

I had observed how dependent Bruno was on working with Simon and Josh. He was confident about contributing ideas and colouring-in the illustrations in a published story. I wondered about his progress as a writer. Hence, midway through Year 3, I had an interview with him, when he reviewed his pieces of 'good' work produced in Prep., Years 1 and 2. This was a separate task from the rank ordering task. At first, the observations he made about his own progress focused on external or surface features (Category 2). He noted decreasing use of colour in his drawings, commented that the shape of the cars had changed and mentioned his progress from drawing stick figures to figures with movement and features. He associated colour with drawing ('No drawing, no colour'). Although he did not mention the fact, by Year 2 he had made the transition from drawing to writing. He noted that he knew 'how to spell words'. He was satisfied with the content (Category 1) of his writing. He 'liked' the topic and 'liked the writing' about Brer Rabbit. This was a teacher-assigned retell of the story. Self-chosen topics had changed from cars to factual information about football.

Although he was able to talk about the content of his work (Category 1), Bruno depended upon prompts from me to focus on his writing. He looked at it, but he was non-committal except to say he knew how to spell more words (Category 2). Where writing was minimal, as in Year 1, or unfinished, he commented he *'didn't have enough ideas or enough time'*. Implicit in his explanations at this time are criteria that indicate he has the ability to reflect on himself as a writer and on the composing process (Category 4).

By the time he reached Year 5 Bruno had made some progress in writing texts. He stated facts concisely about the topic, but he was unable to develop an idea. When he commented that he had *'no more ideas'*, he inferred that he did not know how to deal with the constraints of composing. He was articulate when talking about the factual content of his work, but he was unable to make the same connections when he wrote about personal experiences. The need for *'time'* to write and *'quiet'* were conditions he said helped him, although the imposed ten minutes' silent writing time was rarely a productive time for him as far as actually writing on the page was concerned.

### 7.5.3 Years 5 and 6

At all year levels, the social context of the classroom provided an environment that promoted learning. By Year 5, however, Bruno was more dependent on others than his peers were. It seemed difficult for him to coordinate the information he rehearsed in his mind with the scribing of it. However, he had developed in that he was articulate about affective criteria. He was also perceptive of teachers' values

and how they often did not align with children's values. This point is discussed later in this section.

When Simon left the school in Year 5, Bruno worked with Jason as a collaborative peer. They worked on the first draft of a text about an adventure in the woods. However, this partnership soon dissolved, as Jason preferred to write about his own ideas and to work alone. Bruno was thrust into the position of having to work independently as this was the way the children preferred to work in Year 5. However, this did not prevent them from contributing information or giving advice to one another when seated at their tables.

About six weeks after the children returned to school, I repeated the rank ordering of the Year 4 work Bruno had evaluated in the previous December. (See Chapter 4: 4.3.3, for the rationale for the decision to have the children repeat the rank ordering task). The children made no changes to the ranking of their work or in their choice of criteria. However, they were more articulate about the criteria they had chosen in that they explained a criterion without my questioning them about it. As I was interested in the outcome of Bruno's unfinished piece about used cars, I pursued the topic with him. He expanded a little on the criterion he gave in December by saying that his work had taken '*a long time to do*' and that he was '*proud of it*' (Category 4). He made no further comment about the content of the piece.

The reflections Bruno offered while deliberating on his Year 4 pieces of writing provide some insight into his efforts to reconcile teachers' values with his own. His comments suggest that he was trying to make connections about what he liked about writing and what he thought teachers liked about children's writing. For example,



he explained that *'teachers are different ... Some teachers don't like sport. Some teachers do'*. It *'depended'*, he said, on the teachers' likes and dislikes how they judged writing. He suggested that *'if you [the children] put everything down, and they [the teachers] like that piece of writing, maybe they [will] learn more about writing or something they don't know!'* It was this disparity between his thinking and his perceptions of the teachers' values that created problems for him. He may have been making reference to topic choices. Writing about sport was permitted in Year 3, but not in Year 4.

Although he was aware of his dependence on others (for example Peter in Year 2, Simon and Josh in the middle years, and Jason in Year 5) and had difficulty in completing tasks, Bruno never seemed to lose confidence in himself as a writer. I wrote in my fieldnotes:

*Bruno's writing ability is hard to assess. It does not match his ability to vocalise about his writing & about himself as a writer. He is unable to complete writing tasks. Although he complains about having no time, he socialises a lot with the other boys who continue to write while commenting on sporting events & are able to complete their work at the same time. Bruno is unable to combine the two. It seems he has to withdraw from the inner struggle of trying to make connections with his thoughts and written language. Talking about extraneous things might be helping him, although it is difficult to know in what way. I wonder if the confidence he displays is really a cover-up for self-knowledge of his inability to write fluently? ... (Fieldnotes, June 6, 1994).*

Early in Year 5 the main focus appeared to be on book reviews and projects. The children wrote narrative when they had completed teacher-assigned tasks and with

minimal instruction. As described in Chapter 5, the teacher attempted to extend the children's horizons for writing by introducing a class newspaper and compulsory writing of forms other than narrative. For the rank ordering task at the end of the year, Bruno had three pieces of 'good' work: a poem and drafts of two pieces of narrative. In his folder he had several unfinished drafts of work that he did not intend finishing. His reasons relate to the content of the pieces (*'I had no ideas for it anymore'*) (Category 1). He also seemed aware of the complexity of the composing process (*'I stopped at one place and then I went to another story'*) (Category 4). He had lost interest in some topics (*'I just got bored of them'*). He ranked the three pieces in the following order:

**1. *'Boss of the Pool'***

(Poem. 27 lines in collaboration with his teacher)

**2. *My Speed Box***

(Narrative. Six sentences)

**3. *The Adventure in the Woods***

(Narrative. Seven sentences)

Bruno ranked first his poem (Appendix 6D), offering sophisticated comments. He spoke about what had motivated the poem, discussed his satisfaction in having composed it and reflected on his response to the story, *Boss of the Pool*. (See also Chapter 6:6.1):

*It gets to your heart. It gets to your heart a lot. Yeah, it's a feeling kind of thing. Like, when I writ [sic] this, the ideas were in me. I like to do it. I wanted to do it.*

This explanation contrasts with the more pragmatic criteria he offered for putting the draft of an unfinished adventure story last. His appraisal of his poem combines cognition and feeling. Criteria given on previous occasions were often prefaced by '*I like it*' because of the content or other features. Feelings of sympathy is a criterion he has not mentioned before. His concern is for the human condition, as illustrated in his poem. In Year 4, when the teacher forbade the children to write about violence, she did not discuss with them her reasons for the directive. She was not aware of Bruno's feeling for the people suffering in East Timor, his parents' native country, and did not consider that writing could perhaps be a way for Bruno to deal with his emotions. When he was in Year 5, though, with his teacher's help (she acted as a scribe) Bruno was able to express feelings in his poem. It deals with the emotions brought on when he read the prescribed novel, '*Boss of the Pool*'.

A criterion he gave for ranking last the first draft (unfinished) of the adventure story referred to his not having printed his work on the computer. He was interested in the presentation of his work (Category 2). He then acknowledged that this was the piece he had started to write with Jason at the beginning of the year. He explained that Jason had '*lost all the information - everything!*' He had '*depended on Jason*', he said, to work with him. He tried to rewrite the adventure story unaided, but without success. After accounting for the practical setbacks that had sabotaged his story, Bruno concludes with the blunt assessment:

... It went on and on and on. ... I put it last because [pause] I got sick of it  
after a while.

In Year 5 Bruno was explicit about his difficulties in completing his work. He complained about the difficulty of having little time for personal writing and time 'to get things done'. He refers to the difficulty of getting started and of finishing a piece of writing in a specified time.

Although he was in a single grade in Year 6, where the children did not change classrooms, Bruno had to adjust to a rigid timetable, deadlines for writing tasks, and infrequent positive interactions with the teacher about his writing. In Years 5 and 6 the children were constantly urged to take 'responsibility' for their learning. This instruction seemed to apply to completing set tasks and to time management. Responsibility did not extend to the organisation of worksheets, finished pieces of writing, projects and journals for writing across the curriculum. The filing system set in place in the previous years, and indispensable when teaching the process approach to writing, was used spasmodically after Year 4. Thus, before Bruno was able to select pieces of 'good' work, he had to spend considerable time searching through subject journals, writing folders and his red plastic bucket in which he stored all his belongings when in the classroom.

In the letter to a hypothetical Year 7 English teacher that I assigned as a written evaluation task in Year 6 (see Chapter 4:4.3), Bruno's comments about his progress were more positive than when in Year 5. He related how he used to draw in Year 1 but now he knew 'a different way of writing'. He wrote in his letter, 'Now I can do writing in a sivelised [sic] way'. He did not elaborate on what he meant by 'sivelised' writing. He added, 'I say to myself how much I have learnt in past years'.

He wrote with confidence and made no mention of the difficulties he experienced in writing. He gave the impression that teachers liked to hear what children could do, rather than their difficulties. Bruno, as one who is aware of the difficulties experienced in writing, seems to think that he has to resolve the difficulties without the teacher's help. If this impression is correct, Bruno's comments to the Year 7 teacher link with the comments he made when he reviewed his Year 4 work, mentioned earlier in this section.

The unfinished drafts in his writing folder did not present a collection of great achievement. For a class assignment in Year 6 he wrote and published one story, unaided, for the Prep. children. He considered it to be a 'good' story because he had written it himself and for a known audience. In addition, Bruno could identify concepts about writing, which he attempted to apply. He clung to the notion that he had '*heaps of ideas*', although the ideas were slow to materialise except when he worked with a peer. In a small group conference with three peers, he gave further insight as to why he had made little progress:

*... and sometimes you've got an idea in your head and you can't just put it on a piece of paper. It always happens to me. Writing for me - I can't write a story. This pen - I know I can't do it...*

This was the first time he admitted he was unable to write a story. It would be interesting (and useful) to know what Bruno intended to say when he began with '*This pen*', although '*I know I can't do it*' does give a clue. In fact, this is not quite the case. He was dissatisfied with the short texts he had written. The syntactic requirements of written language (Category 3) were the main stumbling block for Bruno. There was a discrepancy between his competence in speaking and his ability

to write fluently. He was proficient in the spontaneous processes of speech, but the skills required for the abstract, formal activity of writing were slow to develop. He had the will to write. He experienced achievement when he worked with a peer in whom he put implicit trust. His strength lay in spoken language.

Despite his inability to complete most of his work, he differentiates between the value of worksheets and personal writing:

*The worksheet is a task ... and you get your sheet and you have to work it out. But with writing, it just comes out of your own brain. And you just keep on writing whatever you want.*

Although he had difficulty in 'writing whatever you want', his explanation indicates a higher level of thinking than that suggested by his written work. He assessed worksheets in the following terms: '*Some were easy and some were hard*'. He thought the hard worksheets were '*a challenge*' and so he '*did them*'. He claimed he had learnt about the use of punctuation from the worksheets and acknowledged that he could not remember when to use punctuation in his writing (Category 3).

In sum, Bruno demonstrated the ability to provide criteria for his 'good' work at every year level. The most frequent criterion he applied was content (Category 1). Evaluations of surface features (Category 2) declined and disappeared by the time he was in Year 3 and emerged only once in Year 5 in relation to computer skills. Although he was aware of the difficulty he had in writing narrative, he was unable to articulate criteria about weaknesses in semantic and syntactic elements (Category 3) in his texts. He provided insights about his ability to reflect on himself as a writer and his understanding of the composing process (Category 4). Classroom

observations of his behaviour during the language period did not provide the insights gained from my interactions with him in the conference setting, which was adjacent to the noisy classroom. In these situations he was able to articulate criteria that gave indication of his ability to evaluate his own work. By Year 6 he had developed sufficiently to comment on his inability to translate thought ('...*You've got an idea in your head...*') into written language ('...*you can't just put it on a piece of paper*').

It is evident that when Bruno judges himself to be a 'good' writer, he is not influenced by surface features or quantity, either by the length of his writing or the number of products in his writing folder and journals. He is not unduly enthusiastic about published work. He reflects more on the vagaries of the mind (Category 4). At the same time he is convinced that he is a 'good' writer, but not every piece of writing is 'good' writing.

In the section that follows, I discuss how Tracey went about evaluating her writing.

## **7.6 Tracey: A Fluent Writer as Critical Evaluator**

### **7.6.1 Years 1 and 2**

When Tracey began to write, her work was similar to the kind of beginning writing Bruno produced except that her handwriting was large and bold. She drew pictures and patterns and coloured them in and then wrote a few letters in isolation anywhere on the page.

Although she was an assertive and noisy child, as Bruno had noted, this disruptive behaviour did not impede her learning, and she made rapid progress in writing.

When she commented in Year 1, '*I'm going to be really busy*' or '*I have a lot of*

work to do', she obviously enjoyed writing and thinking about topics, as the following unsolicited comment indicates:

*If you want, you can let me write about cats, dogs, etcetera, etcetera. Or lions ... My veins are very strong...*

At interviews, she often pre-empted my questions. As well as providing more illuminating information than my questions might have anticipated, Tracey made me aware of children's perceptions and the need to avoid creating a routine that would encourage predictable answers.

As described in 7.4, Tracey chose several pieces of 'good' work from the products she had collected during the year. Narrative, as mentioned in Bruno's profile, was the dominant genre in Year 1, together with simple project work. For the first rank ordering task in Year 1, her behaviour was similar to that of Bruno. She listened to my instructions and proceeded to carry them out without demonstration on my part. As she sorted through her work she talked aloud to herself saying, *'I can't really pick. They're all good'*. She chose one piece: *'This can go first. I think it's a good story. There are more colours than the other ones'*. Before she had finished the ranking she addressed me: *'Excuse me, Sister Kath, I changed my mind. I like the cake, but [she continued with the ranking] ... then the jungle story, but if the cake turns up - That can stay. So can this stay'*.

In the process of ranking her work, she was obviously thinking of a piece of writing-in-progress about *Father Christmas*. She interrupted her soliloquy again, saying, *'Can I join on "At night-time Father Christmas came"?'* She continued to rearrange the order several times before she was satisfied with her final decision



**1. *About a Cake***

(Narrative. One sentence in very large print & illustration at the end)

**2. *The Little and Big Easter Eggs***

(Narrative. Published in book form. Four pages - three sentences & illustrations)

**3. *About a Family***

(Narrative. A picture cut from a magazine & one sentence)

**4. *Our Adventures in the Jungle***

(Class project. Three sentences & drawing)

**5. *My Cat***

(Narrative. Four sentences & drawing to illustrate the text)

**6. *The Day I Found 20 Cents***

(Narrative. A large drawing & two sentences about finding a 20-cent coin)

**7. *The Chickens***

(Class project. Teacher assigned. One sentence & drawing to illustrate the text)

In the process of rank ordering, Tracey changed her mind about the order of two pieces of writing. Initially she had ranked first *The Day I Found 20 Cents*. The criteria she offered focused on the content (Category 1) and surface features (Category 2). She thought it was '*a good story*'. She had drawn a large picture of

the family lounge room where she had found the coin. The writing did not provide information other than that she had found a coin. She explained the details as depicted in the picture, then added:

*There are more colours [in this one] than in the other ones. This might be in every single thing - colours. And I like finding money and I like the things on them.*

Although she was satisfied with her work, Tracey wanted to make a change. As the task proceeded, and before discussing the last ranking, she moved *About a Cake* (Appendix 7B) to first place, saying: *'I've changed my mind. It was a good day ... Because I like the picture. I like this'*. She looked at it carefully: *'I'm going to be very busy. I want to do something to it - the size of the words. Look how big giant they are'!* She counted the lines. *'That took up six spaces [lines]'*. She reflected: *'I'm happy with the drawing. That was in the days when I was little'* (Category 4). A day when she was satisfied with her writing seemed to constitute a *'good day'*.

The criteria indicate that she was developing rapidly as a writer and that cognitive skills were at work. The task was not merely a mechanical action, but one that brought into play thought processes (*'I've changed my mind'*). Without any explanation she made the transition from drawing content to writing about it. She wrote first and then drew a picture related to the drawing. While she drew attention to the unusual size of her letters (upper and lower case) in her writing, she did not offer handwriting as a criterion (Category 2).

Tracey ranked last the teacher-assigned topic about the life cycle of a chicken, a class project which Bruno had ranked second. She had written one sentence and

coloured that part of the paper in purple, which made it difficult to read the writing. She offered the following unclear criteria for ranking it last:

*I hadn't really started ... They're gone. I just don't want to - I've got other work to do. I want to publish. I want to make a puzzle book.*

She added, '*Can I get on with it?*' meaning, '*Can I go now?*' The interview ended abruptly as she stood and walked to her place in the classroom. She left me with the impression that she was dissatisfied with having to write about a project that was now a thing of the past (the teacher had given this writing assignment several weeks after the project had finished), and that she was becoming more involved with her own compositions ('*Can I get on with it?*'). She was also aware that she had given insufficient information about the chickens (Category 1).

At the end of Year 1, Tracey showed signs of developing as a competent and articulate writer. Since the writing of the story early in the year, her handwriting had changed, with the unusual size of her letters (upper and lower case) being replaced by letters of conventional size. She does not offer handwriting as a criterion but as an observation of her own development ('*That was in the days when I was little*'). Of her own volition she decided to revise the size of the letters in her earlier piece, '*About a Cake*'. However, this good intention did not come to fruition.

In Year 2 Tracey enjoyed the freedom of putting her own ideas into writing narrative. As a result she had produced a number of pieces of 'good' work, which she kept in her writing folder. For the purposes of the rank ordering task she needed to make a selection of her best work. While engaged in this task she asked of herself the question: '*What happens if you like the drawing and not the writing?*' She

selected six pieces of work, but before she began to rank them in order she asked if she could read her work again saying, '*I forget what I've written*'. In the process of reading, she made comments about the texts '*I've made a terrible mistake. Can I have your pen*'. She inserted an apostrophe 's' to the word 'rabbit'. She continued reading the text aloud: '*Oh no! Full stop*'. She inserted a full stop. '*Yeah, yeah. One of my favourites - "Brer Rabbit" - one of my favourites*' (Category 1). She explained, '*I forget what I've written so I have to read through again*'. She took my pen, added facial features to a drawing, continued reading, and completed an unfinished sentence and added 'The End'. Evidently she realised the story was not yet complete as she said aloud and then wrote, '*and it was there*'.

Tracey stood to arrange her work in the following order:

**1. *Brer Rabbit***

(Retell. Teacher-assigned. 10 sentences & no illustrations)

**2. *My friend, Juha, in a Garden***

(Narrative. Seven sentences & illustrations)

**3. *Earthworms***

(Class project: first task. 12 sentences & illustration)

**4. *Flowers***

(Narrative. Published as a mobile. Four sentences)

**5. *Earthworms***

(Class project: second task. Illustrations)

## 6. About My Teacher

(Narrative. Eight sentences)

When she had finished, she sat and reviewed the order saying: *'I loved the project [Earthworms]. It's the first I've done one like that. Cross this one out. That's how I want it'*. She reversed the order of the pieces in fourth and sixth places, *'Now it's exactly right'*. She had observed that I had written the original order and as she changed the order, she reminded me to make the same change in my recording.

Despite the fact that she liked the project, she did not rank it first. She offered the following criterion for ranking first the retell:

*Why [did I put it first]? Because I like the story, and as I said before, in my mind, I said, "I don't think so", and when I read it, I saw that it was better. It's imagination.*

The type of writing (a teacher-assigned retell of a story) did not influence her decision to rank this work first. Rather, it was the content (Category 1). She had enjoyed the story and was pleased with her attempts to recall the events. She had added incidents not in the original story, and she was pleased with her efforts. At the same time she distinguishes between a fiction story and an account of personal experience. Tracey was not prepared to judge a story that she had written several months previously with a cursory glance. She took the initiative to re-read it and then made the decision about the quality of the story. Although she does not reveal

her criteria for comparing one text with another, she gives insight into how her thinking enables her to make decisions about her work.

For ranking last the text published as a mobile, she gave the following criterion and pre-empted a likely question from me:

*Because I don't really like it. It hasn't got much detail, and if you're going to ask me what 'detail' is, it's more information.*

In Years 1 and 2, I had never questioned about 'detail'. Already she had demonstrated that she had expectations of me and that I would want an explanation of the criteria. Then, without invitation and by way of explaining 'detail', Tracey compared the two pieces of writing ranked first and last:

*That's [first] got the most information I've done. It's got three pages and a big picture. This - [last] I like the drawings a little bit, but I hardly like the writing. I don't know why I invented it...*

'Invented' is a way of explaining that the topic about her teacher was ill-chosen, as she was unable to produce a piece of writing that met with her (Tracey's) approval. It seems that her focus is also on conventions (Category 2) when she mentions 'three pages and a big picture'. However, it also seems that when she compared the two pieces of writing, these criteria refer to content (Category 1) because of the information she was able to produce ('three pages') and depict in a way other than by writing ('a big picture'). She explained her composing strategies in this way:

*If it's urgent, I write first. If it's any old thing, I draw first.*

She gives no indication of how she differentiates between 'urgent' and 'any old thing'. However, 'urgent' seems to mean when she sets herself a goal to achieve something, such as developing an idea in narrative form, while 'any old thing' is aimless kind of writing. The major criterion Tracey applies in Year 2 is recognition of the importance of information (Category 1).

Early in the year when she talked about 'colour', she predicted that 'This might be in every single one - colours', meaning evaluative statements about her work would mention colour. However, when in Year 2 the time came to evaluate her work, she did not mention external features such as colour as a criterion for 'good' work. She gives an explanation:

*... I'm very happy [with my work] 'cause I know what I'm doing and I know why I'm doing it ... What tells me? Because I'm growing up. Now I know more about what I'm doing - growing up and doing more writing. More time on writing. More time on books. Yep! I know the questions I can ask myself.*

She is aware of the composing process and of herself as a writer/learner (Category 4). She has the ability to focus on and explain what she has observed in her own development. She expects that as she grows older, so, too, will her writing change.

Tracey initiated her own evaluative comments as though they were a normal part of learning. This is an indication of cognitive skills that enable her to observe the changes in her writing development that have come about since early Year 1. She is now aware of the composing process and that the strings of letters she once wrote are not composition writing. Her thinking has moved from a level where surface features such as handwriting, colouring-in and learning how to spell the words she

wanted to write (Category 2) are paramount to a level associated with the composing process (Category 4). She has the ability to make connections about issues, such as information, that she has heard in writing conferences as illustrated in the comment, *'I know the questions to ask myself'*. *'More time on books'* refers to publishing her own texts in book form, a task she is now prepared to do without assistance. The nature of the questions she asks herself raises legitimate curiosity among adults about the 'roots' of the questions.

#### 7.6.2 Years 3 and 4

Tracey was in a more structured environment in Years 3 and 4 than in the early years. She had the opportunity to continue writing narrative although the emphasis was on a range of genres, as mentioned in the preceding section. She had an enthusiastic and informed teacher in Year 3 who was able to extend her thinking by the questions she asked. Tracey's narrative pieces were longer and she talked about writing 'chapters'. Nevertheless, she also had to conform to a new set of classroom rules. While Bruno did not seem to resent rules, Tracey resented structure, such as having to raise her hand to give an answer, only to be disappointed many times as the teacher rarely acknowledged her attempts to respond to her questions. The general trend in the classrooms in Years 3 and 4 was exposure to various kinds of writing. When teacher-assigned tasks related to a particular genre were completed, the children continued with their personal writing, which was usually in narrative form.

In the interview prior to the rank ordering task, I wondered how well the children understood the purpose of the different genres that had been taught, since their



preference for writing remained with narrative. Although Tracey's judgments in Years 1 and 2 signalled that she was beginning to understand the purposes for various types of writing, she appeared to be less knowledgeable than Bruno when questioned about genres that had been taught explicitly in Year 3 and frequently I had to reframe questions to clarify my intentions.

When I asked what kind of writing had she been doing, she replied, *'Now, what are we on about?'* I explained that the teacher had taught different 'forms' or 'types' of writing, and that some of these forms were in her writing folder. She understood 'forms of writing' to mean handwriting and replied, *'handwriting form, type writing form or computer form, and there's something about joins'*. She added *'normal writing, big letters, any kind'*. I realised that my question was ambiguous and concentrated on one genre at a time. I reframed my questions. For example, I said, *'I notice you have been writing in a diary about Sovereign Hill. Tell me about it'*. She replied, *'Diary? Oh, I love that! It's my loveliest book. Can I read it?'* She described the different genres associated with the Sovereign Hill project as *'old writing'*, meaning writing that referred to past events. When I asked her to explain the difference between a diary and a letter, she was not as explicit as Bruno. However, I was able to draw from her verbose explanations that she knew the purpose for each genre that had been taught.

Before she selected the pieces of writing for the rank ordering task in Year 3, she asked if I had *'about five minutes'* after we had finished as she wanted to *'fix up a new story because the plot of the story doesn't tell us anything ... "Plot" [she explained] is when you recommend it, like in a book report. You don't recommend this [her story about Goldicinder]'*. It was evident from the dialogue that followed

she was confused about the meaning of 'plot'. 'Plot' and 'recommend' were two terms that appeared on worksheets, for example, 'What is the plot of the story?' 'Whom would you recommend this book for?'

Tracey chose seven pieces of 'good' work. She sat to rank them in order and made no comments aloud as she had done in Years 1 and 2. When she had finished she commented, '*That didn't take long!*' and then reviewed the order again without making any change. She arranged her work in the following order:

**1. *Cindy Finds Her Sister, Goldicinder, in the Snow***

(Narrative. Published in book form. Four pages, A4 lined paper & no illustrations)

**2. *Colours***

(Narrative. Published in book form. Seven pages - seven sentences & illustrations)

**3. *Sovereign Hill***

(Diary. Five entries, 3-4 sentences for each entry)

**4. *Goldicinder***

(Narrative. Published in book form. Five 'chapters', six A4 lined pages & no illustrations)

**5. *Sovereign Hill***

(A letter to her mother. Four sentences & illustration)

**6. *Wombat Stew***

(Book review. Responses to seven questions represented by one word to two sentences)

### 7. Dreamtime

(Aboriginal myth. Published in the form of a snake. Three sentences)

Tracey offered several and overlapping criteria for ranking the narrative (Appendix 7C), first:

*It's a new story, and it really sounds better than 'Goldicinder'. It doesn't have 'and thens' and it's got just enough for a good story.*

Her notion of 'a good story' is one that doesn't have 'and thens' and one that has 'just enough' (Category 3). Although the teacher discouraged the use of 'and then', most of the children continued to use 'and then' to join simple sentences. I asked what other connectives she used, to which she replied:

*I go on writing. I stop, read it over and I say, 'Yep! that's good'. I go with the flow.*

Tracey's story, *Cindy Finds Her Sister, Goldicinder, in the Snow*, is an imaginative one that follows on from *Goldicinder*, which she ranked fourth. Tracey shows evidence of drawing on literary models derived from her reading (*Goldilocks* and *Cinderella*). She also draws from explicit writing instruction about suitable joining words (Category 3).

In response to the question why she had ranked the Aboriginal project last, she replied,

*Yukky writing. Quick stuff. It's just something we had to do. It doesn't catch me. I wasn't much proud of it.*

The Aboriginal project involved the children in composing a myth and writing it on paper shaped like a snake (Category 2). Tracey appears to lose zest for writing if a topic (Category 1) does not appeal to her. Hence, she does not invest much effort in the writing. She acknowledges this and is critical of her work (Category 4), signalling that the writing experience had been unsatisfying.

I noticed that she made no reference to colour as a criterion, although she wanted to include the book *Colours* which she had collected earlier from the Prep. room (mentioned in 7.4). She ranked it second because it was 'shorter' than *Cindy Finds Her Sister, Goldicinder, in the Snow*. The book, which she said she had 'donated to the Preps' was nicely presented with an inscription on the inside cover (the teacher's formatting) that read:

Dedicated

especially to

the children in

Prep. J.

Tracey no longer valued colour as a criterion for 'good' writing. However, she wanted to communicate to the Prep. children the love for colour she enjoyed by writing about it.

As mentioned earlier, the focus in Year 4 was on report writing. The banned topics (sport and violence) did not concern Tracey as her interest lay in imaginative topics and personal experiences. She showed competence in organising her journals and writing folders (daily and completed work). Hence, in Year 4, I omitted the conference prior to the rank ordering task that I had given in the previous grades to allow the children to sort through their work for 'good' pieces of writing. For this task I asked Tracey to choose four or six pieces of work she thought were 'good' work. During the selection process, she found in her folder a piece of Year 2 writing about a cat. She asked to read it aloud, arguing that *'It's nice to read things that you've done when you're younger because you get to know what you can do ... You notice the difference between Year 2 and Year 4 [work]'*. The Year 2 work was not eligible for the ranking task, which was restricted to Year 4 writing. Of greater interest is the perspective she now takes of her development as a writer when she compares her Year 2 work with Year 4 work. She still values the reading of the text, but for reasons different from when she read her work in Year 2 during the process of ranking it. She intimates that she enjoys reading her earlier work and is able to observe change over a period of two years.

Tracey chose six pieces. She stood to arrange them as demonstrated in the order below, working quickly and in silence:

**1. My Zoo Report on Animals**

(Report. Published in book form. Five pages. Five to six sentences for each of four animals & illustrations)

**2. Spiders**

(Class project. Published in book form. Seven pages: Contents page - Introduction - Nine sentences - Conclusion; & illustrations)

### **3. *Miss Orange Juice***

(Narrative. Published in book form. Two A4 pages, typed text & illustrations)

### **4. *Ducks***

(Report. Six pages: Contents page - Nine sentences - Conclusion; no illustrations)

### **5. *A Butterfly***

(Narrative. First draft)

### **6. *Horse-Riding at Merimbula***

(Narrative. Published as a miniature book. Six pages: seven sentences & illustrations)

Then she sat and signalled to me that she was ready for the next step, which was to talk about the ranking: *'Right! My first one'*.

The piece she ranked first was a report on the anteater. Like Bruno, she had written six reports on the same animals observed at the zoo. In response to my question for ranking the report first, Tracey replied:

*I like the way it is presented at the front, and I like the pictures. The pictures I really love.*

As it was unusual for her not to comment on the text, I probed further. She appeared to be surprised:

*Oh! The writing? I thought, 'Oh! Like, if I read just three sentences... Like, the information I found is good. I put it into my own words and it sounds like I've [her emphasis] done it. I've been to a park and I've seen these animals. Yeah. Do you like it?*

She was pleased with the presentation of her work and with her drawing, which was an accurate representation of the anteater (Category 2). She hoped for a similar reaction from me, (*'Do you like it?'*) indicating, perhaps, that she assumed the evaluation task was a shared one. She was also satisfied with the accuracy of the information she had recorded in response to questions the teacher provided to help the children write descriptive reports on the animals (Category 1).

The piece ranked last was an account of an event that happened during the summer holidays. At the teacher's instruction, each child wrote the recount and published it in the form of a miniature book. Tracey gave her book the title, *Horse-Riding at Merimbula*. She gave the following reason for ranking it last:

*Well, see, it hasn't got too much [information]. Well, it's got a little bit of detail, but I don't think it's my really best work, but the thing is I had to think about it. Yes, I had to think about it a lot because when I was writing it and doing these things at the beginning of the year, or last year, or whatever, I had to really think back to what I did and what I didn't do.*

As the story is about happenings in the more distant past, it is understandable that she had difficulty in recalling the events. Her criteria contrast with the criteria she gave in Year 3 for the last ranking. In Year 3 she was not interested in the topic and described her work as *'yukky writing. Quick stuff'*. In Year 4 she is dissatisfied with her writing and evaluates it as not her *'best work'*. The dominant feature is an

awareness of her own cognitive processes. She tried to recall, with difficulty, factual information and to write in sequential order.

Since Year 2 Tracey had made rapid progress in the development of writing and in her ability to evaluate her writing. Her main criterion was content (Category 1). When she found a piece of her Year 2 work in her Year 4 folder, as mentioned above, she read it silently and then laughed. She was able to make an assessment of her progress (Category 4) by comparing this Year 2 piece of writing with the Year 4 pieces she had chosen to rank. She made the following comment:

*It's [the Year 2 work] a bit babyish. In Year 4 you write longer stories and different ones. Two years later you don't feel comfortable publishing it 'cause it doesn't make sense, but I don't really want to change it [the Year 2 work] because I'd like to keep it like this.*

Embedded in her assessment are evaluative criteria applicable to all four categories. Her comments indicate she is capable of giving an accurate account of her development as a writer. She observes how her writing has changed (Category 4). She also knows that if she revises her Year 2 work it would no longer be categorised as early writing, which she says '*doesn't make sense*' (Category 3). She realises she has a wider range of experiences from which to choose content (Category 1) and a greater command of language (Category 3) and some understanding of the composing process (Category 4). Tracey's evaluation throws some light on the comment, '*it doesn't make sense*'. When she refers to her Year 2 work with the comment, '*you don't feel comfortable publishing it*', the reason appears to relate to her dissatisfaction with surface features (handwriting, spelling and presentation) rather than syntactic elements for '*making sense*' (Category 3).



As the time drew near for promotion to Year 5, Tracey wrote fluently. Although she was fluent and used sophisticated language, it was difficult at times to know the intended meaning. In fact, I wondered if she were trying to impress with her use of language and her assertive manner. However, the interactions with her provided insights that would have been impossible to capture if she had been less articulate.

### 7.6.3 Years 5 and 6

The focus in the Year 5 language period was on literature, presented in the form of reading, discussion and book reviews. The children also continued to write narrative, but without specific guidance in the structure of narrative or in grammatical conventions.

As noted earlier, there was no filing system specifically set up in Years 5 and 6 whereby the children could file their finished work. A 'good' piece of writing might be in any one of the journals or worksheets they kept in their plastic buckets. Tracey showed more aptitude than Bruno for finding four to six pieces of 'good' work for the rank ordering task in Year 5. As she looked for pieces of 'good' work, she made comments or started a sentence without finishing it: *'Oh! There's not much in this ... Oh! Hang on. I just want to see if ... Before we do anything else I ... This one's good. I did it myself'*. She finally selected three pieces, which she arranged in the following order:

#### 1. *The Mini News!!!*

(Narrative. A booklet containing 16 sheets of A8 paper with handwritten texts & illustrations - pictures cut from magazines)

## 2. *The Day I Witnessed a Miracle*

(Narrative. One page A4 size paper. No illustrations)

## 3. *In the Yard*

(Poem of four sentences, each one written in a different colour)

*The Mini News!!!* is a small booklet that Tracey had put together herself. She had cut out pictures from current newspapers and magazines. On the page opposite each picture Tracey had written a short unedited text to suit the picture. The title, *The Mini News!!!*, appeared at the top of the first page. She offered the following comments for ranking the newspaper first:

*Well, they're all my writing. They're not [book] reviews or retells. I chose this because I did it at home. I brought it to school and I let everyone look at it. People thought it was pretty good. I didn't get them from anywhere and I actually enjoyed doing it, so it's a good thing.*

Criteria focused on herself as a writer and her awareness of the reader (Category 4). In previous years Tracey's criteria included 'information' and 'details'. Although she had selected a variety of pictures, such as the Melbourne Cup, a closing down sale of jewellery, recipes and a description of a new car 'on the road', she was unwilling to choose one page as the best page. The fact that she had composed the texts and presented them in her own way carried more weight than teacher-assigned book reviews and retells of stories. A self-selected topic was thus ranked higher in this instance.

At first, Tracey had little to offer by way of criterion or comment for ranking her poem, *In the Yard* (Appendix 7D) last:

*That's just a little poem I did myself.*

She was unable to elaborate on this comment. However, after some prompting from me, she made the observation that in writing a poem 'you put words in different places. There are places for different words' (Category 3). I observed she was not as articulate as on previous occasions. There was no mention of criteria such as 'information', 'detail', or why she had used different colours to write each sentence. The poem seemed to have been written in reflective mode and so, I did not probe any further about it.

Several weeks before the rank ordering task, the teachers who were responsible for the teaching of language in Years 5 and 6 were concerned that the children had completed few pieces of writing. As they were accountable for their students' achievements, they organised writing instruction so that every child entered into a 'contract' to complete at least one piece of writing, as explained in Chapter 4. The children were divided into four groups. Bruno and Tracey were in different groups with different teachers. The poem that Bruno ranked first and the one mentioned above that Tracey ranked last were outcomes of this compulsory writing.

I asked Tracey about the compulsory task, to which she replied:

*It wasn't too hard. I had a good piece, and then the teacher told us to do something else, but I decided to do whatever I had planned because the teacher was away and we didn't get to planning. So, I reckon I did it how, you know, it would be just okay ... The teacher talked about*

*presenting good headings, but this didn't help me, but it was good enough to know. This poetry piece, um ... I didn't really need a heading, if you know what I mean. It was good to know what she told us to do ... It took me a little while, like, to think exactly what I was gonna do. I did three drafts. I suppose I said to myself, "Well, um, should I write this way?" I wrote a little bit more. I said, "No. I shouldn't have that-- it doesn't sound right, and I'd just be going round and round in circles". So, [pause] finally, I got this piece and I like it.*

Tracey's criteria for ranking specific pieces of work first and last give indication that she is preoccupied with the skills employed in creating a mini newspaper and for composing a poem. She grapples with the need to use appropriate language for particular texts, '*Well, um, should I write this way?*' (Category 3) and also shows some knowledge of how words should be used, '*... There are places for different words*' (Category 3). Tracey also confronts the 'messiness' of the composing process and shows considerable self-awareness - '*... it doesn't sound right and I'd just be going round and round in circles*' (Category 4), a difficulty that faces even experienced writers. Tracey is proud of the newspaper and '*let everyone look at it*'. She is aware of the audience (Category 4) and actively seeks their response, '*I brought it to school and let everyone look at it*'. She is pleased that '*people thought it was pretty good*'. Tracey politely rejects the teacher's emphasis on presentation (Category 2), as not relevant to her poem. How she planned her pieces of writing and the workings of the composing process are more important to her.

The paucity of completed pieces of writing in Year 5 is due mainly to the kind of writing instruction the children experienced in that year. However, this did not influence how Tracey assessed herself as a writer. She explained that her writing was '*actually getting better by the year*', that is, '*... in imagination. As I grow*

*older, I imagine more things*'. She had the ability to see connections between her thinking and language, and to demonstrate this in her writing.

In her letter she told the hypothetical Year 7 English teacher that she was '*a good writer*' because she had '*a good imagination*' and she could '*get her message across to the reader*'. She also wrote of her dislike for teacher-imposed topics for writing, and noted that her '*best work*' was a poem she had written in Year 5 and completed on her own. In fact, this poem, *In the Yard*, was a compulsory piece of writing, which she had ranked last in Year 5. Evidently, it appears that ranking this piece last did not necessarily mean that Tracey was not pleased with her work or that it was 'not good' work. When she wrote the letter to the Year 7 teacher, she did not have her Year 5 work with her in order to make an assessment of her work. She has memories of having written a poem that required effort (Category 4). She wrote it without help and the result gave her much pleasure and satisfaction.

The classroom environment changed dramatically in Year 6, with 40 children occupying an extended classroom and two teachers for the language period. An explanation of how the teachers managed is given in Chapter 5.

Despite her positive attitude to learning and ability to organise her books and papers, Tracey was unable to find any completed pieces of personal writing in Year 6. She located a few pieces of assigned writing tasks, such as a description of the school concert. She gave reasons similar to Bruno for the reduced number of completed pieces:

- There was not enough time for writing

- Too many things were happening in the classroom
- Silent writing didn't help her to write
- Writing was less enjoyable when the teacher assigned the topic
- Commands such as 'Hurry up and get finished' caused frustration

However, while the majority of children indicated they did not derive benefit from worksheets, (as discussed in Chapter 6), Tracey was tolerant of them on occasion, as revealed in the following evaluation:

*I thought worksheets haven't been bad. They're pretty good, but some of them were annoying because you can't get it right. Once you get it, it's easy, but sometimes you can't and it's really hard. You don't like to copy anyone because you won't know for yourself. I really dislike things on the worksheet I can't manage.*

In the final interview I had with her in Year 6, Tracey gave reasons for not having completed any of her personal writing (narrative). At the same time she gave an honest appraisal of the Year 6 language period:

*... I must admit I've been a bit lazy, but the only thing is we haven't had time and because there are so many people in the room. The teachers don't get the time to go around to everyone, but, um, the one thing when [the teacher] comes around to me and I ask her can she help me, she helps me, but she says things I don't want her to say. Like, she says, "Can you change it this way? I think this way would be better", but I don't want it to be 'this way'. I want help but she doesn't give the right answers for me. I don't know if that happens to anyone else ... Even my*

*friends can help me ... She doesn't not [Tracey's emphasis] help you. I would say [she doesn't] help you enough ...*

Tracey's comment is illuminating for it gives insight to the quality of interaction with regard to writing that took place in her classroom. She is aware of environmental factors with which the teacher had to contend (*'so many people in the room ... teachers don't get time to go around to everyone'*), and she makes allowance for these factors. She is also aware of the teacher's role to instruct in writing and she acknowledges this role, but with reservations. The teacher's method of helping (*'Can you change it this way?'*) conflicts with the ideas Tracey struggles to clarify. She acknowledges some help given by her teacher but she does not want to make the suggested changes. The help that is offered does not resolve Tracey's problems with the construction of the text and implies lack of awareness on the part of the teacher. How to provide the developing writer with just the right amount and kind of guidance without taking away ownership of the writing is a complex teaching skill. Recommendations in this regard are made in Chapter 8.

### **7.7 Discussion and Conclusion**

By the end of Year 6, there was tangible evidence to suggest that Bruno and Tracey had the ability to apply a range of critical evaluations to their writing. They demonstrated this ability at a very early age in Year 1 when they verbalised simple criteria to explain their preferences for pieces of 'good' work. As their ability to write developed, they were more articulate in providing criteria and making explanations about their preferences. Although Bruno and Tracey did not participate in a rank ordering task in Year 6, data elicited from other tasks and interviews supported the earlier evidence of the children's ability to give an appraisal of their development as writers and learners.

Both children chose criteria for ranking their work first and last that could be coded in the four categories. I discuss the criteria briefly in the remainder of this section.

### **Category 1: Content Elements**

The most important criterion for Bruno and Tracey was content. In Years 1 and 2 content revolved around their own world of personal experiences, which they depicted in drawing and writing. As their world expanded with age, cognitive development and wider experiences in Years 3-6, so, too, the type of content changed. Thus, criteria changed as they offered more explicit evaluations for more complex texts than the simple sentences they wrote in Year 1. Bruno and Tracey were aware of the purpose of writing, to convey a message to the reader - self or other audiences. Although they had internalised terms such as 'detail', 'plot', 'go with the flow' and offered them as comments, it is not clear at what level these terms were fully understood. The nature of a topic they liked, either self-chosen or teacher-assigned, was significant in the development of their writing and in their choice of criteria. This issue is discussed further in the final chapter.

### **Category 2: Surface Features**

In Years 1 and 2, surface features were chosen by both children as criteria. However, these features disappeared as criteria in Year 3, except on rare occasions in Years 3-5 when they were pleased with the presentation of their work. They may have internalised surface features sufficiently to be able to take them for granted. As their criteria indicate, content was important and they had to concentrate on more complex language in the middle years than in the early years.



### Category 3: Grammatical Elements

At the time of transition to Year 3, Bruno and Tracey had surmounted the initial problems of learning to write and they were developing an awareness of linguistic elements in texts. However, this category was the least mentioned among Tracey's criteria, and even less so in Bruno's evaluations. They had some idea of lexical elements as demonstrated in comments such as *It doesn't have "and thens"*. They were concerned with meaning in their texts, and their comments '*It makes / doesn't make sense*' showed this. Responses indicate that the children were endeavouring to make connections about the structure and the language for the range of different texts they were expected to write in Years 3 and 4. Ability to fluently read literature suited to their age level also contributed to a growing awareness of the structure of texts. Nevertheless, from Years 3-6, they were largely unable to specifically identify linguistic elements as criteria. One reason that may account for this apparent difficulty is that the children were given minimal explicit instruction in the structuring of various types of texts and in grammatical conventions. There seemed to be an assumption that the children could write narrative because they liked writing 'stories'. While the teachers concentrated on teaching various genres (other than narrative) it seems they were not sufficiently explicit in helping the children understand them. The problem appears to be how and when to give this kind of instruction.

### Category 4: Self-Reflexive Elements

Once Bruno and Tracey no longer used drawing to express their ideas and relied on written language, they believed they were 'good' writers. Their comments demonstrate their ability to reflect on their writing and on themselves as writers and

learners and to articulate coherent responses. For this category they offer contrasting insights about their development and ability to write, which identify them as unique individuals.

In Year 2 Tracey's understanding of writing was beginning to develop when she stated, *'I understand what I'm doing now ... I know what questions I can ask myself'*. The comment suggests that she gained some control and understanding of her own composing processes from an early age.

Bruno's comments provide insights of a different kind, which are nevertheless as important as Tracey's comments. He is not as single-minded and independent as Tracey. He reflects on the ideas that seem to overwhelm him as he tries to write. This is confirmed in Year 6 when he admits that he *'can't put an idea on a piece of paper'*. This is not quite the case, as he can write longer passages on topics of interest to him. He knows composing is a different cognitive activity from the mental activity involved in worksheets. He is not able to apply strategies learnt in Year 3, such as using a flow chart, which would help him explore one idea at a time. Thus, writing remains a struggle for him.

### **How Criteria Developed and Changed**

The two children's writing development progressed in the same environment and with the same instructions during the language period. Clearly, variables such as background and position in the family, personality, understanding of writing, command of language and interactions with the teacher made each child unique, and within the social environment of the classroom, external influences contributed to the kind of criteria the children selected for 'good' work. For example, the way the

teachers presented literature, the strategies they used to encourage writing and the books the children read suggest that literature provided them with a useful model from which they could draw on when writing narrative. For other forms of writing the teachers attempted to give explicit directions. Thus, it could be said that the teachers' classroom strategies influenced the children's criteria. However, for each child, the interaction of the personal and the contextual remains a matter of speculation.

At all levels there were constraints for the children and for the teachers. In Years 3, 4 and 5 Bruno was disadvantaged because of movement from one room to another for the language period and his tendency to socialise at changeover time. He was dependent on peers to get started and achieved a minimum of work in the period. Tracey, on the other hand, did not have to contend with interruption to her writing. Despite these factors, the regularity of writing instruction gave Bruno and Tracey opportunities to write and to develop as writers. Once Tracey understood what she was doing in Year 2, she wrote more fluently and at length. Bruno, on the other hand, was slow to make the connections that Tracey seemed to find easy. Bruno was dependent upon another person to help scribe his ideas, whereas Tracey had no such need, although she liked to discuss her own writing with Julia. Hence, the approximate time when content, strategies and skills were internalised varied for the two different writers, as did development in their choice of criteria.

Although teaching instruction influenced criteria, there were factors about the children's ability and values that the teachers were not aware of and that also were influential with regard to the criteria used when commenting on their writing. Bruno and Tracey seemed to take for granted that change in one's learning is normal.

Bruno said he was '*growing up*' and had '*different ideas*'. He '*got around more and more*' and he '*understood things*'. Tracey was articulate about the problems she encountered in her writing. She was aware that as she '*grew older*' she '*imagined more things*'. She believed her imagination was the centre of the workings that brought about change in her writing and in her vision of the world. When they reviewed earlier work in Year 2 and again in Year 6, the children recognised how they had developed from producing '*babyish*' and undecipherable writing to the conventional style of written language, which Bruno calls '*sivilised [sic] writing*'.

At the same time maturational processes, ('neural ripening' as discussed in Chapter 2: 2.2.2), events of which they and the teachers were not specifically aware, were happening in the children's lives with regard to language and cognitive development and to their composing and evaluation skills. Vygotsky's theory of learning leads development provides tentative answers to questions related to the capacity of the children to internalise criteria and to their ability for self-evaluation.

In Chapter 2: 2.4, I considered Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development as one way of viewing the usefulness of self-evaluation. When applied to the two children's capacity for self-evaluation, their actual developmental level was apparent in the drawings and writing they had produced themselves and that had not been assessed by the teacher. In practice, it is likely that the teachers would have made comments about 'big handwriting' and unfinished texts. They would have assessed the work as 'good' or 'not good enough' without explaining the reasons for this assessment. The children's behaviour and comments about how they should rank their 'good' work in order, independently of adult guidance, gave an indication that the task posed a problem for them. This was more noticeable in

the early and middle years. Although the children's cognitive and linguistic abilities had developed in Years 5 and 6, classroom writing instruction had changed little since Years 3 and 4. This observation does not imply that the teachers in Years 5 and 6 neglected writing instruction. The children performed numerous writing tasks but without explicit instruction about the elements of a text. Hence, it seems, they drew mainly from their own resources and understanding of the composing processes to make evaluative statements about their writing in Years 5 and 6.

The interactions I had with the children when I invited them to explain their decisions regarding the ranking process required them to study their texts with greater intent than in the actual writing of them. They had the opportunity to reflect on the content and to identify specific skills they had used to produce these texts. They had to explain their reasons for 'liking' or 'not liking' their work. The richness of the dialogue demonstrates that this is what they actually did. Prompts from me to further elaborate challenged their thought processes and, perhaps, assisted the transition from their actual performance of writing a text to a level that tapped into potential for 'deeper' reflection about their own performance as writers. The self-evaluation tasks can thus be thought of as instances of Vygotsky's notion of learning in 'the zone of proximal development'. In the process of seriously evaluating their own drawings and writing, they also made discoveries about themselves as writers. At this level of awareness they demonstrated ability to articulate criteria for the acceptance or rejection of their own work.

The case studies yielded valuable insights about the children's learning and development that external tests to discover children's ability to write would have failed to elicit. The children demonstrated their ability to understand and apply

criteria for 'good' and 'not so good' writing and to evaluate themselves as writers. Bruno, in particular, provides insights that explain why he was unable to write at the same level as Tracey, and the struggle he had to record his ideas into cohesive written language. Importantly, the children were also articulate about constraints that impeded their progress as writers. The data thus contains important messages for teachers about learning and about their learners. There is truth in the children's perceptions, albeit expressed in simplistic language, that maybe the teachers '*[will] learn more about writing or something they don't know! ...*' (Bruno, Year 4), that is, if they listen and know how to interact with their students. '*I want help, but she [the teacher] doesn't give the right answers for me ... She doesn't not help you. I would say [she doesn't] help you enough*' (Tracey, Year 6).

The account of the two case study children in this chapter supports the theory that 'children are both taught and they teach themselves' (John-Steiner, 1985:118). However, the case studies reveal that there are complex factors that preclude observing the precise time when this happens to every child. What can be stated unequivocally is that teacher-student interactions are a vital key to a better understanding of learning and of the ability inherent in children to evaluate their own work. In the final chapter I make recommendations that I consider will help to bridge the gap between teachers and learners.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Some Rewards in the Search for Understanding

*Maybe when the teachers call, "Come on. Do your writing", they forget you have to think and try to remember. They forget that in your mind you try to put it together ... When they say, "Come on. Do your writing", they don't understand you're writing in your mind. I'm thinking in my mind. I write and then I just go back [into my mind] and then I keep on writing'.*

Joseph, Year 6

#### 8.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1 of this thesis I explained the genesis of my search for greater understanding of children's ability to evaluate their own writing. Julia's comment introducing that chapter sounded a warning, suggesting that a potential gulf existed between children's own views of the quality of their work and their understanding of their teachers' overriding - and seemingly mysterious - judgements and preferences.

As I 'looked in' on classrooms and talked with teachers, it was clear that teachers' attitudes to writing and assessment were influenced by a number of factors: personal uncertainties about language, assessment and evaluation; uncertainties about how to optimise learning for children from different backgrounds; pressures to manage a crowded curriculum; to be responsible to parents; to gain more 'professional' knowledge about teaching writing and, finally, to accommodate an educational culture that placed new emphasis on literacy outcomes as measured by national standardised testing. . The teachers' concern for their students' achievements and

progress in writing was unquestionable. At the same time I observed that the assessment techniques they used gave them information mainly about the surface features of children's writing. It did not inform them about students' thinking processes and why they write the way they do.

For the purposes of the study I attempted to clarify 'assessment' and 'evaluation', terms that are frequently used interchangeably by educators. I resisted narrow definitions of these terms, where evaluation of writing, for example, focuses on the final product without accounting for the process and the complexities of all that goes into being a writer and reader. As a guide to investigating the merits of self-evaluation, I used Wheeler's (1967) definition, which acknowledged the importance of the qualitative judgments made by the writer as part of the criteria that might help define 'good' writing. Elbow's (1993) insistence that self-evaluation was an important component in education reinforced the position Wheeler had taken in defining evaluation.

It seemed to me that extrinsic reward systems, a common classroom practice for acknowledging 'good' work, overlooked children's own capacities to make judgements. When children showed appreciation for, or rejection of their drawings and writing, they were demonstrating cognitive skills that enabled them to draw on a value system of their own, skills that were generally overlooked as having little or no bearing on learning. I wondered about the value system that was clearly operating in children's minds. I wondered about the intrinsic rewards that self-evaluation of writing might offer, and at what age in primary school children might be able to articulate criteria for the work they appreciate ('like'), or reject ('don't like'). How were the children's own criteria for evaluating their writing formed? Did their criteria change over time? If so, what factors influenced change? And did self-



evaluation of writing contribute to a larger debate about the uses of assessment in schools?

The insights gained from major research studies of children's language and learning development (Vygotsky, 1962; Donaldson, 1978; Gardner, 1985; Bruner, 1986) helped me to structure a theoretical framework in which I might explore these questions. Perera's (1984) work on children's writing, based on the early work of Halliday (1975), helped me clarify the criteria produced by the children, and assisted in the analysis of the data.

In particular, Vygotsky's work (1962) and his theory of learning leads development and the notion of the 'zone of proximal development' offered both logical and visionary thinking about children's learning. The scholarly interpretations of his work made by Wertsch, (1985b; 1990), Brown and Reeve (1989), Rogoff (1990) and Newman and Holzman (1993) helped shape the search for possible answers to the questions raised in Chapter 1.

In the first section of Chapter 3, my review of recent research studies on writing helped inform my understanding of the development of writing in the early and middle years as well as clarifying aspects of the composing process that are a concern for the more developed writer in the later years of primary school. I considered different writing pedagogies and the problems that have emerged from two competing approaches: the process-conference approach and the genre approach. Although not regarded as a theory, I included the 'whole language' approach in the discussion, promoted in the United States in recent years to counter political movements that foster large-scale testing of language as a means to measure both standards of literacy and the accountability of the teaching profession.

In the second section of the chapter I reviewed studies of self-evaluation of writing, discussing several alternative strategies for assessing writing in the classroom that were congruent with the approaches to writing discussed in the first section. The range of strategies indicates the concern teachers had to establish fair and comprehensive writing assessment processes, while rejecting the limitations of standardised testing.

Chapter 4 described the usefulness of ethnographic approaches in classroom research and of the participant observer role, which enabled me to collect data about the classrooms, the language period, the nature of writing instruction, and the children themselves. I gave an account of my relationship with the teachers and with the 18 children who participated in the study from Year 1 through to Year 6. My investigation progressed through a series of stages: once I had access to the classrooms I was able to begin collecting data. The main data were generated in the course of a series of rank ordering activities with the children where drawings and written texts that had not been assessed by the teachers or examined by me beforehand were judged by their child authors. In an informal interview setting, the children's criteria were elicited through dialogue with me and their own 'thinking aloud' as they deliberated about their writing. At intervals in the course of the study I reviewed the children's comments, creating, revising, sometimes abandoning, tentative categories into which the children's responses could be organised and classified. The rank ordering tasks elicited a range of criteria and, for the purposes of the analysis, data were finally coded in four main categories shaped by the linguistic studies of Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Perera (1984) and discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

I needed to place the investigation in context and in Chapter 5, I gave a description of the school, the classrooms, the teachers' professional backgrounds, particularly regarding their preferred writing pedagogy, the process-conference approach, how they assessed writing and how they organised the language period.

Chapter 6 described and analysed the criteria the 18 children offered for first and last ranking of their selected Years 1 to 5 work and in their Year 6 task. The work chosen as 'good' work included teacher-assigned topics and genres and self-chosen topics. The significance of the children's judgements is discussed below.

Using a case study methodology, I observed more closely two children and how each developed and changed as a critical evaluator of their own work. Chapter 7 provides a profile of the two very different children, describing in greater detail how they ranked their work at each year level, the criteria they offered, their linguistic and cognitive development and their interactions with me during interviews and conversations.

## **8.2 What Does the Study Tell Us about Self-evaluation?**

This study does not attempt to apply external judgements about how 'good' or 'bad' the children's drawings and writings were. The focus is on the children's views of their writing and their capacity to evaluate their own work. The findings show that all the children in the study had the ability to evaluate their own writing as 'good' or 'not good' work and to think about, construct and apply different criteria to explain their decisions. With a few exceptions at different year levels, the children were able to substantiate the criteria they offered. Not surprisingly, the importance they attributed to different criteria changed over the years. The long-term study made it possible to observe overall patterns of continuity, or discontinuity, in the kind of

criteria the children selected when they ranked their work. Some criteria, for example, content (Category 1), were common to all the children at every year level. Content, for example, was the most frequently cited criterion, suggesting, perhaps not surprisingly, that the children valued *what* they wrote more than *how* they wrote it. Other criteria threw light on how children differ from one another in relation to experiences and mode of thinking.

In Year 1 the children showed aptitude for offering simple criteria related to the content and external features they 'liked' or 'did not like'. They recognised their ability to draw and to write words. As writing changed to longer texts with little drawing in Year 2 and succeeding years, they revealed they were capable of selecting more complex criteria. Drawing did not disappear completely once the children were able to write; it was used for different purposes: to illustrate a title or the main points of a piece of writing.

At this stage much of the children's attention was also on surface features (Category 2). As the children became more skilled in writing in Year 2, their criteria began to change, and by Years 4 and 5 surface features had almost disappeared from their comments, suggesting that they were now less a matter for conscious consideration. Surface features were again mentioned in Year 6, in the context of a letter to a hypothetical Year 7 teacher in which the children offer summative judgements about themselves as writers.

From the earliest years the children's comments indicated they were implicitly aware of semantic and syntactic elements in their writing (Category 3). In Year 1 they could approve of a text '*because it makes sense*', or conversely, disapprove '*because it doesn't make sense*'. However, in the later years, when it might have

been anticipated that their greater maturity and language experience would enable them to elaborate on how a text did, or did not, make 'sense', they were not able, for example, to explain how they actually constructed a narrative text in order to make meaning. It is possible to suggest that the predominantly 'process-conference' writing pedagogy they encountered provided the children with only a limited and non-specific repertoire of ways to talk about how their writing worked – a criticism that has consistently been made by supporters of 'genre-based' pedagogies.

Nevertheless the children's evaluative responses were generally consistent with the learning outcomes of the *English: Curriculum and Standards Framework*, (1995), Board of Studies, Victoria, the curriculum program broadly followed by all their teachers. A limited knowledge of text types, contextual understanding, and strategies, such as the ability to plan and review their own writing, were all apparent. Knowledge of linguistic structures and features were, as indicated above, less well articulated. Further studies to examine ways in which teachers might develop greater congruity between these curriculum strands and children's understandings of them would be an interesting and useful follow on from this research.

The study revealed the children were able to differentiate sharply between the mental activity required for work copied from the chalkboard or for the completion of worksheets, and that demanded for their own compositions. The children's expressed rejection of worksheets in Year 6, in favour of sustained writing activities, is a salient finding that needs to be considered by teachers at all levels of primary school.

The children's responses over the years reflected a shift in focus in their thinking and writing from, in Vygotsky's (1978:104-110) terms, 'first-order symbolism' to

'second-order symbolism'. From Year 2 the children began to demonstrate that, as well as focusing on their writing, they were also able to reflect on themselves as a writer and from Year 3 to be aware of the needs of their reader (Category 4).

Individual personalities and preferences, the ebb and flow of development in their physical, social, psychological and intellectual lives suggested that there were prime times, rather than specific age or grade level times, when individual children acquired evaluative skills. 'Liking' particular, topics, people and experiences, the favouring of one artistic presentation over another, all contributed to the shaping of individual judgements, as did the influence of teachers and peers.

The children's articulation of criteria did not happen in Piagetian stage-like progression from one 'stage' to another, at a particular age and time. Children were not consistent in their ability to evaluate their own work. It might have been expected that they would be more articulate in the later years than in the early years. This was not always so. Some of the children for whom reading and writing seemed to require less effort were, in fact, less articulate in specifying criteria in Years 4 and 5 than in Years 1 and 2. The reasons why this was so are not clear. It might be that, as developing writers and readers of texts in the later years, they were more concerned with the composing processes they were engaged in, than in selecting criteria for the purposes of justifying the ranking of work already finished.

The findings reported in Chapter 7 also give insight into Vygotsky's claim that learning leads development, or the enigmatic concept of the 'zone of proximal development'. The two case study children demonstrated the ability to move in their thinking from the 'plane' of 'I like' the writing or drawing, to a more reflective plane when they were required to substantiate their criteria. This suggested a higher

level in their thinking. Apart from the increasing cognitive skills that accompany maturity, it could also be argued that the dialogue between the children and me about their texts contributed to and enhanced the mental activity in which they engaged when they ranked and evaluated their work. The activity was different from the normal round of classroom activities and required thinking of a different kind. The value for the student when teachers engage with them in this kind of reflective activity is also a potentially useful avenue for future research

### **8.3 Implications for the Classroom: Theory into Practice**

A contribution this study makes to current debate on assessment and evaluation of writing lies in the evidence the study provides of the children's cognitive and linguistic ability to evaluate their own writing from a very early age. As suggested above, opportunities for student self-evaluation would provide teachers with information that might better inform their understandings of children's development as learners.

It should be pointed out that self-evaluation is not about students taking responsibility for, or control of, an area of the curriculum for which teachers are accountable. The study recognises teachers' expertise and obligation to assess and respond to children's written language, taking into account its content, surface features and grammatical elements. However, these criteria give only limited insight into the thoughts, feelings, and imagination of young writers as they attempt to express their experiences in writing. Imagination and feelings are important, meaningful and impossible to ignore. They need to be taken account of in the writing pedagogies which teachers use and in the assessment strategies they apply to measure students' progress and performance in writing. Self-evaluation adds another dimension to traditional methods of assessment, providing insightful knowledge

about the mind of the writer, as does the procedure of inviting children to rank their work and give reasons for the ranking.

The information self-evaluation yields can complement the information teachers gather from their own observations and assessments. Information from two different perspectives - that of the teacher and that of the student - gives teachers a richer and more meaningful picture of achievement and progress, as well as information on which to base future teaching. '*Our bones*' do not have '*eyes*' [so] '*they could see our mind*' says Jessica (Chapter 2), as she tries to explain how she understands what she is doing. Teachers would benefit from a better understanding of how those minds work. As Tracey puts it, '*I want help but she [the teacher] doesn't give the right answers for me*'.

Bruno's comments about himself as a writer and his explanation of the topics he liked to write about, albeit with difficulty, contain a larger message for teachers, suggesting the importance of considering carefully how to help less able children derive meaning and enjoyment from writing, thus enabling them to develop as independent writers.

Topic choice proved to be an important issue. In many instances the children believed their writing was 'good' because they liked the topic itself, whether self-chosen or teacher-assigned. Having discovered at an early age they could write 'stories', the children would pursue their writing on a topic they endorsed, unconcerned by what the teachers thought about their self-chosen topics. There are positive and fruitful ways of dealing with high interest topics: *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, violence and sport, topics that some teachers did not approve of and promptly banned, denied many of the children the motivation to pursue topics they



wanted to write about or to continue with teacher-assigned topics. In Year 4, Bruno already recognised that the value system of teachers and that of the children did not connect very well. Donaldson (1979) refers to this discrepancy as a 'mismatch between school and children's minds'. She argues that because teachers do not understand children's minds, many students 'learn to hate school' (p.60). None of the children in the study ever commented that they 'hated school'; however, the study did expose unnecessary discrepancies between teaching and learning. This implies that teachers need to be informed about how best to foster the processes of writing and the skills of discussing how texts work, without taking away ownership of the writing. In short, they need to know when and how to intervene in order to help the writer.

By their own admission, four of the six teachers involved in the study did not know how to instruct in the process-conference approach to writing, the approach outlined and mandated in the school's language policy. Limited understanding of composing processes may have also accounted for the strategies the teachers used at the beginning of each year when, in order to sustain interest in writing, they adopted an approach of 'starting off afresh'. This was counterproductive, breaking the continuity from one grade to the next and ignoring each child's history and development as a writer. It also ran the risk of unnecessarily depriving the teacher of detailed knowledge of the children they were about to teach.

The teacher's role as the 'expert' in teaching writing extends beyond 'telling' children what they should do, as illustrated in Joseph's poignant comment at the beginning of this chapter. Graves (1981; 1983) recommended that teachers write along with the children in order to gain understanding of the composing process and its complexities, as well as to understand what it is they ask children to do. Valuable

as this recommendation might be, it is difficult to put into practice with current class size and other contingencies. What is essential for effective learning and what this study emphasises is the importance of teachers' professional knowledge, the organisation of the classroom and the quality of teacher-student interactions in enhancing the learning environment.

Children crave a learning environment that will allow them to '*put it together*'.

Joseph's poignant descriptions of a child's frustration about the 'mismatch'

Donaldson (1979) refers to above, about the fact that '*they don't understand you're writing in your mind*', about the effort he makes to satisfy the teacher's directive ('Come on. Do your writing'), are thought-provoking. It shows how teaching practice can also be responsible for negative reactions:

*I'm going down like this with the pencil [pretending to write]. I'm thinking [He demonstrates, pointing to his head]. Then I go down again ... I'm pretending to write on the paper, and so it goes on like this ...*

Although the findings show the children had strong preference for writing narrative that focused on their own 'dreams, experiences and histories' (Giroux, 1987), the children did not reject the writing of other genres. At times they chose teacher-assigned work and rated it highly as 'good' writing, indicating they were open to engaging with and approving teacher-assigned topics as well as topics of their own choosing

As discussed in Chapter 5, the focus for writing in the middle and later years accommodated the teaching of a range of genres, though from my observations the children did not receive enough explicit instruction. Nor did the children receive explicit instruction in the composing of narrative, their preferred genre. It is possible

to suggest that a firm foundation in the writing of narrative text would be an asset when it comes to writing other kinds of texts. This presupposes that narrative, which most children like to write even while they struggle with the complexities of form and style, be nurtured at all levels by continued and informed instruction, rather than by presuming that 'all children can write' (Graves, 1981) and by directions such as those that irk Joseph - 'Come on. Do your writing'. There is a place for teaching other types of writing in a context that has meaning for the children other than to meet the presumed demands of secondary school (See Chapter 5: 5.3.3).

Primary school children have difficulty in understanding the meaning of 'taking responsibility for your own work', a maxim that is frequently repeated in classrooms. Children interpret this to mean assignments must be finished on time and left on the teacher's table for correction. The analysis in this thesis suggests that, given time to write and to reflect on their work, the rationale for finishing their writing might change. Responsibility is more likely to be understood when children ask themselves questions about their texts and think about criteria. This study shows that children are able to do this: '*I know the questions to ask myself*', as Tracey puts it.

The teachers in the study established specific rules for managing their classrooms and attending to general housekeeping matters. However, an approach to writing, such as the process-conference approach, involves complex management. It requires writing folders, self-correction of spelling, drafts and editing, portfolios for 'good' work to report to parents, and the multiple procedures involved in the 'publishing' of writing. Furthermore, time for individual teacher-student conferences and opportunities for the children to talk to their peers about writing-in-progress, which

Tracey found to be more helpful than the help given her by the teacher, also require skilful management. In a crowded classroom this is not always be possible.

The children were articulate about the kind of environment that helped them most. They complained there was never enough time for writing. They did not want time merely to produce a quantity of writing. They were aware of how long it takes to compose - to write and rewrite one text. Although the teachers imposed on the children ten minutes silent writing time as part of their language schedule, the strategy - 'quiet first, then write', as Murray (1982) suggests - seemed not to be markedly beneficial because of the noise that erupted when the ban on talking lifted. In Year 2, Bruno indicated he was sensitive to noise that disturbed him at writing-time. The complexities of establishing a classroom environment that caters for all students, while purporting to encourage each child to take 'responsibility' for their own learning, is far more difficult than is often recognised. The findings of this study suggest that classroom management is a complex area where teachers need professional development.

#### **8.4 Professional Development for Teachers and Messages for Teacher Educators**

All teachers need opportunities to enrich the attributes and professional skills they already bring to the classroom; to be given time to reflect on their philosophy of education, to broaden or change their vision of teaching and learning in the interests of their students, and to read and discuss professional literature.

This study reveals tension and constraints traceable to teachers' limited knowledge of children's language development, rather than to children's inability to write.

Learning tasks I observed in the classrooms claimed to be 'child-centred' and 'progressive' ways to promote learning. However, there was an insecure

understanding of what this might mean. While the study found that children are able to be independent to a degree, it also found that they are dependent upon the adult's guidance and support to affirm and to give them appropriate guidance. Interactions in the classroom are effective only in so far as teachers know the kind of strategies to use to promote enthusiasm for and commitment to learning, bearing in mind Plutarch's advice, quoted in Chapter 5, with reference to the children when they were in Prep.: *'The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled'*.

For those interested in Vygotsky's theory of actual and potential development, social and collaborative interaction is a dimension that requires much thought and study, for children think and respond in different ways, as the evaluative statements analysed in this study indicate. An important consideration for understanding Vygotsky's ideas about the 'zone of proximal development' is that fundamental change in thinking can take place through internalisation of the social and instructional environment. The self-evaluative tasks described in this thesis encouraged the children to develop critical awareness of the texts they composed and invited them to reflect on their own learning and composing processes and to find an evaluative language in which to communicate this. This opportunity might be seen as one way of understanding what is meant by 'transforming' learning, or, indeed, be seen as a dimension of 'critical literacy'.

The confusion teachers experienced in the 1980s and early 1990s with regard to changing and competing theories of language education is still evident and the findings of this study have implications for teacher educators, signalling a need to focus less on claiming superior positions in academic debates on writing pedagogies and to take responsibility for assisting prospective and practising teachers to clarify writing pedagogy and assessment and evaluation strategies. The history of language

education is one of rapid knowledge development and change. Misinterpretation and misrepresentation of theories can occur when teachers attempt to put new knowledge into practice without an understanding of its theoretical underpinnings. When debate about new knowledge becomes polarised, the media look for simplistic explanations to alert the community to a presumed neglect in teaching 'basic skills' and a presumed lowering of literacy standards. The outcome of such concern in a politically conservative climate is government imposition and privileging of external testing.

It is clear that no one perspective on writing pedagogy is comprehensive enough to form a framework that provides teachers with a complete understanding of writing instruction. Teacher educators need to take up the challenge of a writing pedagogy that 'draws productively', as Kamler (1994b) suggests, from 'process' and 'genre' perspectives. Both perspectives have much to offer. Recent attempts have been made to develop theories of literacy, often under the label of 'critical literacy' or 'new basics', which integrate the cognitive, contextual and social dimensions of written language theory. These may well suggest a way forward.

### **8.5 Implications for Research**

As the study is based on a small sample - eighteen participants - it is not possible to make grand claims about the importance of self-evaluation, the nature of children's choice of criteria for 'good' work or the conditions that influence change in all children's judgements. It is, however, possible to signal important directions. The site for this study was located in a low socioeconomic area. In my interviews with the parents of the participants, I found that few parents had completed Year 12 and no parents had attended a tertiary institution. How different would my findings have

been had the participants come from a different locality and home background?

From a different school?

This study concentrated on the children's views of their written work. Of value would be a comparative study that investigates the criteria teachers assign to their students' writing and the criteria the students offer about the same work. Such information would be valuable for two reasons: First, it would give insight into the weaknesses and strengths in the students understandings, and second, it would inform teachers of how their writing instruction is interpreted, or how the students' understandings and values may conflict with what the teacher, the experienced adult, thinks is important.

## **8.6 Conclusions**

This study contributes to our understanding of children's learning and writing behaviour. At times the children surprised me with their capacity to think deeply about their own writing processes and to offer acute comments about how their teachers did, or did not, support their writing development. The study might open the minds of administrators and teachers to the advantages of involving students from an early age as active participants in assessment and evaluation processes. It reminds us that tests provide limited information about writing and learning. They do not reveal or provide insights about students' ability to critique their own writing - as the children in this study demonstrated they could do.

The pedagogical implications for student self-evaluation are complex. Self-evaluation cannot be reduced to a formula that follows a Piagetian stage-related progression. It is not another device or 'bandaid' to help solve the problem of illiteracy, although it may be proven in time to be an effective way to promote

literacy. Self-evaluation supports the 'learning leads development' theory to which Vygotsky (1978) draws our attention. It is very much a learner-centred approach, a humanistic way of acknowledging the unique efforts of the individual learner.

Young children's capacity for self-evaluation is an area that is relatively unexplored; conclusions must be seen as tentative. Children's writing has always been a contentious issue, linked as it is to public debates about standards of literacy. How to assess it has presented problems in the past, witness the focus on surface features. To suggest student participation in evaluation in all grade levels in the primary school may, to use Vygotsky's terminology, be a 'revolutionary activity', but this is what should happen if we are to recognise and respect children's ability to think and to make logical judgments about their own writing.

The weight of evidence in this study shows clearly children's capacity to evaluate their own drawings and writing. It suggests that children's intellectual abilities may not be tapped in ways that would enable them to reach their full potential as learners. It warns that schools remain more teacher-oriented than learner-centred, and as a consequence children lose sight of the fact they are learners. They are 'doers' of tasks to satisfy teachers' criteria. Allowing children to critique their own work can give meaning and purpose to their activities and affirm children as learners.

The findings in this study are not a happy accident or the fruits of high intellectual ability on the part of the children. The 18 children from a school situated in a low socioeconomic locality and classified as 'disadvantaged' (but not 'impoverished') performed as normal children with a desire to learn and excited by their achievements - and with teachers who were far from exceptional. Their comments



introducing each chapter inform us of the children's awareness of complex processes - processes that even researchers struggle to understand.

A significant aspect of the study is that the children performed unaware of any of the assumptions about their learning potential that the classification of 'disadvantaged school' generally implies. It cautions us not to underestimate the capacities of children.

Finally, to implement recommendations for encouraging student self-evaluation of writing requires more than goodwill and skill on the part of teachers.

Implementation needs inspiring leadership. There has to be a purpose for 'revolutionary activity' or reform, and that purpose lies in a respect for the needs and expectations of children, and in recognition of their potential as learners.

## Afterword

The study provided compelling evidence that young children as early as Year 1 have the ability to evaluate their own drawings and writing, thus answering the question: At what age are children able to evaluate their own work? My commitment as a researcher, however, was to do more than answer this question. At a time when the close and sustained study of children's literacy development in the classroom has been overshadowed by ideologies which sometimes lose sight of the very students whose needs they purport to meet, I was determined to continue my study of the children's evaluative capacities in subsequent years in order to understand how changes in the children's development of cognitive skills were likely to influence their criteria for 'good' writing. Furthermore, I wanted to see how the teaching of writing at the different year levels influenced the nature of the children's criteria, thus gaining insight into what teachers and children across the primary years valued as important in literacy learning.

Although I had always tried to maintain a liberal and broad-minded view of education during my teaching career, paying attention to the intellectual abilities of my students and their needs, it was clear from my research that I, too, had underestimated young children's capacity for self-evaluation, both of their writing specifically, and of their learning in general. The longitudinal study opened up important issues about the complexities of literacy teaching and literacy practices.

One of the most significant aspects of the study was my relationship with the children and the opportunity it provided to observe the changes in their choice of criteria, which they articulated with such care, and the development of language that

enabled them to express their thinking and their feelings about their own learning. I noted the gradual disappearance of low-level criteria for 'good' writing relating to surface features, such as colour, and the emergence of sophisticated judgements about linguistic features, audience and ownership, indicating higher levels of cognition and informed judgments of their own work. This evolution enabled me to arrive at a greater understanding of Vygotsky's theory of learning- leads- development. I had grappled for years with Vygotsky's enigmatic theories of learning and development and his claims about language and thought. As I listened to the children's explanations of their own learning, it was as though I witnessed the transformation of thought into something tangible, into critical language. I recognise that I was the one responsible for creating the right kind of environment to elicit this information; and this acknowledgement of the importance of environment is itself typically Vygotskian. My interactions with the children about their writing helped to clarify Vygotsky's claims, without 'watering down' those claims as often seems to be the case with those who critique his work. I gained a stronger understanding of a theory of learning that was more meaningful to me than traditional theories as discussed in Chapter 2.

An important outcome of the thesis is that my belief that all children are capable of enthusiasm for learning has been affirmed. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm displayed in the early years, wanes or disappears as children grow older, mainly because teachers do not understand the learning process and are not fully equipped to teach (and test) a complex discipline such as writing. Prescriptive literacy programs and testing stifle enthusiasm rather than facilitate learning.

A seemingly unbridled zeal regarding literacy standards (about which there is no consensus in the community), as reflected in many of the current Early Years literacy programs, and the administration of national standardised tests in Years 3 and 5, can be seen to be misguided and alien when we take account of what we already know about learning and writing processes. Childhood is now being eroded and the most precious years of spontaneous learning and enjoyment about learning for its own sake are ignored. If state and national tests must be administered, then they would be better at Year 4 or Year 6 level. This study indicates that children at Year 3 level struggle with the difficulties of transition from recognition of surface features as important to 'good' writing to a deeper level of understanding the structural particularities of language in writing. In Year 5, fundamental changes occurred as the children were again in a state of transition to a further cognitive level and an increasing awareness of the complexity of the processes involved in writing. In Year 4 and Year 6 the children experienced greater stability and confidence in learning. The term 'transition' tends to be used too glibly and without an understanding of the demands made of students at particular and vulnerable times.

Further, teachers are too easily pressured by political agendas as revealed in recent approaches to literacy programs and assessment, writing ideologies and mandated reporting procedures. Although they are required to be alert to what is happening in the wider community, their role in the classroom is to nurture children's innate love for learning, to guide and to inspire their students. They need the opportunity to take cognisance of the fact that children can also learn without specific instruction. An understanding of children's capacities for self-learning can have a humbling effect on adults, leading to the establishment of greater respect for and trust in the learner.

For teachers it is not enough to like children, expecting that this attitude will create a good teacher, nor is it enough to like instructing those who are less knowledgeable than ourselves. It is essential to build rapport through collaborative interactions with one's students and to provide a learning environment that is vibrant. Those who teach and purport to be educators must endeavour to sustain their enthusiasm and love for learning. Teachers need to 'rekindle' their own resources through reading, professional conversations and voluntary professional development, as well as through mandated professional development programs.

Such qualities and aspirations do not emerge as teachers step into their first classroom. They are qualities that need to be extolled in pre-service training courses. Aspirants to the teaching profession need to receive the same kind of modelling, guidance, and inspiration as the students they will be teaching later on. If aspiring teachers do not have the opportunity to write themselves, to share their writing with peers, to gain inspiration and enthusiasm from their instructors, they are not likely to be successful teachers of writing in their own classrooms. They are likely to be vulnerable to the reductive policies of politicians and bureaucrats to the detriment of inspirational teaching. Over the long period of this study it was possible to observe the ways in which teachers own aspirations and pedagogies were influenced, and often constrained, by political and ideological shifts in literacy policy and practice. Teachers must be guaranteed the opportunity, as I was, to work closely with students, confident that students can do more than we think possible when guided by informed, committed and sensitive adults who are writers themselves.

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## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX 1:   *Extracts from St Sophie's School Assessment and Language Policies***

### **Extracts from St Sophie's School Assessment and Reporting Policy**

Assessment and reporting are integral parts of the learning and teaching process. We, as teachers, recognise this responsibility and endeavour to make them part of our everyday practice.

We understand that:

*ASSESSMENT is a process concerned with gathering information about students' competencies. Its focus is not only on what has been achieved by students, but also on how they have gone about their learning.*

### ***Aims of Assessment***

At St Sophie's, we believe assessment

- Is to gain insight into the learner's total development
- Gives us information to modify the curriculum
- Is ongoing and consistent
- Gives both teachers and students an awareness of the learner's strengths and weaknesses

### ***What do we assess?***

We assess students' development and achievements in:

• Content skills	Concepts, understandings, communication, problem solving, research, strategies and processes
• Knowledge	What do the students know?
• Attitudes	To learning, to their own abilities as learners, care, effort and motivation
• Social skills	How the students relate to others; cooperate
• Work habits	Conscientiousness, beginning and following through tasks, independence, learning modes, organisation and thoroughness

### **St Sophie's School Language Policy and its 'Whole Language' Philosophy**

The school language policy is based on the philosophy of 'whole language'<sup>1</sup>. The guiding principles are expressed in the directives that follow:

Although there are separate policies for reading, writing and spelling, we should aim to integrate these areas of literacy learning.

Three essential keys are abundant opportunities for reading and writing, focusing on meaning. This means that teachers need to give attention to reading and writing instruction as a normal part of learning rather than teach each area as though it is an isolated 'subject' area.

Reading, writing and spelling will need to be taught as separate units. However, it is important for teachers to see them fitting in to the curriculum as a 'whole' language program, not just as 'bits and pieces' that have to be taught.

A 'whole' language program also means that the teaching of phonics, skills, sentence structures and vocabulary are taught in context...How literature is shared and discussed with the children is an important consideration for a 'whole' language classroom.

---

As explained by K.S. Goodman, *What's Whole in Whole Language?* Scholastic-TAB, Richmond Hill, Ont., 1986.

## **APPENDIX 2: *Questionnaire for Interviews with the Teachers in the Study***

The questions asked in individual interviews with the teachers who participated in the study were shaped by the observations, as well as information gleaned during unplanned conversations:

### ***Hopes and Ideals about Teaching***

- How long have you been teaching?
- What attracted you to teaching?
- Have your expectations of teaching been fulfilled in the way you imagined they might be?

### ***Self-Assessment***

- Teachers often make the comment that they've had 'a really good day' in the classroom. What would be a good day for you? When is a day not so good?
- What are some of the really important satisfactions you have experienced as a teacher?
- How would you describe an effective / successful teacher?
- Do you think you are an effective teacher?
- Can you say how professional development days help you with regard to your teaching?
- What traits would you like the children to remember about you?

### ***Writing Pedagogy***

- Tell me something about your time in college with regard to the teaching of writing.
- What has been a major influence on the way you teach writing?
- What would help you the most to gain more confidence?
- The principal is insistent on the thematic approach to literacy. What is your thinking on regular themes?

### ***Assessment and Reporting of Students***

- In general terms, what do you want the students in your grade to have achieved by the end of the year with regard to literacy, that is, reading and writing?
- What are the main elements you usually look for in 'good' writing?
- Can you explain how you go about assessing the children's writing?
- How useful to you is your record-keeping in finding out how children learn?

### APPENDIX 3: *Questionnaire for Interviews with the Parents*

Interviews with parents were conducted in an informal atmosphere. Parents were invited to reflect on and respond to the following guiding questions.

- May I ask why you chose to send ..... to St Sophie's School?
- What are your expectations of a 'good' school?
- Are you happy with the decision you made regarding the school?
- What memories do you have of your time in primary school? In secondary school?
- What do you usually like to read?
- Would you like to comment on the way reading and writing are taught today?
- Are you happy with the way the teachers inform parents about their children's progress?
- What are your views on homework?

#### APPENDIX 4: *Questions Used in Interviews with Children*

At each year level after the children had evaluated their work, they were asked to elaborate on their judgements and decisions. I selected specific questions to ask individual children, as appropriate to the situation, from the following guiding questions:

Why did you put this one first? last?

What else can you say about it?

Can you say why you like your work?

How do you know to write this way?

Can you tell me what you mean when you say, *'because I like it'*?

Can you tell me what you mean when you say, *'because I don't like it'*?

Can you tell me what you mean when you say, *'because it's good'*?

Can you tell me what you mean when you say, *'because it's not good'*?

Which piece was the hardest one for you? Why?

Which one did you enjoy doing the most? Why?

## **APPENDIX 5:   *Excerpts from Year 6 Taped Interviews With Children***

### ***Excerpts from Year 6 Taped Interview With Julia***

In Year 6 children did not rank order their work. Instead they reviewed their work done in Years 1-5. Following are excerpts from Julia's Year 6 interview.

J = Julia

R = Researcher

R:    Tell me about the writing you've done this year.

J:    It's been okay so far. I've only written one story so far.

R:    Are you happy about that?

J:    Sometimes when I was in the younger classes, I would just write anything, or just finish off with a stupid ending, but now if you do one or two work things it's okay because you can actually concentrate on it.

R:    How is this piece of writing going?

J:    It's sort of half way through.

R:    Will you finish it?

J:    Yeah. Like, I have to rewrite it and all that, and we haven't had a lot of time for writing this year. Like, we hardly ever do it.

R:    How do you feel about that?

J:    Oh, well, we've been doing these activities and stuff.

R:    You say you've been doing activities, worksheets and your own writing. What has helped you the most with your writing?

J:    Well, activities you know, have got something to do with learning in general, but I reckon what we did in Grades 3 and 4 was better. We would have a whole session like till playtime for writing and I reckon that was really good. But now we don't have it at all.

R:    What about the worksheets? Did they help you with your writing?

J:    Oh, in a sort of way, but sometimes some of them hardly helped at all. I reckon they don't teach you anything. It's just for nothing ... Some of the



comprehension stuff, I don't reckon there's any point because we never do stuff like that. We do it in activities, but not in our own writing.

R: Tell me why you think this is 'good' work?

J: We have Human Relations. We did projects. It's not here at the moment -- it's at home. I did a big skeleton with the writing on the back. It was a mini-project so that would have been one of my good ones.

R: Did you keep any writing in your classroom?

J: What do you mean by that?

R: You've been writing during the year, but you don't seem to have folders for finished work or your best work as you did in the other grades. Where are they?

J: I'd'n know ... We hardly ever use them any more ...

R: Tell me about the one you're working on now.

J: Yeah. I sort of changed it. I really want to go on with it, but we never have enough time. It's like we're too busy getting organised, or the teachers give us hardly any time, and we never actually have time to get out our folders. At the moment we're doing adventure stories and I don't like it. I hate it when the teacher tells you to write a certain story. They already gave us the characters to do an adventure story and we have to do it with a boy, and no one really likes it, and you have to get it published by next week, and that is not enough time ... They (the teachers) don't listen. It's easier to do it with someone you know ... You're comfortable and stuff ... With the boys they always muck around or they don't listen ... Andrew is so slow. He is still writing out the character line.

R: So you find it hard to write when the teacher gives you the topic and tells you what kind of writing it has to be?

J: Yeah. I would rather make it that it's not an adventure story. Even if you can go by yourself, that would be better ...

R: Do you notice if your writing has changed?

J: I reckon it's got better. You get new ideas and everything. I was into publishing and all that, but as I've gotten older I don't really want to do it any more ... I prefer to work on a piece and keep changing it until it is right.

R: You're not anxious to publish it?

J: The teacher does but I don't really mind if it doesn't get published ... It is probably a story you don't like and you leave it how it is ... It's like you don't really care [about publishing]. I just want to do this story. It's not like the first story you write [when] you say you want to publish it.

R: You are more interested in putting a story together -- the composing part?

J: Yeah. I reckon people rave about publishing a book and doing all the pictures, but I don't really care about pictures any more. It's not like you need lots of pictures and stuff ...

.....  
Julie's written evaluation of a project that the teacher requested of the class as a self-evaluation task.

What I learnt about China

*I learned that the Chinese have big celebrations like the Chinese New Year. They have lanterns and lots of people dressed up and doing dance's, like all the people that dance around in that dragon costume.*

*I found this out from books in the library.*

## Excerpts From Taped Interviews With Patrycia

Extracts from taped interviews with Patrycia in Years 1 and 6 are provided below.

In Year 1 Patrycia is rank ordering her pieces of 'good' work. In Year 6 she is reviewing her writing samples from Years 1-5.

R = Researcher

P = Patrycia

Two low classroom tables gave ample space for the child to arrange his or her pieces of writing. There were two chairs, one for the child and one for me. A box containing eighteen folders of 'good' work, selected at the preliminary conference, was on another table close by. I set up the tape recorder and my journal for note-taking. I negotiated with the Year1 teacher about a suitable time and who would be available, as he did not like children to miss out when he was teaching. He allowed Patrycia to come for the first interview, a portion of which is included below.

Patrycia, aged six years, sat on the chair provided and in the brief introduction I asked if she minded my recording the conversation. She was indifferent. I asked her to find her folder in the box. She chose to stand while the following dialogue took place.

### Year 1

6 / 12 / 1990

Researcher	Patrycia	Observations
You have some 'good' work in your folder. Can you put your work in order -- like, your best piece first, then the next best, and so on.	Okay.	<i>As she took each piece from her folder, she studied it and made comments before deciding which piece should go first.</i>  <i>Confident. Thoughtful.</i>
	I don't remember some of these things. (Pause)  It's a bit tricky [putting them in order].	<i>Studies each piece and then selected 6 to rank in order</i>

Researcher	Patrycia	Observations
		<p><i>Obviously making decisions</i></p> <p><i>Looked through the book that had a story she had published.</i></p>
	<p>You can't put 'About the author' in (to self).</p>	<p><i>Thinking aloud. Comment not directed to anyone in particular. Realises this is an 'appendage' with details about herself, the author- not a story</i></p> <p><i>She chose a piece and ranked it second.</i></p>
<p>Why not?</p>	<p>Because it's not about the story. There's another one!</p> <p>Oh! I haven't seen this for ages.</p>	<p><i>This is a cut-and-paste story (5/6/90) which she ranked third.</i></p> <p><i>Means she did the work some time ago. Memory?</i></p> <p><i>She had finished the task, she sat, saying.</i></p>
	<p>They're in the right order.</p>	
<p>Tell me why you put this one first?</p>		<p><i>Class project about the life cycle of a chicken.</i></p>

Researcher	Patrycia	Observations
	I don't like making mistakes. I like to make things right.	<i>An aside to self. May refer to giving a 'correct' answer? Could also refer to making a mistake in her work.</i>
	It's a chick. When I read it to my friends I get excited and comfortable. I'll be seven soon.	
Are you excited about that?	Yes, I am. (laughs)	
The next two pieces seem to be about the same thing?	[There's] too much writing in that one.	<i>Cut-and-paste piece, (draft) ranked third.</i>
Why did you put your published story second?	'Cause (pause) I like nature. I like flowers. I like looking at leaves because they're strange. I take a leaf home and I look at it.	
That one's about nature, too. Why did you put it third?	It's a draft.	<i>Did not question 'draft'. I didn't want to prolong the task.</i>
This one is fourth in the row. Why did you put it there?	I like dancing 'cause I like concerts. When you look at dancers, you'd like to look at it again, but you can't because that's the last time.	

Researcher	Patrycia	Observations
Putting it in order helps you to remember it?	Yeah.	<i>Content important</i>
And this one is second last. Why?	<p>Because it's a bit funny.</p> <p>Because he kissed me and I hate him and I punched him, and I like dressing-up, and I put it in my story and he didn't know! And that's all.</p>	<p><i>Unusual? Her way of retaliation -- to write about the incident. Content important.</i></p> <p><i>Appears to be giving criteria for why she likes her work, not for the sake of the order. Probably too hard to justify every position. Keep information but focus on first &amp; last rankings -- all levels.</i></p>
Why did you put this one last? You might like to read it again before you answer because you wrote it some time ago.		<i>She read the story 'The Jungle', (Sept., '90) &amp; replied:</i>
	<p>I don't really like it. It's like this one (piece ranked first). I wrote this one first (piece ranked last). Now when I read it, it isn't so good. I just put anything on the paper and that's why it's yukky and I don't like it when it comes out yukky.</p>	<i>N.B. Has a notion of how language works &amp; is critical of the text. Is becoming aware of the composing process &amp; ability to reflect on her work.</i>

Researcher	Patrycia	Observations
		<p>The interview ended. I thanked her for her comments. She gathered up the pieces of writing, placed them in her folder and returned to the classroom.</p>

# Year 6

8/11/95

Extracts from a conference taken in my office as the room was too noisy.

Researcher	Patrycia	Observations
<p>Tell me about the writing you've been doing at Language time.</p> <p>Yes, if you like to call it that. Just tell me about any kind of writing you've done this year.</p>	<p>Like, what do you mean? In personal writing?</p> <p>Well, we've been talking about, like, um, the television. You have to write that there is more than one channel and you have to change it to one that has more than one ...</p>	<p><i>Tries to recall teacher-assigned tasks. Garbled information about the task. Check later with Bronwyn.</i></p>
<p>I'm afraid I don't quite understand the task you had to do. Is this a worksheet you had to fill in about television programs?</p> <p>So you had to make suggestions about another show she could watch?</p> <p>What kind of writing do you have in your folder?</p>	<p>Yeah. (inaudible comments) Jane wasn't allowed to see her favourite show ...</p> <p>Mmm.</p> <p>Very different work.</p>	<p><i>Not sure if this means different from the television task or different from her work of previous years.</i></p>



Researcher	Patrycia	Observations
	These are my pamphlets. We had to do swimming and water rescue. These are my drafts ... I've got lots of thing. See! Things I wrote when I first got started [in Year 6]. I started lots and handed in the ones that were finished.	
Do you think you will finish these?	I want to but I don't know if I can.	
What's the problem?	I haven't got much time left [in Year 6].	
Show me some work you think is 'good' writing.	This is a story I've been doing right now with Gracie.	
What is it about?	It's a play.	<i>She names characters but does not give much information about the content.</i>
Why is it good work?	I don't know. It's just - I like being famous and everything ...	<i>She gives a brief description of the characters in the play which is based on a television show.</i>
I'm still not sure why you think the play is a 'good' piece of writing.	It's just the way I've worded it, like.	

Researcher	Patrycia	Observations
Can you say a little bit more about the way you've worded it?	Um, me and Gracie have tried to use different words -- not always the same. Instead of saying 'I'll get it. I'll get it' when someone knocks on the door, we say, 'Oh! Hi, Jack! I'll be there in a minute'.	<i>Use of language. Substitutes without losing the meaning, but unsure about the question. Wants the story to be interesting, but seems not to know anything about grammatical structures.</i>
What do you intend to do with this play when you have finished the writing ?	Well, we will probably finish it next week. It's going to be very small ... We're going to act it out.	
Do you think people will enjoy the play?	Yes ... This style we are doing now is really into people. A lot of people like this style that we are doing ... A lot of people can relate to it and a lot of people could like it because this is what is going on [at the present time]. This is the fashion sort of thing.	<i>Idea links with instruction about events viewed on television. Aware of audience but is not concerned about the technical side of the writing. Interest in writing plays &amp; acting apparent in previous years but has not learnt/remembered what is involved ....</i>
Can you say why you don't finish your work?	You're just bored with what you're doing. I don't know. It just keeps going and going and you don't know what you're going to do with the story. You write and write and it seems you go on for ever and ever, and you say, 'Nuh. I'm going to start a new one and I'm gonna finish it'	<i>Gives same reasons as Julia in Y5 rank ordering. Evidence she needs help to write more concisely &amp; how to end a story. Is aware of her inability to shape the text but is unable to be specific. The teacher has not picked up her needs. Understandable. Teacher conferences rare.</i>

Researcher	Patrycia	Observations
<p>Have you changed as a writer?</p> <p>I notice you have some worksheets in your writing folder. What is the difference between the worksheet and your personal writing you've been talking about?</p>	<p>Yep! I've never changed my style of drawing people though. I like drawing little faces.</p> <p>Oh, well, my personal writing is what I do, what I like and what I want. This (worksheet) is totally opposite to what I don't want, what I don't like and what I never would want to do.</p>	<p><i>Honest. Probably right.</i></p>
<p>Do worksheets help you with your own writing?</p> <p>When you look back on your time in primary school, what was your best year as far as the language period and your own writing are concerned?</p>	<p>No! (Laughs) Punctuation, maybe.</p> <p>Grade 6. This year.</p>	<p><i>Surprising. No hesitation. Confident.</i></p>
<p>Can you say why it's been your best year?</p>	<p>Why? Sure. It's mostly because I know what I'm doing. They explain it a bit more, plus, sometimes [in the other grades] they just give it to you and say, 'Do it', and you stare over it and say, 'What do I have to do?' You don't know what to do. But this year it has changed a lot. You know what to do and it is sometimes more fun I have learnt more this year than I have ever learnt before.</p>	<p><i>Appears to be contradictory. Seems to appreciate direction but is also aware of her own ability &amp; can work independently of the teacher. Is at a level of maturity where self-regulation comes more easily than in previous grades. Co-operative and speaks with confidence.</i></p>

Researcher	Patrycia	Observations
Do you think that what you learned in other years has helped with your learning in Grade 6?	Yeah. Well, the teachers ... (Does not complete sentence) Yeah. Sometimes it's me and sometimes it's the teachers.	
What about the conferences I had with you about your work? How did they help you?	They were okay. I like coming to conferences ... The best part [is] I get to say what I like and what I do. I don't really like questions ... I like the other way round. I'm answering the question but you haven't even asked the question. If you ask [me] why do I like it -- that's not a bad question. Like, your other question, 'What is your favourite piece'? You say what you've got and why you like it. That's the same question ...	<i>She prefers 'Tell me about your work' rather than 'why' questions. This is important info..</i>
Sometimes I thought you did not like having to put your work in order. Is that right?	Yuk! ... It wasn't that it was difficult, it was just the way -- Like, I can say what I don't like, but I don't like putting them in order and talking. I just like to say straight off, 'that, that, that, that'.	<i>N.B. All this section important. Topic choice, ability for self-regulation but also needs help e.g. conference about text. Worksheets. Type of question. Purpose of R.O.? Notes redundant questions.</i>
		The interview ended on this note.

**APPENDIX 6:**    *Samples of Bruno's work (Prep. - Year 5)*

# APPENDIX 6A

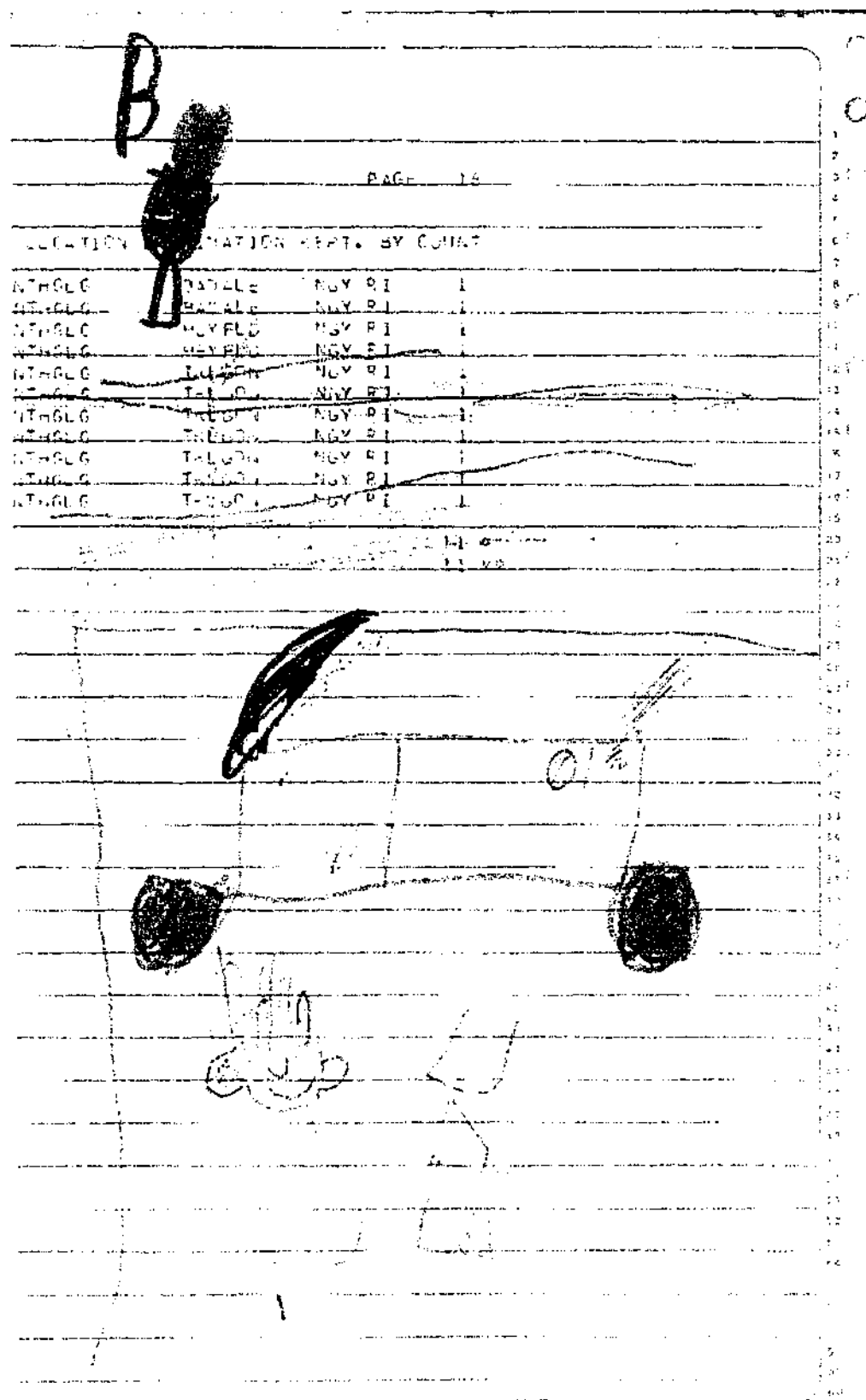


Figure 1 - Bruno Prep: Lamborghini Drawing

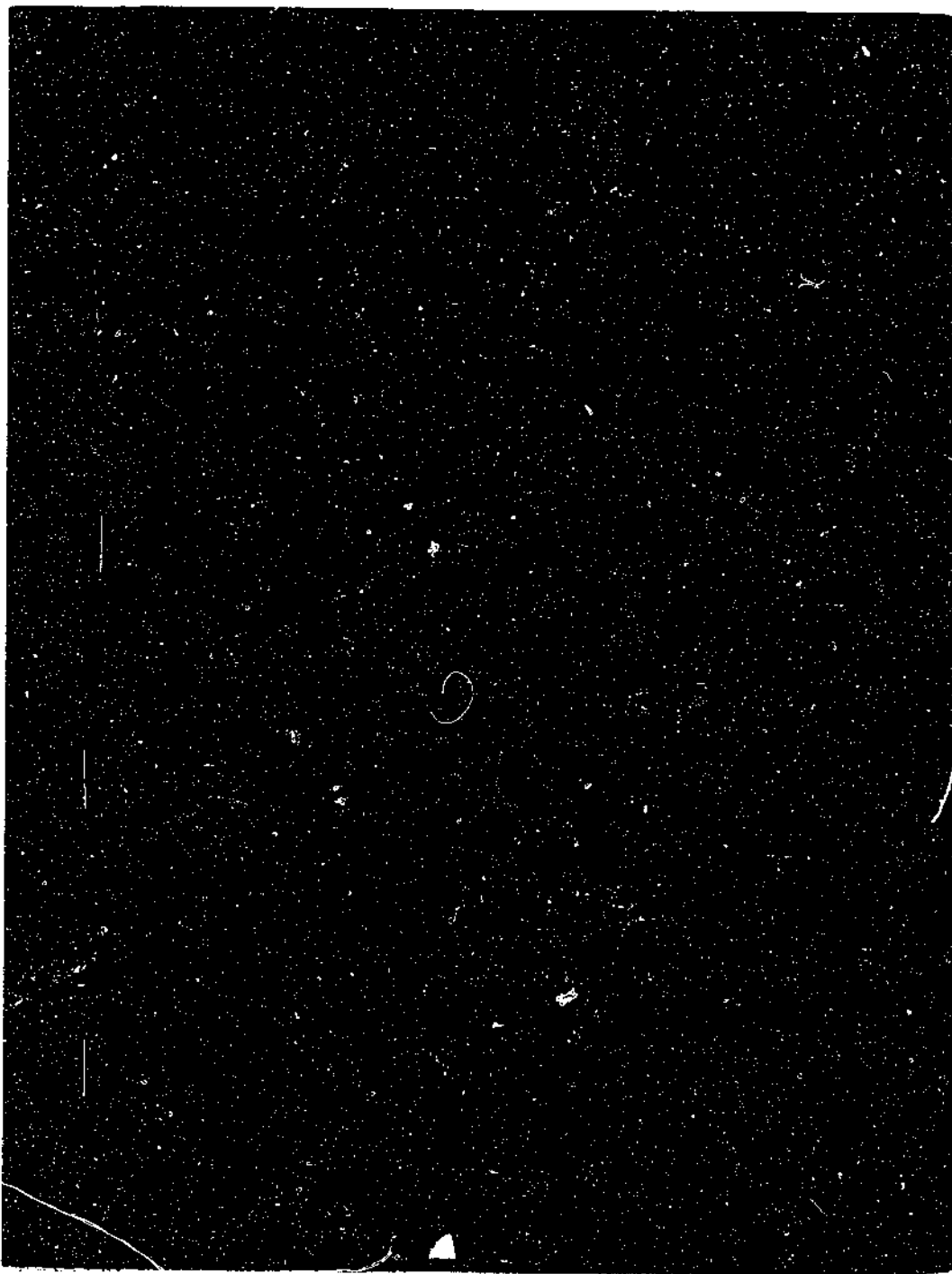
APPENDIX 6B

BRUNO 3/10/40



Figure 2 - Bruno Year 1: Turtle Car

**APPENDIX 6C**



**Figure 3 - Bruno Year 3: Chicago Bulls vs Nicks (Front Cover)**



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The N. B. A. Live from  
United States of America

Figure 4 - Bruno Year 3: Chicago Bulls vs Nicks (Page 1)

The Bulls were winning.

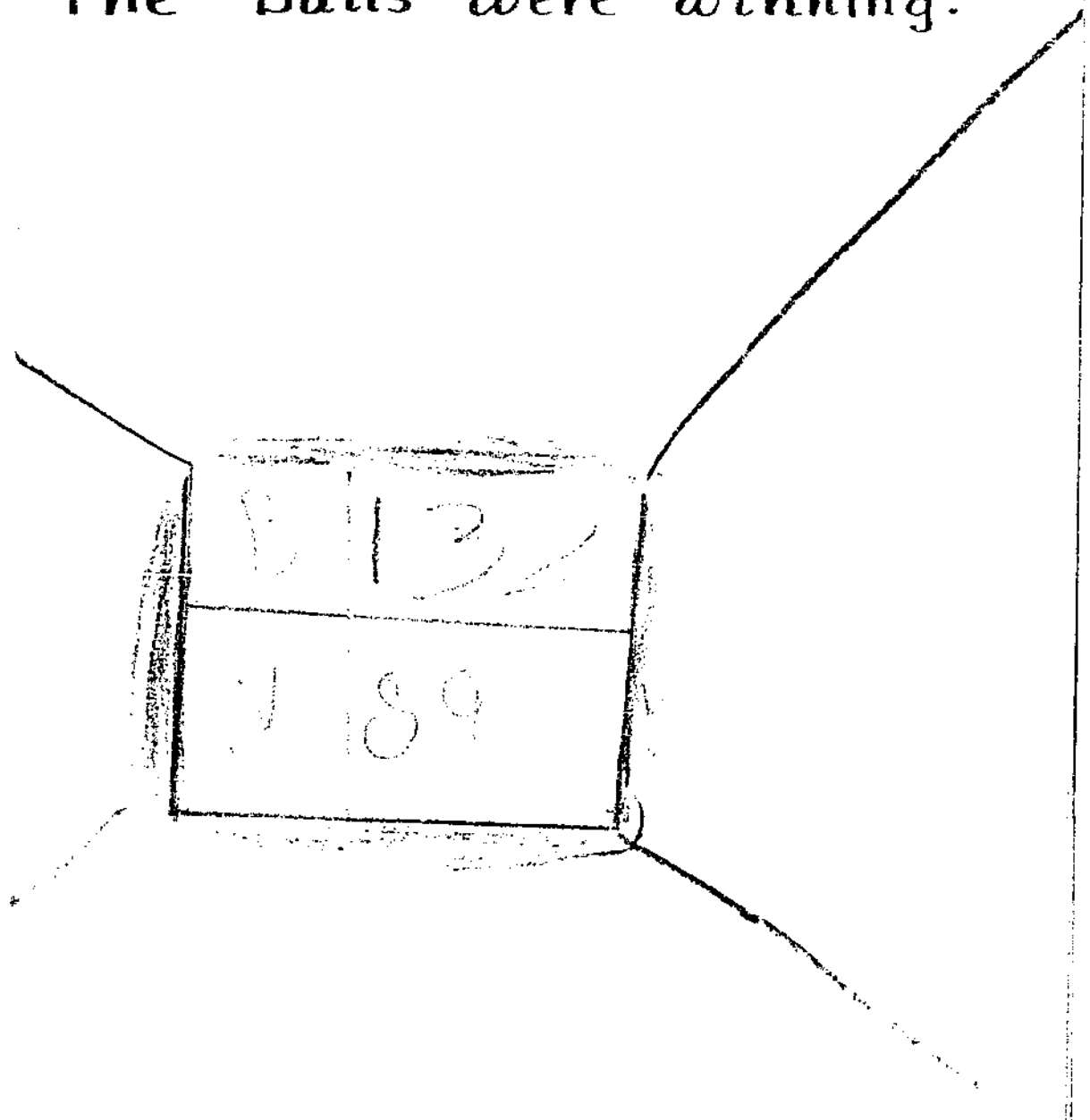


Figure 5 - Bruno Year 3: Chicago Bulls vs Nicks (Page 4)

The Bulls got a lot  
of 3 pointers, and  
Jordan got the most slam  
dunks.

The audience cheered  
and they said, "Come on  
the Bulls! Nicks are fools!"

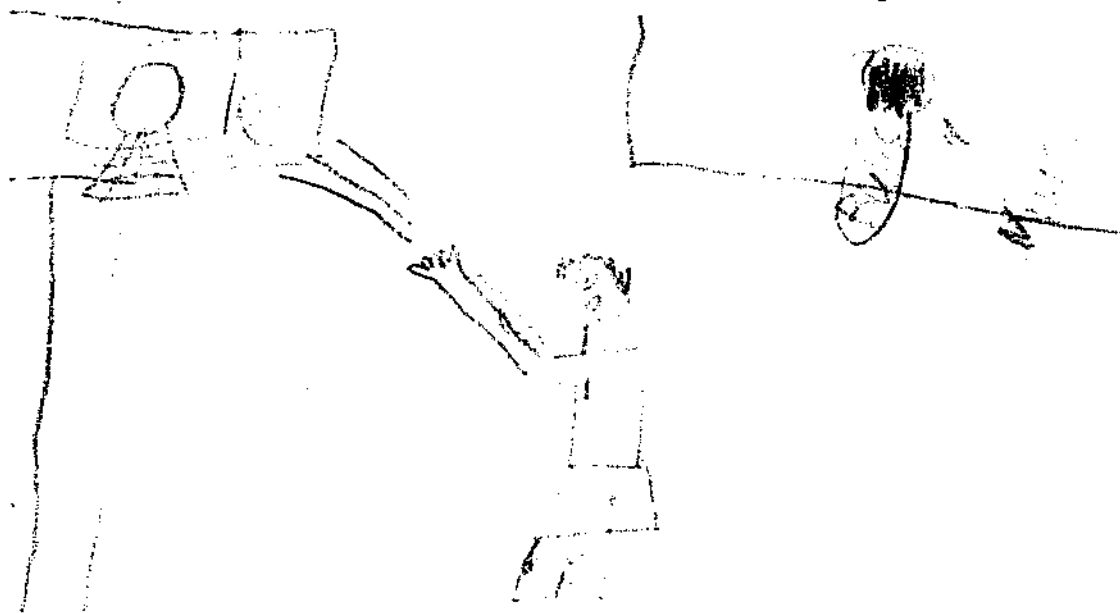


Figure 6 - Bruno Year 3: Chicago Bulls vs Nicks (Page 7)

The Bulls won the game!  
The crowd went wild.  
What a game! And  
they all shook hands  
and gave a pat on the  
back.

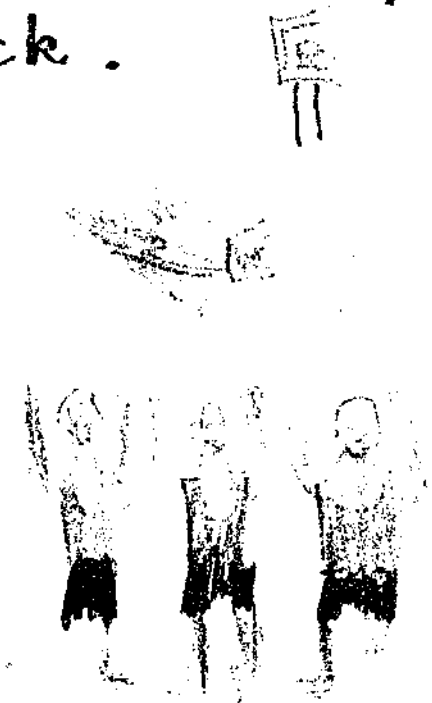
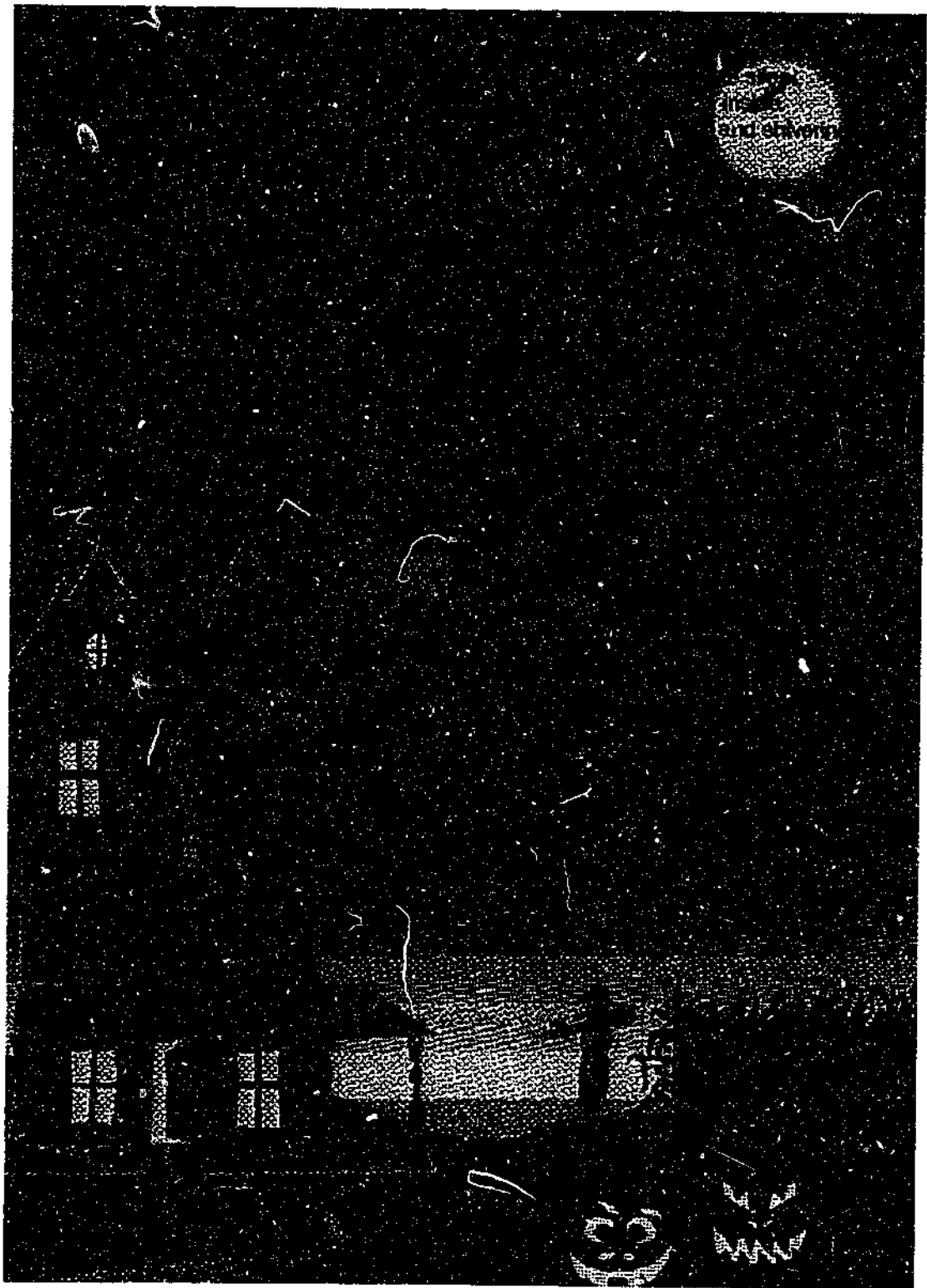


Figure 7 - Bruno Year 3: Chicago Bulls vs Nicks (Page 9)

**APPENDIX 6D**



**Figure 8 - Bruno Year 5: Poem – Boss of the Pool (27 lines)**

It was a very windy night,  
The streets were silent,  
Everyone was inside.  
The night was cool and shivering.

I was alone in my Mum's car,  
Alone and cold.  
I couldn't handle it anymore.  
I looked around.  
I saw someone  
His hands are against the window.

I was scared.  
He kept on staring  
Like his eyes were glued on me.  
I wanted to run  
My heart was beating fast  
I couldn't handle it anymore  
So I left.

He followed me  
Wherever I went.  
I saw all different people.  
They made me run.  
I bumped into a lady  
I thought she might help.  
She gave me directions.  
I ran hoping to find my Mum.  
There she was right behind me.

**APPENDIX 7:**    *Samples of Tracey's work (Prep. - Year 5)*

# APPENDIX 7A

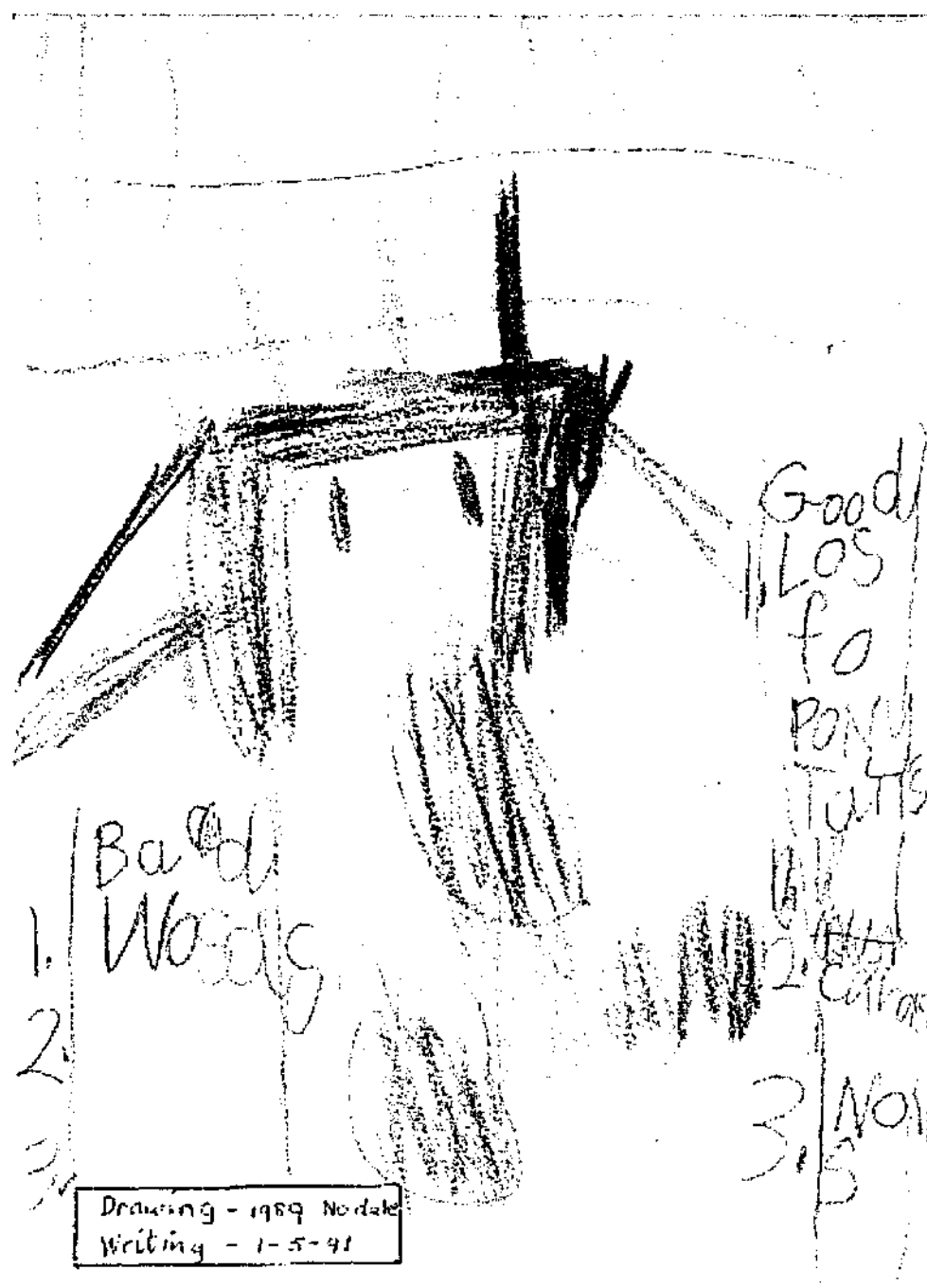


Figure 1 - Tracey Prep: Self Portrait (with six ponytails)



APPENDIX 7B

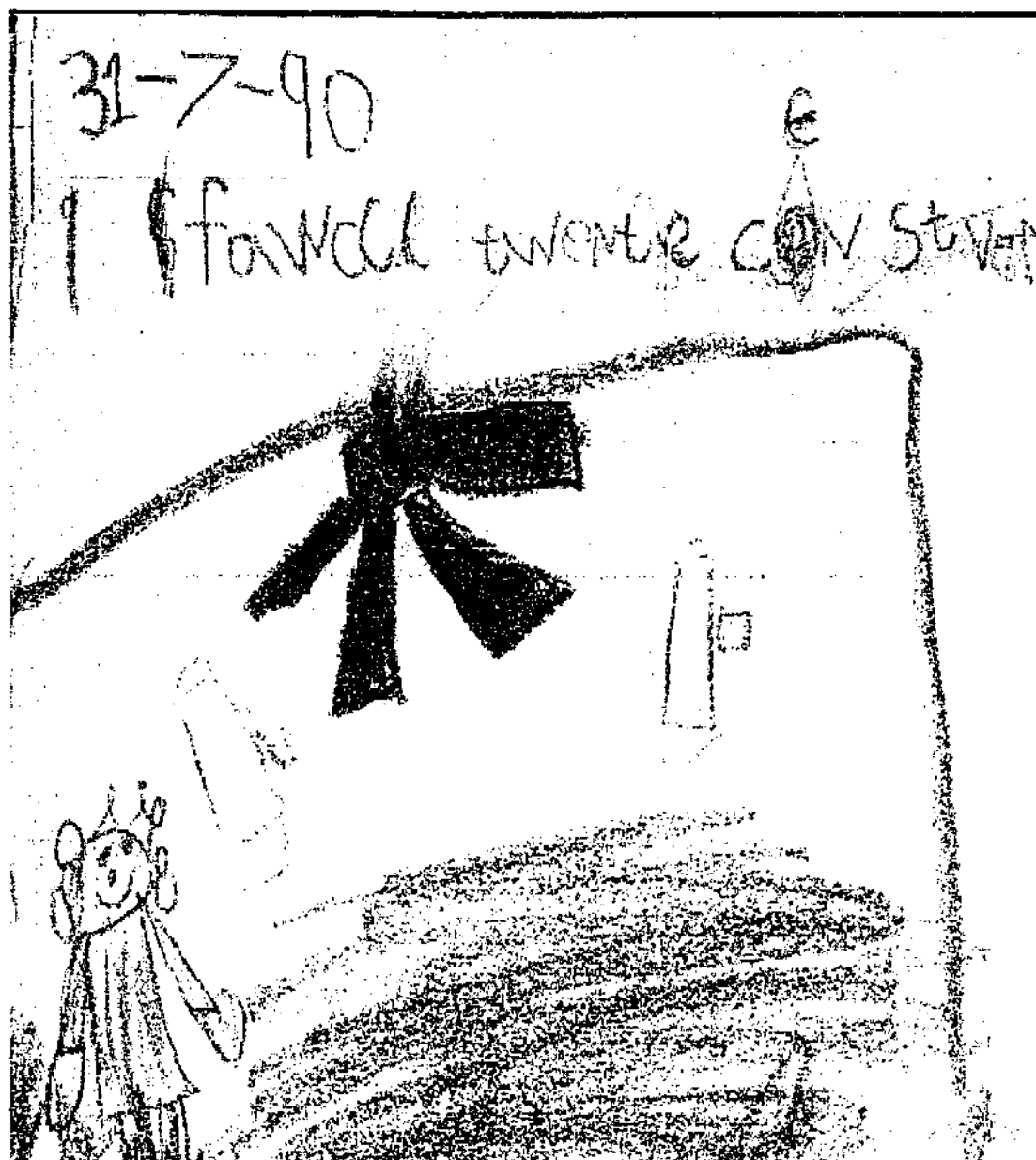


Figure 2 - Tracey Year 1: About a Cake

APPENDIX 7C

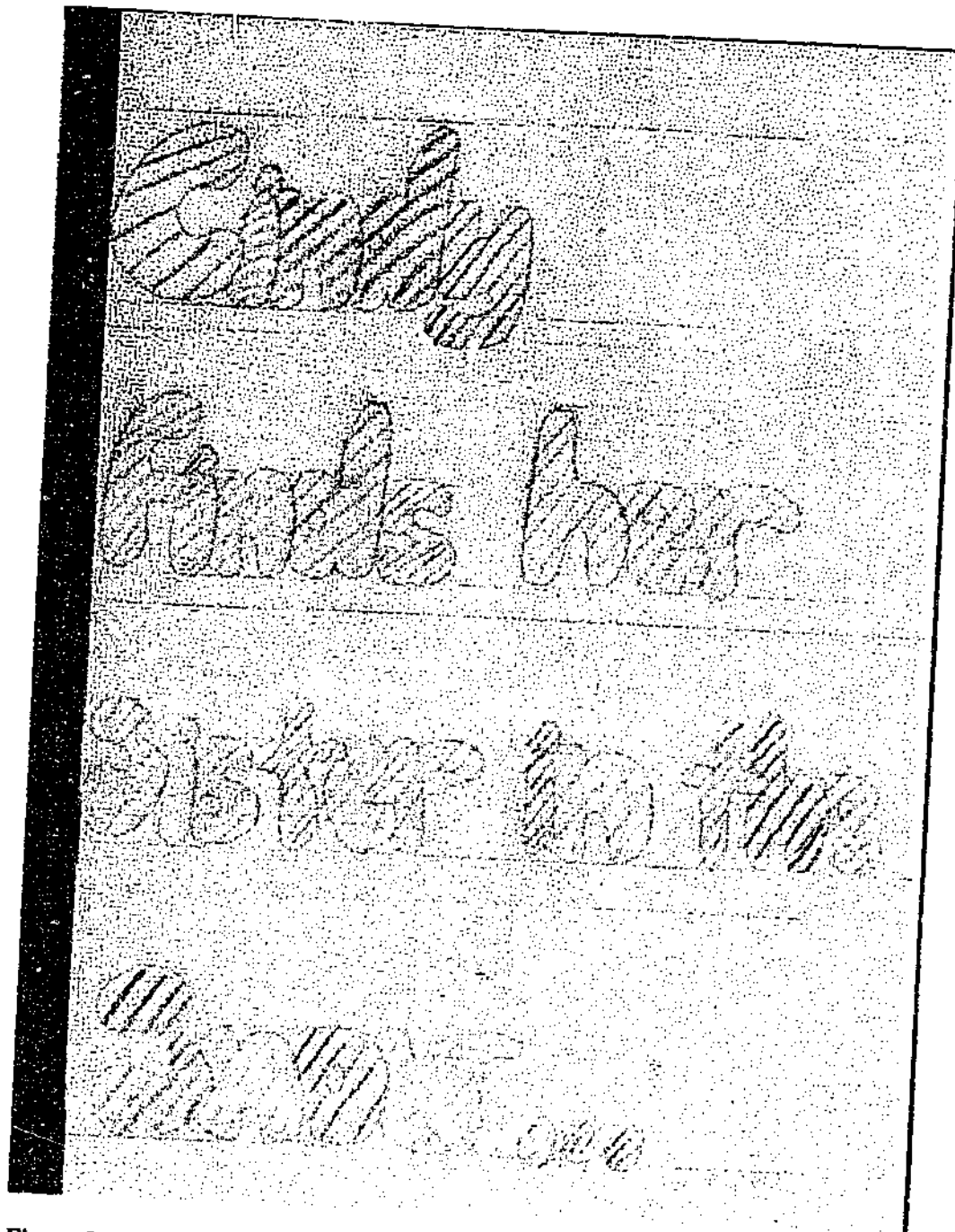


Figure 3 - Tracey Year 3: Cindy Finds Her Sister in the Snow (Cover Page)



*Written by Tracey Villani*

*Published December 15, 1992*

Figure 4 - Tracey Year 3: Cindy Finds Her Sister in the Snow (Title Page)

Cindy packed her bags and went to the snow for a holiday. She went to Snowballs for a year. She got into the car and drove to the snow. It took her two hours to get there. Cindy put on the music, she sang some of her favourite songs.

She was thinking to herself, I am very lucky because I have a year off school and so do my friends.

Cindy arrived at Snowballs, she went to the motel counter and rang the bell.

page 1

Figure 5 - Tracey Year 3: Cindy Finds Her Sister in the Snow (Page 1)

She met a girl who was her sister  
but she didn't know that at the  
time.

You look familiar," said Goldicindere.

So do you," replied Cindy.

What's your name?"

My name is Cindy."

And my name is Goldicindere."

WE ARE SISTER'S!"

Do you want to go out for tea  
tonight?" said Goldicindere with a  
winkle in her eye.

OK," said Cindy with a smile on  
her face.

Figure 6 - Tracey Year 3: Cindy Finds Her Sister in the Snow (Page 3)

# In the yard.

In the yard we see beautiful  
flowers.

I remember when they were little  
baby, seeds.  
tiny

I love seeing the birds fly over  
the garden and into the tree tops  
to build their nests.

When I see my little friend George  
the long summer grass I don't  
be able to see him. I don't see  
him. I don't see him. I don't see him.

I really ballering  
road

Figure 7 - Tracey Year 5: Poem - In the Yard