

**THE WRITING DEVELOPMENT OF
SIX GRADE ONE STUDENTS:
A JOURNEY TO LITERACY**

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DEDICATION

Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow -

Don't walk behind me, I may not lead -

Just walk beside me and be my friend.

To Lome, my friend and life companion who is always there to walk with me.

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this seven-month study was to focus on the writing development of six Grade 1 children. The children, ranging in age from five to seven year, were tracked over a seven-month period, beginning in September and running through to the second reporting period at the end of March. Their abilities ranged from "struggling" to "strong".

Through a case study approach, data was gathered in the form of writing samples, observations and informal interviews. Writing samples were taken from journals, self-chosen stories, stories done at home and brought to school for show and share time messages, entries in a concern book, and some pattern writing activities. Writing instruction followed a curriculum as outlined by Alberta Education. Interviews were typically short conversations, which were mostly student-initiated. Teacher-initiated conversations are identified in the data analysis section of the paper. The data was subjected to a search for patterns. Drawing and the autobiographical nature of students' stories in the early stages were common threads. For the most part, however, no significant patterns were found. Each child appeared to be dealing with his or her understanding of written language in different ways at different times throughout the study. No common sequential pattern of development was found. Other stages of writing development, which appeared somewhat sequential, were not static or fixed and there was considerable overlap between the stages. In fact, some of the children were found to be experimenting with several ideas from different stages of writing development as would be outlined typically in the curriculum. Each child's progress was seen to be unique. There were no similar spelling behaviors exhibited at any one time, and punctuation was dealt with differently by each child. Story development, too, was unique to each child and his/her experience.

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INTRODUCTION

He turned to the flyleaf of the geography and read what he had written there: himself, his name and where he was.

Stephen Dedalus
 Class of Elements
 Clongowes Wood College
 Salins
 County Kildare
 Ireland
 Europe
 The World
 The Universe

That was in his writing: and Fleming one night for a cod had written on the opposite page:

Stephen Dedalus is my name,
 Ireland is my nation.
 Clongowes is my dwellingplace
 And heaven my expectation.

James Joyce

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

Writing can be a profoundly intimate experience about which most of us have mixed feelings. Like Stephen Dedalus, in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, many of us are driven to find meaning in everything that we do. Writing is a way of ordering our thoughts. Lists, as an aid to thinking like the one produced by Stephen Dedalus, have been well documented in the research of Bissex (1980), Clay (1985), Harste, Woodward, Burke (1984). Yet, writing is also a social act. When Fleming, a fellow student, responds indicating his understanding of what young Stephen Dedalus has written, he creates a social bond with the young man by acknowledging and reacting to Stephen's thoughts. In a similar manner, Ken Goodman (1986)

suggests children write what happens to them so they can come to terms with their experiences and share them with others.

Writing can be exciting because people bring with them different experiences, both social and cultural, and, as a result, create different understandings of an event or occurrence in their lives. Still, a lot of people avoid writing. Many of our attitudes about writing, sadly, have been shaped by the instruction that we received as children (Bright, 1995). Some of these attitudes have been positive. For example, in my case, I became a news and feature writer. Other experiences which have been recounted to me recall the painful process of writing about something individuals didn't want to write about, of spelling every word properly and of correcting endless grammar mistakes, and of writing lines as a punishment. The subtle message that some people learn early in their schooling is that writing is hard and it is not enjoyable.

For this reason, the development of writing, particularly in the case of young children, has become an important area of study. I chose to investigate the possibility of there being a fixed sequence of writing development in my Grade 1 class. What I found were children, from different social backgrounds with different interests and experiences, who retained different understandings of what I said and did with writing. I found that "children, like adults, don't follow the linear logic of the textbook." (Perl, 1994, p.xiii)

For this study, I observed and collected data from six students in my Grade 1 class over a seven month period. I chose a case study approach for my research method and data analysis since most of what we know about children's writing is the result of direct observation and collection of writing samples. The case study approach, outlined by Atwell (1986), Bissex (1980), Calkins (1986), Emig (1971), and Graves (1983), has paved the way for better

understanding of the real life interactions that occur in my classroom each day. This study is a story about living with children, about learning to be a guide and about learning to follow.

Children, in general, cannot be described fully in the language of facts. I cannot create a graph to describe creativity, persistence, or autonomy of choice. Consequently I feel a teacher cannot perform as a computer, stuffing children with facts. I believe the teacher must be there as co-learner, working side by side with the children, guiding and learning. It is a view that acknowledges complexities, pluralities, incompleteness, and mystery of teaching and learning. To me, teaching is a work in progress.

Writing involves an "orchestration of several different knowledge bases" taken from endless situations in children's day-to-day dealings with their world. Language itself is a hierarchy of units. Sentences can be seen in terms of phrases, phrases in terms of words, and words in terms of sounds. All these features need attention as a young child builds letters into words, words into phrases, and phrases into sentences and stories (Clay, 1981). Early writing and speech are integrally related. They are both activities that a child plays with and rehearses throughout the day. Because the English language is not completely phonetic and because there seems to be no defined sequence through which all children must pass to learn to read and write, child psychologist and researcher Marie Clay (1981) questions the sequential view of language development. Clay believes a sequenced program is the result of "an adult's logical analysis of the task and not of an observation of what children are doing, and the points at which they, the children, are becoming confused." (p.7)

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The question I wanted to investigate, or, better yet, the quest I wanted to embark on was "How do six Grade 1 children learn to write?" It came at a good time for me because this was my first year teaching Grade 1 in English, and I wanted to learn more about the writing process as it relates to reading. For the purposes of this paper, the writing process can be defined as a way of expressing oneself using recursive steps which include pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. (Calkins, 1986; Harp, 1991). While teaching Grade 1 in French Immersion, I saw the links and interrelationships between oral language and written language. This year, in my English classroom, I have re-examined the way I teach language, reading, and writing. My research of different schools of thought and my own observations in the classroom seem to bear out observations made by Tompkins (1996) who, after reviewing reports from parents, teachers, and researchers, could find no defined sequence for writing development. Originally I also sought a sequential development, but I quickly found there was none that I could detect at the beginning of reading/writing.

THE LITERATURE

The literature on the writing process is vast. Different programs have fallen in and out of favor over the decades as the volume of research on the writing process has continued to expand. For example, in the past few years, more research on language development has indicated that writing is the flip side of reading and literacy. This wasn't the case 20 or 30 years ago when writing was considered the poor cousin to reading. Process writing pioneer Donald Graves dedicated his career to raising the profile of writing in the classroom and among educators in general. Research on writing was well behind that of reading when Graves began publishing his research in the late 1970s. Prior to that time, writing instruction was characterized by a focus on the products of writing. Graves argued that writing was critical to the reading process, particularly in the early stages. He stated: "writing contributes to reading because writing is the making of reading. When a child writes, she has to know the sound-symbol relations inherent in reading. Auditory, visual, and kinesthetic systems are all at work when the child writes and all contribute to the greater skill in reading" (p.8). Even basal reading programs now advocate a process-writing segment to supplement their programs (Winograd, Wixson, and Lipson, 1989).

An examination of the research leads to a greater awareness of different divisions or schools of thought about the development of literacy. The definition of literacy, for the purposes of this paper, is taken from Brian Cambourne's (1988) thoughtful work in the area.

Literacy is a word which describes a whole collection of behaviors, skills, knowledge, processes and attitudes. It has something to do without ability to use language in our negotiations with the world. Often these

negotiations are motivated by our desires to manipulate the world for our own benefit. Reading and writing are two linguistic ways of conducting these negotiations. So are talking, listening, reflecting, and a host of other behaviors related to cognition and critical thinking (p.3).

I have divided the research into five general schools of thought on the reading-writing process: Alphabet-Phonics Approach, Basal Reader Approach, Individualized Reading Approach or Whole Language, Process Writing or Language Experience Approach, and a Combination Approach. This classification, originally posited by Cunningham and Allington (1994), best helped me weave the particularly intimate relationship between reading and writing in the early years of a child's development. It is important to note the different approaches overlap in some areas. Disagreement seems to arise in such areas as the amount and type 'of phonics drill being used. Writing experience, part of the whole language movement, is now widely accepted. The debate continues in the area of balancing process and product.

Alphabet-Phonics Approach

More than 200 phonics programs are currently published and sold in the United States (Winograd, Wixson, & Lipson,1989). Barnhart (1967) insists that phonics, or the science of speech sounds, unlocks the door for most beginners and cannot be ignored. Allington and Walmsley (1995) agree, stating that phonics instruction is important, particularly for early emergent reader/writers and for at risk children. The authors assert that, since understanding the alphabet is a major hurdle facing beginning readers, phonics instruction is important.

Adams (1990), in reviewing decades of phonics-related research, concludes that while some children can figure out the letter-sound system without instruction, direct

teaching of the system speeds up literacy acquisition. Allington and Walmsley (1995) agree with Adams on the benefits of phonics instruction for at-risk children. "The need for explicit phonics instruction is particularly clear for at-risk children who have not had an exposure to reading and writing and thus have had fewer opportunities to figure out how our alphabet system works" (Allington and Walmsley, 1995, p. 139).

Phonics is loosely defined as the way of teaching reading/writing in which individual letters of the alphabet are matched up with the specific sounds of words. Bond and Dykstra (1997) classify phonics instruction as either being synthetic or analytic.

The synthetic method is based up on the belief that the child should be taught certain letter-sound relationships of word elements before beginning to read and then be taught to synthesize word elements learned into whole words. Most older methods of teaching phonics were usually synthetic. The analytic method is based upon the belief that they should be taught whole words and then, through various analytic techniques, be taught to apply letter combinations learned in familiar words to sounding out new words (p.352).

Phonics instruction still remains a popular method in many education systems. Classrooms and resource rooms are filled with different alphabet-phonics workbooks that follow the traditional sequential development of children's reading and writing. University education curriculum laboratories have endless varieties of such materials. They're available and they're still popular because worksheets are easy to implement both in terms of classroom management and time management (Graves, 1978). Graves adds that children are quiet when they do worksheets; they don't walk around the class looking for words; they don't discuss topics or stories with friends; the work is easy to correct, but they don't learn.

Other researchers also disagree with the value of the phonics workbook approach, particularly in regard to writing. "An exploration of the literature on the value of workbooks

and worksheets will reveal that they are practically worthless in terms of learning" (Veatch, 1973, p.9). Veatch adds that workbooks don't teach children to think; instead they learn to fill in the blanks sometimes without even reading. DeFord, Lyons and Pinnel (1991) concur and further criticize the phonics workbook approach because artificial copying tasks or isolated practice activities provide no room for children to think about their tasks or use language in realistic communication situations. However, they go on to say that, when used occasionally, phonics is another way to reach children.

If the present Alberta school curriculum is any indication, the phonics approach is not ignored. The objectives list of almost any of the standardized tests, or the scope and sequence chart of almost any reading series, or even the curricular guidelines of any school district contain the sub-skills view of teaching reading and writing. For example, Derbyshire, Lajeunesse, and Gilbert (1995) outline sub-skills to be taught and to be learned in one Alberta school. They acknowledge the importance of whole language instruction in the school but include sub-skills that are cumulative and taught over the grade levels.

The organization of this document, meant to complement what you are doing in language learning, is such that you should be able to find your own grade level and what you, as a teacher are responsible for presenting to your students. Learner expectations specifically mentioned in the Alberta curriculum include a reference letter and number for easy reference (p. 1).

Allington and Walmsley (1995) agree with this conclusion, stating scope and sequence charts are merely guides to further developing individual reading and writing skills. Other authors note that while skills development plays an important element or role in the reading/writing process, those critical of the sub-skills view "aren't arguing against skills, but

rather how they have been defined, organized and taught" (Winograd, Wixson, & Lipson, 1989, p.2).

Basal Reader Approach

The basal reader approach, which has been a way of providing teachers with access to a number of anthologies children can read, emphasizes learning sight words and reading comprehension. Basal reading programs, containing teachers' resource manuals, workbooks, anthologies, and other supplemental materials, still remain the dominant means of reading instruction in Canada and the United States. However, in Canada a more holistic or "whole language/natural language learning" approach (Cambourne, 1988) is taken by some of the basal reading series that are used. The term holistic refers to the natural way children simultaneously learn about the "forms and functions of language"(Harp, 1991, p. 5). Children learn to read and write in ways that involve them in the real life experiences of reading and writing in order to communicate.

An early researcher, Emmett Betts (1946), identifies three purposes of basal readers: to provide teachers with a basic format for systematic group instruction, to improve student word recognition skills, and to guide students through a reading selection. Over the years, this lesson framework has become known as a directed reading activity (DRA). The basal readers used today have not diverged much from the Betts' description. With a few variations, the DRA consists of pre-reading activities, guided reading activities, post-reading activities, and follow-up writing activities.

Constance Weaver (1988) argues that the basal readers typically reflect a phonics approach because they explicitly teach letter/sound correspondences and phonics rules.

They may reflect a sight word approach in at least three ways: by explicitly teaching basic sight words, by encouraging teachers to pre-teach new vocabulary before the children read a selection, and by simplifying the language of the reading selections... Some basal reading series reflect a so-called linguistic approach in that the selections are written so as to contain a high degree of phonic regularity (p.42-43).

Critics of the basal readers argue that this makes for difficult reading because the simplification of language is so contrived that reading becomes difficult. The focus is placed on developing skills to identify words rather than on strategies for constructing meaning from the stories,

Winograd, Wixson and Lipson (1989) suggest basal readers have had to change somewhat as educators' understanding of the reading process has grown, "The essence of this change has been a shift from the view of reading as a set of hierarchically arranged sub-skills to a more interactive view" (pJ), The authors add that the basal reader approach supports the idea that children learn to read before embarking on the writing process. Initially, the creative writing program, usually called composition, was taught separately from the reading program and consisted of a topic of the teacher's choice which the children were expected to have knowledge of and interest in. During the composition class, emphasis was placed on correct forms, punctuation and spelling rules on the given topics. The resulting end product was paramount. According to Tompkins (1990), early researchers, such as Burrows, Applegate and Stewig, argued for a more natural approach to writing. In response to demands for a more interactive approach, basal reader publishers began to adopt aspects of whole language teaching and improved the quality of the stories and teaching strategies used in their texts (Winograd, Wixson, and Lipson, 1989).

However, these textbooks still reflect the emphasis on reading in the United States

even though there is a strong recognition of writing in the whole language programs. While Canadian classrooms use many of the American texts, this is only part of the program used by teachers who have been schooled in a more holistic approach. An example of this type of text is the Impressions series, published by Holt, Rinehart Inc. and approved by Alberta Education for use in primary classrooms. However, student and teacher resources are under review as part of the development of the Western Canada Protocol for Elementary English Arts. The Canadian edition of Impressions, which was revised in 1989 and called First Impressions, is produced by representatives from different Canadian school districts including some from Alberta. The Grade 1 textbook in this series has a whole language component. Authors J. Booth, D. Booth, Pauli, and Phenix (1984) say their series is based on a whole-language approach (See pages 13 to 18 for description) which introduces children to reading with large units of meaning.

In the teacher's manual for the Impressions series, the authors discuss the writing component of the series, a set of black-line masters that complement and supplement personal writing generated by the child. In order to accommodate the different levels of writing ability in the classroom, the authors have structured activities ranging from drawing to single-word labeling to writing phrases or sentences. The tasks include writing stories, patterning sentences, organizing information, solving word and letter puzzles, and using vocabulary.

Also included is a section for personal writing, generated by the child, in which the authors indirectly suggest a process writing approach be used. Their suggestions for further reading include such references to researchers as Glenda Bissex, Marie Clay, Donald Graves,

and C.A. Temple, individuals considered some of the key people in the Process Writing Approach.

Olson (1987), writing for American teachers, has also compiled activities, teaching suggestions, and a bibliography to supplement basal reader instruction. Her book is correlated with the Ginn Reading Program, the Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich Bookmark Reading Program, and the Scott Foresman Reading Program: An American Foundation. Olson sees the teacher as a guide, helping students acquiring mechanical skills. "The teacher should combine those skills and expand the learning through an integrated literature program" (p.xiii). However, the bibliography of Olson's book contains numerous books on or about gifted children. One implication of this is that the extensions are meant for only the gifted few. Average and at-risk children are still climbing the ladder of skill acquisition to profit from the enrichment activities suggested.

Individualized Reading or Whole Language Approach

With the growth of whole language theory, writing, for the first time, was recognized as an equal partner with reading. However, some proponents of whole language say the approach should not be seen in same light as the phonics or basal reader systems. Whole language is not a series of instructional materials but a way of learning. (Harste, 1984). Newman (1985) agrees, stating that whole language is a philosophical approach, a "state of mind," not an instructional method. Weaver (1990) adds that the term whole language has come to mean different things to different people and finding a definition has proven to be elusive. Atwell (1992) agrees, stating that whole language, like all labels, has been "watered down and trivialized." She says the term is "about kids becoming literate in a whole, real,

context - learning to read by reading, learning to write by writing. The question we need to ask is not "Is it whole language?" but "Is it real language?" (Atwell, 1992, p.48). MacKay (1993) acknowledges the misunderstandings surrounding whole language but argues that experts agree on some common "series of beliefs about learning, teaching, and curriculum." (In Stewin and McCann, 1993, p.483) She says methods, materials, and techniques do not help in the term's definition. MacKay defines whole language as:

A philosophy, inclusive of a set of beliefs about language, learning, and the relationships between and among children and adults, including teachers. These beliefs are rooted in the current thought and research in a variety of disciplines, including philosophy, education, linguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics, sociology, and anthropology. Perhaps, unlike many educational reforms, whole language is grounded in the beliefs and practices of teachers as they live together with children in classrooms (p.484).

Harp (1991) states the true research base for whole language can be traced to the work of Dewey, Batesone, and Eisner. These researchers found children learn best when actively doing and drawing from their real life experiences. Research carried out in the 1970's and 1980's by Cazden, Chomsky, Harste, and Vygotsky into language development tracked the movement in children from immature oral language to highly developed oral language which was found to parallel literacy development. This discovery, along with the work done by Clay (1981), K. Goodman (1970), Yetta Goodman (1991), and Smith (1981), revolutionized the teaching of reading (cited in Harp, 1991). This work helped pave the way for the development of the writing conference approach. Researchers looked at the importance of relating "oral language to written language and of relating reading to writing" (Weaver, 1988, p.44). They emphasized building upon the language and experiences of the child so that meaning can be derived from a story.

Many Canadian provinces, including Alberta, have followed the lead set by Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand to encourage whole language classrooms (Goodman, 1986; Stewin and McCann, 1993; Weaver, 1988). MacKay (1993) writes provinces, such as Alberta, British Columbia, Quebec, and Nova Scotia, have innovative models of whole language education. She cites a concern, however, about teachers' "lack of a strong theoretical base upon which to anchor their practice" (MacKay, 1993, p.499).

Whole language was first introduced in Canada by Frank Smith and Ken Goodman, and popularized by the work of such people as Marlene and Robert McCracken in the 1970s. For most classroom teachers the McCracken name is synonymous with whole language teaching. Their thematic units are commonly found and used in many Canadian classrooms. In 1972, M. McCracken and R. McCracken questioned the traditional sequence of teaching reading then writing as the greatest motivation for the greatest learning. They recommended instead that a natural learning approach be used, using experiential learning through good literature. Later, in 1979, the McCrackens further expanded their theory by focusing on fitting reading and writing processes to children's thought processes. They argued that teaching should not focus so heavily on skills and lists that children would be unable to understand the functions of language.

Language experience is a process that attempts to bring together speaking, listening, reading, and writing as a unit. To help children more fully understand the use of language, the McCrackens outlined the following sequence in which language skills could be taught first in kindergarten and primary grades.

- The oral development of ideas both through reading and the language of literature and discussion, using the home dialect.
- At the primary level, the teacher takes dictation as the child describes the picture.
- The child begins independent writing using ideas, word banks, sentence structures and invented spelling.
- The child reads familiar material.
- The child reads unfamiliar material.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) supports this natural approach to learning, a method she used in teaching Maori children to learn English. She developed the concept of key word vocabulary whereby she gave her students their special key words. M. McCracken and R. McCracken (1987) identify these key words as ideas that are "labeled by words that are in the child's mind; they are concepts about which he wants to talk, think, and learn more" (p. 94).

The McCrackens (1993) describe language acquisition as a natural process that is not linear. They further suggest that attempts to make language acquisition linear are self-defeating and in fact cause much of the failure to learn to read and write. However, proponents of the Whole Language method have not completely ignored skills development. In 1996, the McCrackens applied their philosophy to spelling in a book entitled Spelling through Phonics. They outline their method of progressing from invented or temporary spelling to standard spelling. They do not, however, exclude phonics, alleviating this perceived weakness by drawing on strategies that integrate spelling into meaningful writing activities as children often fail to carry over their memorized spelling word lists into their

writing. They argue that "children learn standard spelling by using words in their writing, which is continuously informed by their reading and talking" (p. 14).

Numerous books on the inclusion of skills instruction in a whole language program have been published. Tompkins (1997) proposes a literacy program that includes the following components aimed at "breaking the code" for children: phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling. She suggests that the spelling of young children changes to reflect their growing skills in phonics and spelling patterns. While she divides the stages of writing into three activities, she points out they are "not linear or cyclical." Students personalize the process to meet their own needs. Writing is "recursive and the writer jumps back and forth among the activities. These activities include pre-writing, writing, and post-writing" (Tompkins, 1990, p.70).

Tompkins (1990) integrates much of the best in the whole language experience teaching to deal with the process and content of children's writing. She claims that research shows that looking at what writers do when they write is as important as the finished product. In a similar vein, Shanahan (1997) says the link between reading and writing is far more important for young children than it is for older students.

Apparently, the developmental ties of reading and writing are sufficiently similar that they can be combined successfully, though in different ways, throughout literacy education. Young children's invented spelling, for example, can be a powerful impact on their word recognition ability. Clarke (1988), thought the cross-discipline benefits of this activity are likely to dissipate as children become more proficient in word recognition (for most this occurs by about second or third grade), (p. 14)

Spelling is an issue that has contributed to the development of a rather jaundiced view of whole language programs. It is an important sub-topic to discuss because it is

fundamental to the process-product debate. Because students were encouraged to write and communicate, spelling, grammar, and punctuation fell by the wayside, according to some parents and administrators.

Bean and Bouffler (1987) attempt to alleviate this perceived weakness by drawing on strategies that integrate spelling into meaningful writing activities. They argue that "children learn standard spelling by using words in their writing, which is continuously informed by their reading and talking"(p.14). In another study, Bean and Bouffler (1991) describe developmental behaviors of Grade 3 spellers, linking phonetic, visual, and semantic cues.

Sitton (1995) has developed spelling lists of high frequency words, complete with pre-tests and post-tests, to help children overcome spelling problems. This is an attempt to help children move away from invented spelling as some students have difficulty growing out of this stage. Sitton also suggests activities to reinforce practice and writing instruction.

Process Writing/Conference Approach

Teaching young children to write has undergone a further revolution, prompted by Donald Graves (1975, 1983) and the process writing approach. Process writing, part of the whole language movement, encourages children to choose their writing topics, then draft and redraft their work with the goal of publication. The teacher acts as a facilitator, who helps the children correct their own work. Reading and writing occur concurrently with writing being a crucial component at the early stages of beginning literacy. The primary premise supporting this approach is the view that children learn best when they are reading their own

work. As with whole language, Lesley Faigly (cited in Perl, 1994) argues that the perceptions of the writing process vary from person to person.

Janet Emig (1971) was the first to use the case study method to study the writing of her Grade 12 class. Graves (1975) expanded the method to study the writing of primary school children. Nancy Atwell (1987) and Lucy Calkins, (1986) are also known for similar work in the area of establishing a writing workshop with their students. Graves and Atwell urge teachers to leave the security of prepared story starters and allow students to work daily on their own self-chosen stories.

Temple, C, Nathan, Temple, F. and Bum's (1993) report the process approach is now widely accepted as teachers have accepted this wisdom of teaching reading/writing together. They cite hundreds of samples of children's writing and track their progress from scribbles to fluent, conventional writing. The authors also propose a link between oral and written language, the history of writing, and the writing strategies children use.

Research and experience of teaching and parenting have shown a remarkable thing. Even when they are not taught about writing, most children make essentially the same discoveries about it, in essentially the same order. . . It is not mere coincidence. Children, it seems, have a unique biologic endowment that disposes them to learn to talk. Given the proper circumstances, it is likely that this language - learning facility extends to the learning of written language as well (p. 2).

Proponents of the process writing approach also challenge the foundations of the phonics/basal reader approach. Graves (1982) has attacked the "superstition" that children must learn to read before being allowed to write. "Ninety per cent of children come to school believing they can write, whereas only 15 per cent believe they can read" (Graves, 1982, p.9). Graves has also attempted to develop a "sense of sequences in which children

learn to write to see how much a child's development influences the writing process (Graves, 1982, p.34). Although he did identify a tentative sequence, he dropped the stages of development.

Like Graves, Carl Bereiter also found that the children he studied did not master any of the identified skill systems in any particular order or that they were linked to the Piagetian stages of cognitive development (cited in Newkirk, 1989). It had generally been assumed that children learn to use language in sequence - learning to listen and talk before they come to school, to read in the elementary grades and then to write in middle school and high school. Listening was the first language mode to develop, and talking followed soon after. However Carol Chomsky (1971) and other researchers have observed young children experimenting with writing earlier than with reading. Chomsky was one of the first to question the reading/writing order of instruction.

If we concede that word recognition or even just the sounding out of words, appears so much more difficult for children than composing words, why do our reading programs as a matter of course expect children to deal with it first? The natural order is writing first, then reading what you have written. To expect a child to read, as a first step, what someone else has written is backwards, an artificial imposition that denies the child an active part in the whole process. Moreover, it takes the fun out of it" (Chomsky, 1972, p. 120).

Learning occurs simultaneously as children integrate the language they hear, the words they see, and the words they use. Allowed to "trust their own ears and their own judgements," many children just blossom in their search for patterns as they go from invented spelling to standard spelling (Chomsky, 1971).

Clinical child psychologist Marie Clay (1981) proposes that a process of writing development starts well before children enter school and receive formal instruction in

reading and writing. She demonstrates that children's "non-conventional "scribbling" is important to writing development and, that writing, particularly at the early stages, is central to the reading-writing process.

For a preliminary period, creative writing activities appear to be an important complement to a reading program. In the child's early contact with written language, writing behaviors seem to play the role of organizers of reading behaviors. Writing is not the only means of expressing ideas in written language . . . but it does appear to help the child come to grips with learning to attend to the significant details of written language (Clay, 1981, p.3).

However, like Graves, Clay has been unable to find a defined sequence in the acquisition of knowledge. "A simplification achieved by dealing firstly with letters, then with words, and finally with word groups may be easy for teachers to understand but children learn at all levels at once" (Clay, 1981, p. 19). In this respect, Clay agrees with authors such as Bissex, (1980), Calkins (1986), and Graves (1978). She notes:

The insights the child must gain relate to the arbitrary conventions by which our speech is recorded and it is possible to imagine that the learning of these conventions may be approached from a variety of directions. Eventually, as each convention is mastered the children acquire a common fund of concepts but the point of entry and the path of progress may be different for any two children. Chance experiences may produce new insights at any time which alter the entire learned pattern (Clay, 1981, p.7).

Clay, like Goodman (1982), views errors as an interesting route children take in the writing process. The errors could mean new areas the children may be reaching out to master or a consistently troublesome area preventing the child from moving on in his/her journey.

Clay (1993) is also adamant that reading and writing are intrinsically connected.

The child who has failed to read is often also struggling to write stories. Often remedial lessons exclude the teaching of writing as this is seen either as some extension that comes after reading or as a different subject.

An alternative view sees both reading and writing in the early acquisition stage as contributing to learning about print. (They are separated by educators for timetables and curricula.) A case can be made for the theory that learning to write letters, words, and sentences actually helps the child to make visual discriminations of detail in print that he will use in his reading (p. 10-11).

Clay's work has had a great impact on reading recovery programs in North America. For example, DeFord, Lyons, and Pinnell (1991) implemented a pilot project, based on Clay's work, in the Columbus, Ohio public school system. The project was based on the fundamental premise of the importance of the writing process.

Because young children must learn to balance the act of writing (a very slow process) and the conventions of print with their thoughts and intentions (which are very rapid), teachers must constantly help the beginning writer focus inward (learning how print operates) and outward (how stories and messages work and will be received). The only way to accomplish this is to make the writing events purposeful, shared and used over time. In this way writing is an integral part of the reading program as well as a communication process children learn about as they write (DeFord, Lyons, Pinnell, 1991, p. 88).

Bissex (1980) also studied the reading/writing relationship, using a case study approach. She followed her son's language development from the age of five to the age of eleven. Her conclusions identify the functional and communicative aspects of children's writing and the movement from invented to conventional spelling. Bissex concludes:

Learning to spell is a matter of knowledge, not habit. Kids are trying to figure out the rules. Children are already abstracting at two-years-old. I have a sense learning starts globally. With babbling, kids speak globally rather than by words. They don't have a system building up from small units to bigger ones. A way to program a machine is not a way to teach a child (cited in Walsh, 1982, p.38).

Newman (1985) examined the experimentation and play that go into early

childhood writing. She concludes "Learning to read and write is a process of experiencing language. There is no end product. Fluency is not some state that is finally attained; we are all continually arriving. Writing develops in many directions at once" (p.71).

Butler and Turbill (1987) also stress the importance of writing in the reading process. They conclude that the reading and writing processes are comparable at each stage with the goal being to construct meaning. The writing process involves the continuous reading and rereading of material.

Learners who regard themselves as writers will read differently from those who do not write. As they read, they will not only appreciate the conventions and elements of style used by other writers but will actively seek to learn from them. Furthermore, comprehension is thereby greatly enhanced. Not only do they read for meaning, they see beyond that and "befriend" the author (Butler & Turbill, 1987, p. 16).

Another significant change in this approach has been the shift from content to process. In the past, researchers of writing development conducted their studies in lab-like situations, much like the condition of tests. "Artificial skill sequences turn schools into mazes for children to stumble through," says Goodman (1986, p.9). These studies reflected the behaviorist thinking of the times. They identified grammar points, spelling errors, and elements of style. Interest was in evaluating the finished product. However, when Graves (1978) turned away from analyzing product to looking at the process of writing, he found subtle shifts in the writing patterns of young children. He focused on what children did when they wrote and wondered if their behaviors changed during the writing process. Calkins (1986) agrees:

Now, instead of asking only, "What are the forms of good writing?", many teachers and researchers ask, "What processes do writers use?"

What do children do when they write and how do these behaviors change as they grow older?" and "How do the behaviors of skilled and unskilled writers differ? (p. 14).

Finally, Graves and other researchers stress the importance of remembering that children are not blank slates. They do have knowledge of the world that can be used as a basis in the language learning process. Harste, Burke, and Woodward (1983) researched the activities of three-, four-, five-, and six-year-old children from different socioeconomic backgrounds to determine what scribbling and play reading show about their knowledge about language and the strategies they use to develop their writing and reading. The authors conclude the traditional school "creative writing" assignments ignore what children already know about the world.

Graves (1978) argues that both coercive (worksheets) and the permissive (open but without structure) approaches to writing are "contemptuous" of children. He adds, writing is an active process rather than a passive one where students read about writing or fill in the blanks. In the past, writing was seen as a method of "moral development, not an essential mode of communication" (Graves, 1978, p. 18).

After examining more than 100 pieces of children's writings and drawings, Newkirk (1989) concludes that the conventional views of writing development underestimate children's competence at analytic writing. His view is a semiotic one, or postmodern view, where the person assigns meaning to objects, gestures, and events from a personal perspective. He argues that the traditional conceptions of development are inadequate because "they overstate the difference between the young and the older learner" (Newkirk, 1989, p.2).

In the last decade, several shifts have contributed to the move to another type of research that builds on the findings of Emig, Graves, and others. Writing is no longer considered an individual activity but a social and cultural one incorporating many voices. Researchers are no longer anonymous faces ticking off the spelling mistakes or structural mistakes in a composition. They interact with their subjects and they explain their biases in the introductions of their research. Perl (1994) sees this shift in the nature and form of research as a move to a broader social reality:

Finally the forms in which we tell of our discoveries, in which we report the findings of our research expand. Stories, portraits, tales, and narrative accounts begin to supplant the more traditional reports of research as we move closer to understanding that what we are trying to describe may not be the truths of laboratory science but the truths of living and shaping and creating - the truths of being human (p.xvi).

Combination Approach

This approach, coined by Allington and Walmsley (1995), includes all the different routes needed to meet children's learning styles. It is an approach some researchers say might help deal with the literacy-writing problem which continues today. "While it is not possible to clearly determine which children will learn best with what approach, it is clear when a teacher provides more routes to the goal of literacy, more children will find a route to take them there" (Hall, Prevatte & Cunningham, 1994, p. 16).

Cunningham and Allington (1995) identify a number of causes of the students' failure to read and write. They propose that a number of the nation's social problems can be traced to children who do not get a successful start with literacy. There is no "cure-all" to help those who find reading and writing an elusive goal, but a combination or balanced

approach offering children meaningful reading-writing activities is the blueprint they offer. The authors studied the thinking processes that "skilled" readers and writers use in order to accelerate learning of children who find learning to read and write difficult.

Allington and Walmsley (1995) examined the different approaches to teaching reading and writing to identify the tools that get the job done - developing literacy in children. They cite the conclusions of an U.S. government study, done in the 1960s, seeking to find the best approach to beginning reading. That research was inconclusive.

Virtually every approach had good results somewhere and poor results somewhere else. How well the teacher carries out the approach seemed to be the major determinant of how well an approach worked. Some teachers use what researchers call "combination" approaches, such as language experience and basal, or phonics and literature, or literature and writing. The study concludes that, in general, combination approaches work better than any single approach (Allington and Walmsley, 1995, p. 140).

The authors also conclude that "children - especially if they are at risk - need a rich variety of reading and writing experiences as well as some direct instruction in letter-sound patterns" (Allington and Walmsley, 1995, p. 140). They view writing as "an approach to reading", allowing children to figure out reading from the "inside out."

As children write, they spell words they see and recognize in their writing. Even when they can't spell a word perfectly, they try to sound it out to spell it and actually put to use whatever phonics they have learned.. Clarke (1988) found that encouraging invented spelling was especially helpful to children who came to school with lower levels of reading and writing ability. Children who write are more avid and more sensitive readers (Allington and Walmsley, 1995, p. 139).

The authors state basal readers have their place in the classroom. The basal readers' major purpose is to teach important comprehension skills and strategies as well as develop word knowledge, vocabulary, listening, and speaking skills. However, part of this

combination approach includes self-selected literature, a writing block, and a working-with-words block.

Basals teach both phonics and comprehension and, while they differ in their emphasis, basals have in common the gradually increasing levels of difficulty and the emphasis on teacher-guided reading of short selections. . . . Basal instruction provides teachers with multiple copies of reading material whose difficulty level is gradually increased, which the teacher can use to guide children's comprehension and strategy development. Basals contain a wide variety of all types of literature, children are exposed to many genres and topics they might miss if all their reading was self-selected (Allington and Walmsley, 1995, p. 139).

In the end, these authors advocate the combination approach to reach all students. They argue that "the question of which method is best cannot be answered, but it is the wrong question. Each method has its undeniable strengths" (Allington and Walmsley, 1995, p. 139). They cite the work of Clay, DeFord, Lyons, and Pinnell in encouraging the development of good literacy programs, particularly for at-risk students. Key to this debate is the work done by Bond and Dykstra (1997). The results of their study indicate that programs are not equally effective in all situations and that "combination approaches" are superior to any single approach used in the classroom.

This conclusion seems to be consistent with the one advocated by the Western Canadian Protocol for Elementary English Arts. In part, the Western Protocol states:

By using effective reading strategies, students construct meaning and develop thoughtful and critical interpretations of a variety of texts. Writing enables students to explore, shape, and clarify their thoughts, and to communicate them to others. By using effective writing strategies, they discover and refine ideas and compose and revise with increasing confidence and skill (Alberta Education et. al, 1996, p.3).

Canadian researchers in the whole language movement tend to see literacy in a more holistic manner than do their counterparts in the United States. However, the sub-skills

approach to teaching is not ignored. The bibliography, at the back of the protocol, however, appears to place importance on combination approaches with equal emphasis on process and product. The bibliography is a Who's Who in language education and writing, including Allington, Atwell, Britton, Calkins, Clay, Goodman, Graves, Harste, Holdaway, Newkirk, and Walmsley. It appears to reinforce the idea that teachers need to reach a balance in producing a child-centered, natural approach without forgetting basic curricular requirements. Newkirk (1989), who is cited in the Protocol, attempts to deal with this central issue and agrees that there is a need for some general ordering principles even if a child-centered education is the main goal. "While any curriculum hopes to engage the interests of children none can be solely defined by those interests" (Newkirk, 1989, p. 14). Newkirk cites the work of John Dewey who saw the excesses of both child-centered education and skills-based education.

(John) Dewey recognized this problem when he wrote in 1902: It will do harm if child-study leaves in the popular mind the impression that a child of a given age has a positive equipment of purposes and interests to be cultivated as they stand. . . . As the most mature member of the group, (the teacher) has a particular responsibility for the conduct of the interactions and intercommunications which are the very life of a group as community. . . .The tendency to exclude the teacher from a positive leading share in the direction of the activities of the community of which he is a member is another instance of reaction from one extreme to another (Newkirk, 1989, p. 14).

This need for balancing process with the end product mirrors the approach advocated at a Lethbridge, Alberta school by Derbyshire, Lajeunesse, and Gilbert (1995) in their document designed to complement the use of whole language instruction methods used at a Southern Alberta school.

This document has isolated the learner expectations for the writing component of the language learning curriculum from Alberta Education. The whole language teaching approach works well in many situations. Our experience has shown, however, that we as teachers often slide over or completely miss essential skills teaching in the whole language approach. By examining just the writing components, we have discovered areas in the curriculum that are very vague and other specifics that we had not noticed (p.1).

Based on my review of the literature in early reading and writing instruction, I decided to pursue my interest in the writing development of young children. Having taught ECS and Grade I French Immersion for eight years, I found the move to an English Grade 1 classroom a new and engaging challenge for me. I was dealing with the development of oral language in French Immersion, so the move to the English stream with native speakers with varying degrees of oral language development was an exciting transition for me as a teacher. This group of children, with different levels of language skills, entered my classroom wanting to read and write. My question "How do six grade 1 children learn to write?" was very timely. It has proven to be indeed the quest that I had hoped it to be.

THE METHODOLOGY

My research project is the story of the journey taken by 19 Grade 1 children to learn about writing. They are all on different paths in the writing process. The 11 boys and 8 girls have numerous interests, likes, and dislikes. They are children who enjoy discussing their deeds and misdeeds. There is very little that is private in my class. We share each other's joys, sorrows, successes, frustrations, victories, and humiliations.

In my classroom, there are opportunities for shared writing, journal writing, independent story workshop, and printing. Included in this global picture is phonics instruction using puppets and songs and actions. I consider this to be a balanced program. In January, I added the instruction of spelling of high frequency words. As a result, the students' writing samples are filled with notes and messages to me. Their writing samples and their conversations also tell the story of their efforts to communicate and tell me what they are thinking and feeling. Though thoroughly spontaneous, their learning is crowded with complex activity, something Clay (1979) noted with the students she studied.

The materials we use include notebooks and a variety of different colored papers in various shapes and sizes, class books from the McCracken series and books from the school library as well as two sets of basal readers from the Impressions and Networks series (Nelson Canada, 1984). At the classroom entrance, beside the calendar, is a Concern/Suggestion book where children can write about their problems in class and on the playground. There is also a message board on which the children write notes to each other and to me. The writing activities are part and parcel of my reading/comprehension program.

When I started the year, I began with journal and story starters where the children filled in the blanks. We did a lot of pattern writing. We made books about Fall, Winter, and Halloween. The children also created books entitled What I want to be when I grow up. After researching about writing in English and attending a conference in Calgary on developing reading/writing in the Grade 1 classroom, I developed a process writing workshop for my children in November. Then I established a word wall message center and an ongoing writer's workshop.

Writing plays an important part in developing reading behavior, something that I found when I started this research project. For example, I began noticing clearly in January the work of my reluctant readers was showing that writing provided the jump start they needed to get going. The examples I use in this paper tell the story of six children - four boys and two girls - whose ages range from five to seven years. Brad and Kristi are strong; Darcy and Errol are average; Jessica and Shayden are struggling. I make this call based on their reading and writing ability and their overall behavior.

My writing samples were gathered over a seven-month period from the first day of school to the end of March. My analysis has been based on the students' first journal entries, stories written in January and notes, cards, and other informal writing samples gathered throughout the study period.

Informal interviews, usually student-initiated, were held throughout the study period. The interviews served to facilitate the writing process and to clarify the students' perceptions of writing, and their own performance. These interviews also served as a form of revision. Typically the children read their stories to me, made oral corrections, and proffered suggestions

about how they could further develop their stories. This information provided me with insight into the differences between their oral and written performance, providing me with information as to what was giving them difficulty.

I am presenting the various writing samples in a retrospective way, looking back on progress the children have made and trying to understand the course of their growth and development. I offer records of the children's drawings, writing, and talk. They are subdivided under themes I have chosen as areas of interest and focal points for my analysis. They include the relationship between drawings and print, spelling, sentence structure, errors or miscues, and story content. These themes were selected because they are central to the writing development of young children.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Drawings and Print

Children's pictures cover the walls of my classroom. Aside from the alphabet and the odd poster, the educational and display items are projects created by the class. At first glance, it looks like all this class does is art. But the children are quick to point out to any visitor that the accordion pumpkins, displaying all the different emotions, were really patterning or symmetry in math, health, and language arts. The same holds true for the book outlining the children's Halloween costumes. In the first grade, particularly in September and October, art and drawing are the children's prime vehicles for communicating. Children's writing grows out of their talk and drawing. It is quite literally their talk, written or drawn, as Tompkins (1997) has suggested.

Pictures are the children's way of composing their thoughts. They are important in the pre-writing and drafting stages of writing. Research on the writing processes of young children confirms the relationship between writing and drawing. Graves states that "rehearsal is an especially important part of the composing process because most six-year-old children are present tense oriented and cannot plan a piece of writing until they sit down with paper in front of them" (See Walsh, 1982, p.47). The picture leads them into writing. When children draw before they write, the drawing serves to help them sort out what they want to say. The letter-like scribbles that develop from their drawing eventually become letters and finally words, phrases and sentences.

A different opinion is offered by Newkirk (1989) who says children's drawing is more than just a rehearsal mechanism.

The idea of drawing-as-rehearsal is just one more example of the word-centred view that reigns in our educational system. The child's drawing is reduced to a preliminary, a kind of pre-writing, rather than being accepted as an important communicative symbol system in its own right (p.37).

Newkirk (1989) agrees further with Ann Dyson-Haas' (1989) expression that children are "symbol weaving, constantly shifting among mutually supporting systems of representation - talking, drawing, and, in a minimal way, producing written text" (In Newkirk, 1989, p.37).

Darcy, Jessica, and Shayden are Grade 1 students who have been assisted towards writing by my use of drawing and talking as complementary communication media in the writing process. This approach is championed by Turbill (1983) who wrote: "the teacher's role is significant, first in supporting the child's efforts to draw/write, while accepting all attempts to spell, and, second, in serving as a responsive listener, who asks questions that help the child to think out the moves in the story" (p.48)

Six-year-old Darcy comes from a print-poor home where the family does not read. His older brother, Shawn, is in Grade 2 and has experienced reading/writing difficulties. I originally thought Darcy would be having some problems because of his speech difficulties. I requested his parents check out his adenoids. The doctor said his adenoids could remain for awhile because his hearing was not affected. Darcy loves to talk and share his ideas and experiences, but he is hard to understand as he talks "as if he has marbles in his mouth". Every time he writes, Darcy tells me what he is going to write. When he brings his work to me, it may be a line or two of print. His writings do not sound conversational. As Graves (1978, p.4) says, "only advanced

writers can make writing sound like speech." But Graves goes on to describe ways in which the writing of young children who have not yet learned many of the conventions of print is close to speech:

When children first write, they treat writing as speech. They draw to supply context for the subject, run words together, spell words as they sound, let words run around the page, speak out loud when they write, blacken in letters, use capitals and exclamation points liberally (Graves, 1980, p. 38).

Darcy's first journal entry in September was the scribbled drawing, shown in Sample 1, in which I wrote the words down for him. He tried to communicate and talk about his work and the details are filled in with the pictures he tried to paint with his words. He was following a pattern described by Temple, C, Nathan, Temple, F. and Burris (1993) who found young children compose long before they write.



Sample 1. Darcy's September journal entry.

Graves found drawing and speaking to be the means by which children gain control in the transition from speech to writing. "Children need to hear and to see what they mean. They control their writing through drawing and speaking as they write and in discussing the writing with friends and the teacher. Writing is more speech than writing" (See, Walshe, 1982, p.23).

Darcy wants to be a fireman. He drew the picture in Sample 2 for his career day book

in early November. Darcy drew a big red fire truck and boldly wrote in the words that he found



Sample 2. Darcy's fire truck, November.

on a list we brain-stormed on the blackboard. He didn't want to hand in the picture because he said there were a few more things he had to put in. Darcy told me about how he loves to put out fires and how he wants to drive those big red trucks. It was the most detail he had produced

since the beginning of the year.

His rainbow book, made in January, was a source of great pride and he told me about it.

The idea was taken from one of the readers but Darcy loved the story and made it his own.

When he read it to the class, someone pointed out it looked a lot like the story in the reader.

Darcy then discussed the differences between the story in the reader and his own. At this stage he had to discuss his stories with someone, or he didn't write at all. He earnestly discussed his story several times, adding more

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Sample 3. Darcy's penguin story,

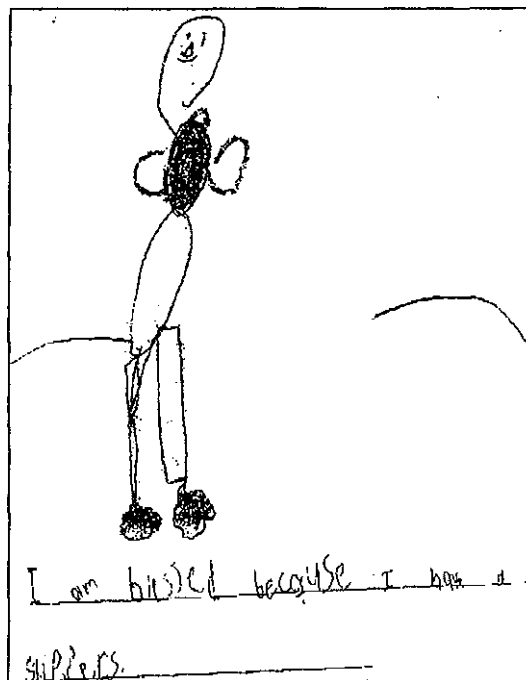
November
 detail every time. His fine motor skills were still weak, but he was interested in writing and communicating.

In his penguin story (Sample 3), written at the end of February, Darcy put capital letters at the beginning of each sentence and periods at the end of three lines. He spelled many words correctly, having gone to a reader and looked up most of the words. However, he sounded out words like basketball and points. In his penguin picture, which was cut out with scissors, Darcy did not provide as much detail because his writing was increasing in detail. This development is described by Calkins (1986) who says "speech - like drawing - provides a scaffolding within which text is constructed. As children's writing becomes more fluent the gap between their speech and their writing decreases" (p. 58).

In February Kristi, another student in my sample, reached a point where she did not want to draw a picture for a story she was writing during free time, indicating that she no longer needed the support of drawing. This appears to support Calkins' (1986) conclusion that there is no hard and fast rule for every child, and no solution works forever

We can introduce drawing as a form of rehearsal, but then we must watch for signs indicating whether drawing is extending or limiting the child's writing(p.55).

Darcy didn't like to take big risks. He would rather find words in a book than sound them out and put them on paper. In March, Darcy wrote a story about his slippers. He wrote

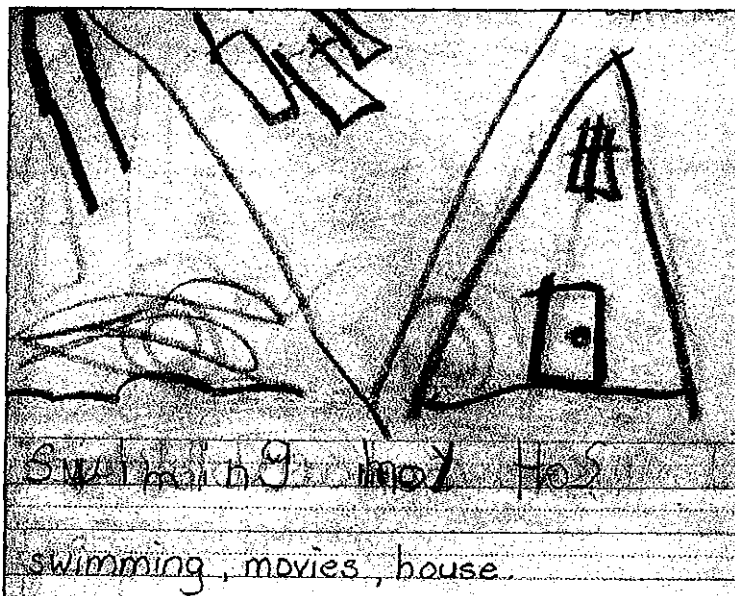


Sample 4. Darcy's slippers, March

he was blessed because he had slippers. As seen in Sample 4, he drew himself wearing his

favorite slippers and came to tell me how soft and cozy it felt to put his toes in those slippers. The details on the face and slippers were the most Darcy had ever put into his drawing. While he was drawing the slippers, he brought me red, orange, and yellow crayons. These colors, he told me, were identical to his real slippers. The next day, Darcy brought them in to show the class. The slippers were made to look like Tigger from Winnie the Pooh. We learned this was his favorite story. He told us he ran faster and could jump higher when he was wearing these slippers. I suggested this might be a good adventure story him to write.

Jessica turned seven in September and was repeating Grade 1. Although she was struggling



Sample 5. Jessica's September journal entry

in both reading and writing, she made amazing progress after she started writing stories in her free time. Jessica started school knowing that writing words in a straight line is important. Her first journal entry in September, shown in Sample 5, documents this knowledge. However, she

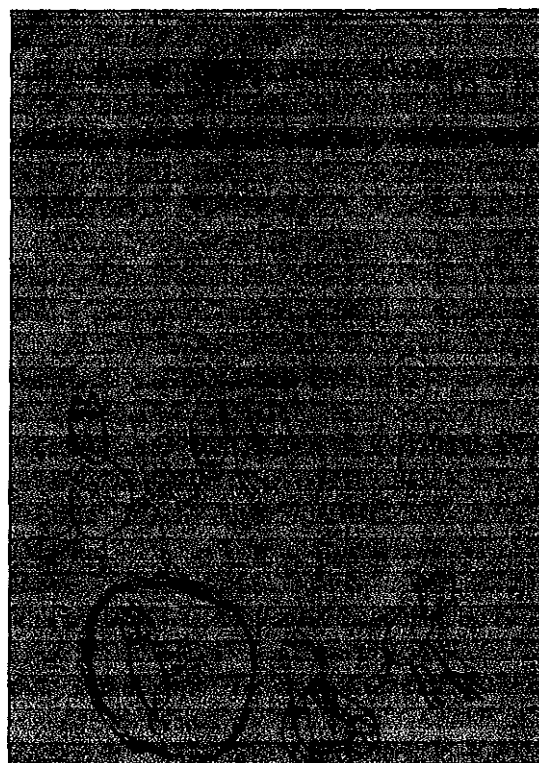
occasionally ignored spaces

between words. For this activity, Jessica copied some words from the board and tried to sound out others. Her picture shows an interest in detail as she told me about her trips over the summer. Most of the meaning is carried by her picture where she is seen swimming and at home. Jessica's use of drawing once again demonstrates Calkins' (1986) assertion that children use pictures as

a framework for their stories. There was directionality in this sample and the knowledge that letters, in some recurrent pattern, make words and maybe even sentences.

Jessica loves to write about cats and kittens. For Halloween, Jessica wrote that she would dress up as a cat. She concentrated her efforts on drawing the cat going from house to house with a big black bag. The cat had a smile and was walking on two feet. Jessica did contour drawings mostly, seldom coloring the clothes or filling in the details.

After Halloween, Jessica wrote two more books about cats. Writing for Jessica had been difficult until the cat book. Her writing progressed further in January when she stumbled upon a sentence frame that she wanted to try. The frame "I like . . ." opened up endless possibilities for her. This discovery is discussed by Clay (1981) who states that when a child "realizes that letter elements recur in patterns we get lots of progress"(p.27). Jessica went on to write another book about her cats. She wrote:




Sample 6. Jessica's cat story, January

"My cats are black and orange and I love dog."

She used a capital letter at the beginning of her sentence and added a few more throughout her story. Many of the words she copied from a reader, but Jessica maintained the sentence frame of "I Like" and added "My cats". . . . On the second page of her cat book, shown in Sample 6, Jessica wrote "I love cat and katinsn do you." She had spaces and some conventional spelling

such as "I, love, cat, and, do, and you". This was a continuation of the sentence frame "I like" or "I love". However, she added a question, "do you", demonstrating an awareness of audience or, at the very least, an awareness of me, the teacher, because she came to talk to me about her cats. Jessica's cat drawing in Sample 6 demonstrates what Calkins (1986) describes as a breakthrough into narrative because the cats are engaged in various activities such as sleeping, eating, sitting, and walk. However, unlike the children in Calkins' study, Jessica was as yet unable to make a similar transition to narrative in her writing. She continued to stay with the attribute books where there was no sequence of events or actions that develop the story line. Each sentence in her book could have been the last one.

A sociable child, Jessica communicates through speech and drawing. She likes to make a list of things she likes, colors she likes, animals she likes. In March, when Jessica was ill with



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Sample 7. Jessica's measles journal entry, March

the measles, her journal described how she felt. In Sample 7, her writing demonstrated some phonemic awareness of initial and end consonants but vowels remained a challenge. Her writing also contained a letter reversal in the word "book".

By March, Jessica had started to view writing as a means of communication. The class created a book compiled of one-

page well wishes that Jessica read and reread. She mentioned this book several times in succeeding weeks, indicating she had assimilated the messages, thus seeing the printed word as communication and as a social exchange. Jessica had learned how black and white squiggles on a paper convey social relationships, a development described by Dyson-Haas (1989).

Six-year-old Shayden wrote something different in his first journal entry in September.

During his summer holidays Shayden wrote .

"I saw an octopus." To represent this message Shayden made three squiggles vaguely resembling letters as shown in Sample 8. Shayden started school eager to learn to write. He knew letters make words and that they proceed in a linear fashion, but he had trouble with directionality. His drawings were circular squiggles that



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Sample 8. Shayden's September journal

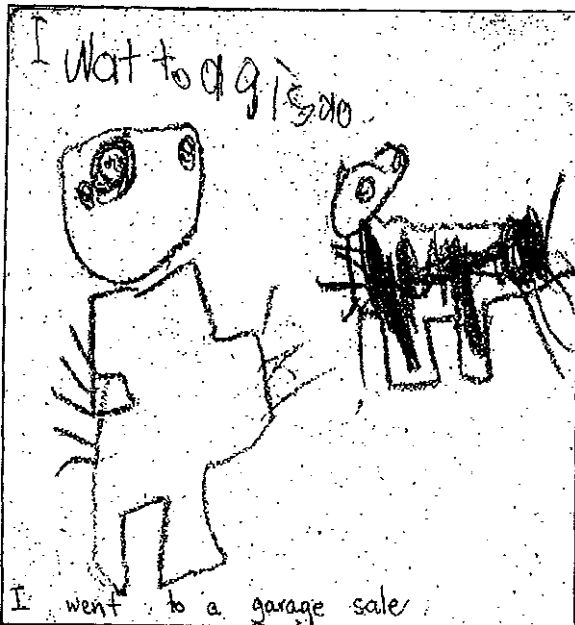
resembled cursive writing and emTy

differentiated his drawing from his printed letters, a stage documented in the literature by Schickendanz (1986). "When children first attempt to create print, what they create may look like scribbles. Usually these scribbles have certain characteristics of print" (p.74).

Shayden has had a lot of difficulty in school, but he has struggled to do his very best. He comes from a print-poor family. He is a very mature boy who speaks when he needs to and is very concise and to the point. Mostly when he wrote, Shayden didn't really want to discuss his work.

By February, Shayden knew most of the alphabet and many of the consonant sounds.

Though he was reading and writing, his skills were not as strong as those of his best friends



Sample 9. Shayden's garage sale entry,

February

Brad, Scott, and Errol. To make matters worse, he wanted to do it right, so he copied from other children and could not read what he copied. As a result, he was reluctant to write or even discuss his writing. However, when he went to a book and worked at his own level, after much prodding from me, he found something he could recognize, such as his colors or some of the high frequency words

From these words he could create a sentence, as in the story in Sample 9 where he wrote about his grandparents and the garage sale. His sentence, though readable, lacks spacing.

Shayden tended to depend on the words he knew, on predictable sentence patterns, and on copying from his neighbors to write his stories. His drawings in Sample 9 were contours with some scribbles done very quickly. For a period of time after February, Shayden said he couldn't read. I think by that he meant he was not reading as well as his best friends Brad and Scott, who were both very strong students. I sat down and explained to him that he was doing well and that by comparing himself to his friends, Brad and Scott, who were writing at another level, he wasn't giving himself a chance.

In his March journal entry, found in Sample 10, Shayden quickly wrote this phonetic

description of what he did on the weekend without copying from anyone else. It shows a good understanding of initial and end consonants as well as some vowels, all of which show a significant improvement from his earlier work that seemed to be of the a one sentence "I stayed home" type, a pattern he maintained in his journal for several months. Shayden's slow progress seemed to parallel the research findings of Clay (1993) and others. Clay describes this slow progress as something to be expected in her reading recovery program but stresses the importance of writing for children like Shayden. 'Many of the operations needed in early reading are practiced in another form in early writing'(p.30). She identifies the link between reading and writing as crucial to helping at-risk children.

Spelling

The letter/sound relationship is an important code-breaker in early writing/reading development. The children in my class found it exciting when they could read the story back to me or, better yet, when I could identify words. At that point they knew they were communicating. Carol Chomsky believes early writing and invented spelling provide the practice needed for reading and writing. Read (1971) found that none "of the children he studied had trouble shifting from

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! -Wch::::.%

Sample 10. Shayden's March journal entry

their invented to conventional orthography despite some parental fears" (See Cazden, 1972, p.64).

Children progress from Clay's scribbling or Cunningham's (1994) "driting" to writing using standard English spelling. When children "drite", they write talk down. Words can be written with a letter; words progress from left to right; and certain letters, put together, make words. Learning to spell is part of breaking the code (Tompkins (1997). In learning to write, children construct their knowledge based on what they hear and see. Clay (1981) states that spelling progresses from global features to letters. Charles Read found children used their knowledge of the sound/symbol relationship and phonics generalizations to invent spelling (See Tompkins, 1997, p. 111). Bean and Bouffler (1987) indicate experimentation is an important part of spelling development. "Early experimentation is crucial to the development of all language, and spelling is no exception. It is a matter of discovering how language is used by using it and having chances to experiment with it. It's by experimenting that children learn the strategies necessary to produce English spelling"(p.22).

Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) found invented spelling was a stage on the way to conventional spelling. Cunningham and Hall (1995) state that brain research provide support for word family instruction. Adams (1990) says, "current theory suggests that the brain is a pattern detector, not a rule applier, and that decoding a word occurs when the brain recognizes a familiar spelling pattern or, if the pattern itself is not familiar, searches for its store of words with familiar patterns" (Cunningham and Hall, 1996, p.2.)

Shayden wouldn't take a risk. As a result he did well on spelling tests, when his mother had time to practice with him, however his success on spelling quizzes of high frequency words,

such as is, on, at, his and we, did not transfer to his everyday work. His mother said he got very upset when he made a spelling mistake. Shayden did hear sounds but he could not record them. He could sound out the words with me but when it came to putting them down on paper it was a gargantuan task that often ended in frustration. He relied heavily on his visual memory. He had a lot of reversals and his eyes played tricks on him. He was making progress but he was already comparing himself with his friends. As a result, Shayden had a hard time finishing any project. Baskwill and Whitman (1988) say some children, like Shayden, who are so concerned with neatness, correct spelling, and writing conventions that they are unable to write their thoughts down, can be helped with a natural approach to evaluation. I needed to watch him closely during writing sessions to ensure that he got his work sorted out and written down without worrying about getting it down just right.

Word sorting is an important feature in spelling development. Brad liked patterns and sorting. It was one of his favorite

activities when he entered my class. During free time, Brad, who turned seven on March 14,

would go to the tubs, which are

blocks for building, patterning

and math, to rehearse his

patterns and, as the year

progressed, he came up with

more and more complex

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Sample 11. Brad's table of contents, January.

patterns. He had come to my class with a good knowledge of the alphabet and sounds, and he was starting to read. In his ECS folder, Brad could spell words such as love, mom, dad, Brad and Jocelyne. In his September journal entry Brad was able to write a complete sentence, using some of the words from his reader. The sentence, "I Went To Sandpont", was well spaced.

Like Shayden, Brad was also very concerned about "proper spelling." But, unlike Shayden, Brad wasn't paralyzed with fear. He told me he would not write anything unless it was spelled correctly. In his first journal entry, Brad wrote about his summer vacation. He went to the new reader, found a word, and verified it with me. He was going to get it right. Children, especially the most capable, want to do it right (Turbill, 1984).

Brad's preoccupation with detail continued on and off throughout the year with varying degrees of results. He wrote an 18-page story, complete with the table of contents shown in Sample 11. This activity seems to parallel the findings of Calkins (1986) who says one method children use to revise their stories is to put them in order. Brad wrote every word, with the exception of his name and some high frequency words, phonetically with blends and vowels. Brad's table of contents represented his attempts to order his 18-page adventure book. A week before he wrote his table of contents, Brad asked me questions about what goes into a table of contents. He looked at readers in the classroom and asked me about the difference between a report and a story. A week later, after his stories were written, Brad had gone back, numbered the pages, and written in the titles.

After he completed the story with pictures and print, he told me more details. At home he worked on picture books about mazes, colors, and dinosaurs. He brought some of his books to school for show and share. He was interested in patterns in math and in his picture books. He

also looked for patterns in spelling and talked about them. Brad thought his spelling was pretty good. As he read to me, Brad found and corrected spelling errors that he identified. As his invented spelling developed, there was increasing differentiation and integration of the speech sounds as represented in the letters. Glenda Bissex noticed this in her son Paul's evolution in writing.

The evolution of Paul's invented spelling likewise followed a pattern of increasing differentiation and integration: differentiation of speech sounds to be represented by letters, differentiation of alternative spellings for some sounds; and integration of such information within the framework of systematic conceptions of spelling. Jackson has described a sequence of stages proceeding "from the simple and undifferentiated to the stratified and undifferentiated" as the fundamental principle underlying all language development (Jackson, 1968, p.68 in Bissex, 1980, 47).

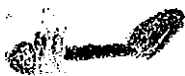
Shayden, on the other hand, had a weak phonemic awareness. This was a problem since phonics is the tool of the early writer. The "skill of spelling" requires that a child learn phonics and apply them. "He must learn to spell his own speech" (McCracken & McCracken, 1979, p.40). This involves linking the sound with the symbol or letter, learning the sequence of certain sound/symbol patterns, and learning the different spelling patterns. Shayden had a hard time with all three. However, when writing, one on one, he could identify some initial consonants. The vowels were very difficult. Clay (1993) suggests that children, particularly those like Shayden, who are at risk, should write stories every day.

It is in the writing part of the daily lesson that children are required to pay attention to letter detail, letter order, sound sequences, and the links between messages in oral language and messages in printed language. It is particularly important that children learn to hear the sounds in words they want to write, and find appropriate ways to write these sounds down. The writing knowledge serves as a resource of information that can help the reader. However, this reciprocity does not occur spontaneously. The teacher must remember to direct the child to

what he knows in reading when he is writing and vice versa. The child comes to control high- frequency vocabulary for writing and learns strategies for spelling more and more words in his language (p. 11).

Sentence Structure

Sentence structure is hard for many children to understand. I also find it hard to teach.



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We did the stop/starts of simple sentences and worked with sentence strips and patterns. In the beginning, Brad wrote perfect sentences from the story starters or patterns that I gave, but as Brad's sentences became more complex to reflect his thinking, the periods disappeared. In Sample 12, he has

Sample 12. Brad's adventure story, January.

neither periods nor capital letters, other than his name and his friend's name. But he does have some standard spelling, strong attempts at phonetic spelling, and spaces between words. His interest was in telling the story and, at this point, he was writing more than one story with illustrations for his book. Brad said he didn't know how to punctuate. Even though he was a confident writer, it was something that concerned him. During one story conference Brad talked about his writing and what made a good story. "Stuff about adventures makes a good story," he said. " Probably some kids like that too. I like writing my adventures. It was cool. . . I wasn't worried much when I was writing. I was worried about the periods. I don't know where they go."

Later in the year, Brad started writing only one line per page. This was a major departure

from the 18 pages of text he had given me earlier. I didn't understand what was happening. However, he informed me that he was trying to figure out punctuation. This was new to me until I came across the caution from Calkins (1986), suggesting that irregularities in children's writing are a sign they are dealing with some specific issue, as Brad was with in punctuation.

It is important to remember that what children do as writers depends on the context in which they write and on their backgrounds as writers. This is why scope and sequence charts on writing are inadequate and perhaps harmful. Furthermore, even within any one writer, development does not consist of forwards -moving progress. One day the writing is good, one day it is lousy, and often what seem at first to be regressions turn out to be moments of imbalance through which new levels are reached (Calkins, 1986, p.33).

Kristi was the youngest of two five-year-olds in my class. She celebrated her sixth birthday on February 10. Early in the year she was hesitant to use letters or words to represent ideas, and she was also hesitant about reading, declining to read or participate in a presentation in front of the class or read to me. But she listened well and her comprehension was excellent.

For her first journal entry in

September (Sample 13),

Kristi wrote

"goodbyecampingsummer"

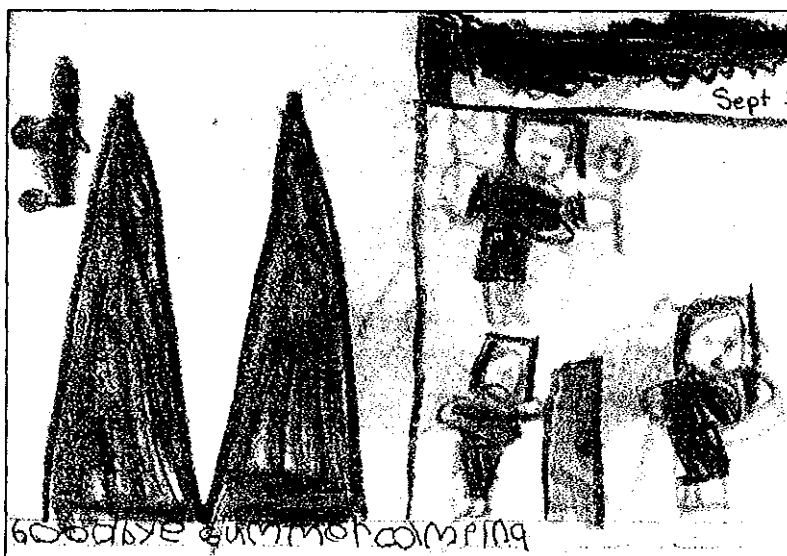
which she copied from the

words listed on the board. She

had good formation of letters

and was able to print on the

line. Kristi had no spaces

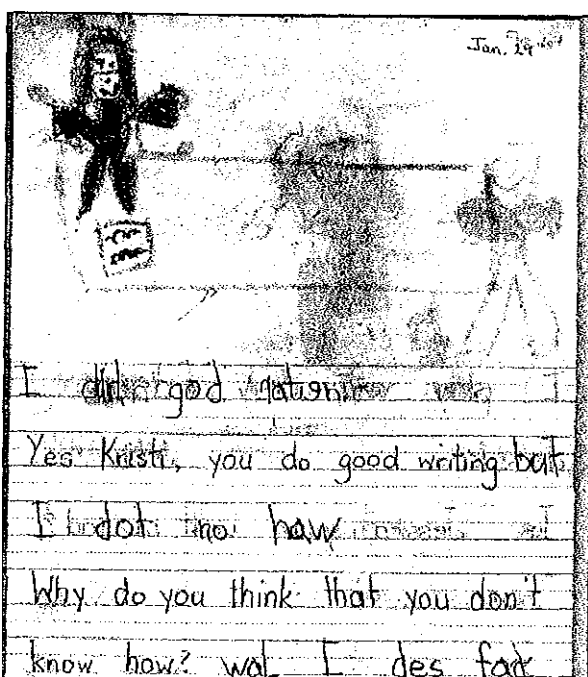


Sample 13. Kristi's September journal entry.

between her words but she knew letters have to be in a particular order to have meaning. Her

drawing was also well developed for the beginning of the year. She was at the family cabin with her mom and dad and baby brother who was drawn in yellow but the clothes were not filled in.

Kristi comes from a print-rich home where she has lots of opportunities to read and write. In her home reading book, Kristi's mother documented her progress with different sounds and described the problems she was encountering. In October, Kristi brought a pattern book that she made at home for show and share time. In telling the class about how she made it, Kristi



Sample 14. Kristi's January journal entry

took pride in telling us how she and her friend Jennifer created the drawings and words.

Kristi's journal was virtually a laboratory of her writing/reading development. At the beginning of the year, she would copy off the board the words she wanted to say. In January, Kristi wrote to tell me she enjoyed writing stories in class (See Sample 14). When I responded that I agreed she was a good writer, Kristi wrote back "but

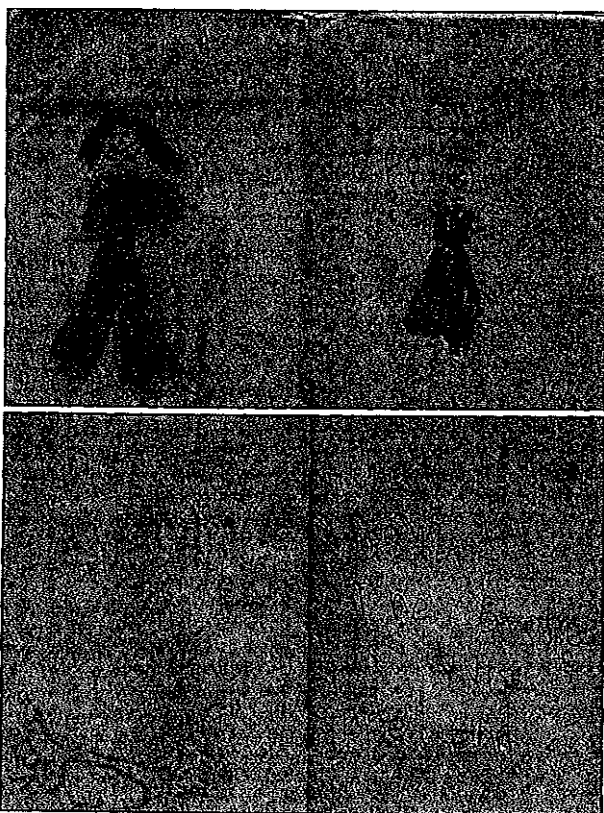
I dot no haw" I wrote back "Why don't you think that you don't know how? Kristi answered

"wal I des fad I kat do good writing." From the first to the last sentence in the dialogue Kristi looked up the proper spelling of writing. She used vowels and consonants in her writing, and in writing back to me she saw writing as a meaningful activity with a definite purpose in mind - to communicate and find out more about what someone else was thinking. Kristi always double-

checked with me to make sure of what she wanted to say. At that stage, she just wasn't ready to write something on her own. Kristi's reluctance may be similar to a developmental period described by Clay (1981).

The most difficult step in the entire process is taken when the child leaves the security of the repetitive structure, tries to become more flexible, varies the form of his statement and uses elements within these structures flexibly and interchangeably. This is comparatively easy for a child who already speaks with a rich vocabulary and a variety of sentence forms (p. 62).

In the months following January, Kristi dutifully wrote back to me every time I made an entry



Sample 15. Kristi's world book, pages 1 and 2, January

in her journal. She even went back to early journal entries, read my comments, wrote and told me she wanted me to read and write back to her. After that, she was on her way.

As Kristi's pictures became more detailed, so did her writing, and her risk-taking increased. Kristi used the readers, books, and the word wall in my class to find the words she needed. She used a lot of invented spelling to record her thoughts. In her free time Kristi made books or wrote notes (See Sample 15). She always wrote back to me in her journal. In January, Kristi

just took off in her reading. Soon the once reluctant little girl was volunteering to read and to participate in an upcoming play. This is consistent with Cunningham and Allington's (1994) findings that there is a definite link in early writing/reading.

Children who write become better readers. One of the most powerful connections you can make is to connect reading and writing. Children who read something knowing that they will write something are more likely to read with a clearer sense of writing because they have more to say (p. 96).

The McCrackens (1993) describe writing as powerful exploration of language. Glenda Bissex watched her son learn to read other people's writing only after he had learned to read his own. In Kristi's kindergarten report card, her teacher noted Kristi could print her own name. Inside her ECS folder printed in capital letters were: love, mom, dad, Kevin, Aimee. They echo Sylvia Ashton-Warner's (1963) key words and the McCrackens' "very own words". I like to call them "heart words."

Kristi usually drew her pictures first and then wrote. On one occasion in February, though, Kristi told the class she wrote the story and then had to do the pictures. I commented on the variety of the people in Kristi's world - flowers, Kristi, poor people, hard working people. "I know," she said. That writing reflected her growing development of awareness of the world around her. In her writing, Kristi kept to a pattern and added new words to make it interesting, following the pattern described by Cambourne (1988).

When writers do their own writing, not only do they communicate meanings to themselves, but they discover how to order their thinking and their worlds. . . It is probably the most powerful, readily available form of extending thinking and learning that the human race has available to it. There is no other technology that has quite the same potential for ordering and developing human thinking (p. 184).

Kristi's penguin story (See Sample 16), written at the end of February, was autobiographical. The penguin was really Kristi. That week, Kristi was taking her dance exams. The description of the penguin's hair and clothes was a description of Kristi. She could spell a lot of her color words and some high frequency words such as is, my, are, the, her, she, to, go,

well, and already. Kristi used no capital letters, but she had an excellent command of her initial and ending consonant sounds. Her vowels were still a challenge.

Kristi handled the punctuation problem differently from some of the other students. In her story about her penguin, she put dots at the end of each line for the first two lines, then dropped them as she concentrated on her story. In the classroom concern book, Kristi put a period at the end of each line. This

U...t.Ko/.. _
 \ \ "ta day. r ^ k s + v . ^ h
 Sample 16. Kristi's penguin story,

February was what she had retained from the concept of sentence - the period is usually at the end of the line. In another entry, a week later, Kristi dealt with the punctuation problem by adding periods after every other word. The period appeared to be a source of confusion and challenge for her.

Errors

The books, written by my Grade 1 students, were replete with errors, showing the different stages the children were at and the individual problems they were dealing with. Bissex. (1980) says teachers should view errors as important pieces of information, rather than as something to be corrected. Kenneth Goodman (1986), a pioneer in diagnosing reading miscues,

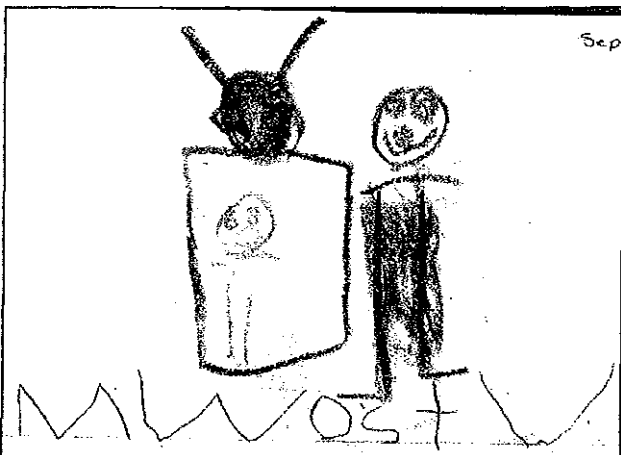
calls errors "a window on the mind." They reflect a child's current knowledge of the grammar of spoken English. Courtney Cazden (1972) agrees.

The notion that behavior is systematic and rule-governed suggests that children's "errors" are often important clues to child thought. Children take the problems we pose and deal with them in their own ways. Researchers and teachers either measure how well the children have learned to see the world "our" way or they try to discover how children see it for themselves. To Piaget, Errors are an important source of information on qualitative changes in intelligence as the child's mind develops (p.27).

Clay (1981) says that errors are important in diagnosing where children are in their learning. "Errors are interesting. They often signal that the child is reaching out to some new facet of written expression, and that he needs help towards some new learning" (p. 58).

In January, Brad wrote about a concern using "w" instead of "r". This problem was easy enough to correct. Brad didn't know where to put his periods, but Brad also wasn't too concerned with that at the time. In the same month, Kristi was working on the "th" sound that she didn't appear to hear, or so I thought. According to Schickedanz (1986), these "examples are not the result of poor listening but the creative relationships children detect"(p.89). The children's errors could be interpreted as risk-taking, an important part of writing development and learning. (See, for example, Bean and Bouffler, 1987)

Risk taking is also a necessary ingredient for success, and so children need situations where they feel free to take risks with writing. They need the time and encouragement to experiment... We found that this can sometimes put pressure on teachers when they are judged by what is produced. One of our young writers worked for a whole term on a single story, and there were times when we wondered whether we should encourage her to get moving. The calibre of the story she produced was, however, well worth the time taken, and we were glad we did not interfere. Another problem for teachers may arise when what are essentially first drafts are judged as finished products (p.22).



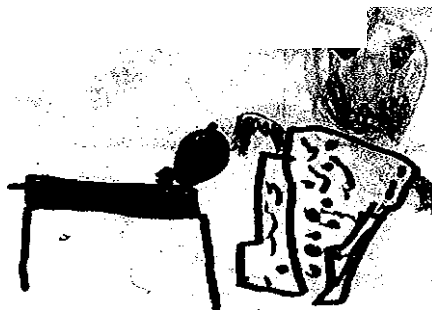
Sample 17. Errol's September journal entry.

Six-year-old Errol comes from a print rich and supportive home. He has been diagnosed as having attention deficit disorder and is on medication. In his September journal entry, shown in Sample 17, Errol had difficulty focusing on the topic and, then, when he did he came UP with s,x letters "

MWOSTW "Me watching TV". He quickly drew a picture and was done with it, not because he wasn't interested, but because it was his way. His drawing has basic details of a figure with a smiling face, wearing blue watching a box in which there is someone who has his or her mouth open.

t w o i s h H \$. x • K K i

As the year progressed, Errol took a keen interest in writing. In November, Errol wrote in his journal that he felt sad when someone said he couldn't play. Errol had capital letters sprinkled throughout the sentence. He started off



Sample 18- EnovsmissinSt00thbook'

January.

with spaces but dropped them as he wrote about something very meaningful to him. There were words such as "you" and "I" that were spelled correctly while others are sounded out phonetically using initial and ending

consonants. The sentence frame "I feel sad" was given to the class. Errol's drawings showed his sad face when another child says, "NO". His stick people conveyed his message. He concentrated on details in the facial expressions.

His three-page book about missing teeth was written at the beginning of January. Sample 18 is page 2 of his narrative. There are all kinds of details in his description as well as directionality and good story development with a beginning, middle and end. The story shows a good command of initial and ending consonants and some awareness of vowel sounds. The errors demonstrate Errol's struggle with vowel sounds and combinations. Errol said he wanted to tell the class about his experience with missing teeth. Errol wanted to communicate. He said, "I was so happy when I lost my tooth. I knew I would get money. No, it wasn't hard to write because I knew about it real well and I know how all the words are spelled. Spelling was no problem. The coloring was hard." Errol's story was written phonetically with a good command of initial and ending consonants. He used standard spelling for words such as "lost", "in one day", "my", "box", and "put". There was no punctuation. Errol's story was important to him and he wanted to share it with the class. He asked me about it several times. When Errol read his story to the class we talked about it. We talked about how missing tooth stories were popular in the class, and someone suggested we do a graph of missing teeth.

The topic of Errol's next book was the seasons. There were no pictures in this 12-page book that had about two sentences per page. Errol said this spacing was very deliberate because this was a chapter book. Errol was proud of his writing, but he didn't always like to draw.

Errol played with directions, and, while writing the chapter book, he asked if he could change the direction of the writing to right to left. After a short discussion, Errol decided it might

not be a good idea because the children might not be able to read his story. The direction principle or "mirror writing" exists with many young children and sometimes they do it unconsciously as they write. (Clay, 1981).

Story Content

The purpose of writing revolves around informing or communicating, relating a personal experience, or writing imaginatively for the fun of it. This also describes the content of children's writing. They write a letter to ask a question, a poem to describe snow, or a set of directions on how to make a snow angel. Bissex (1980) describes her son's experience with writing to convey a message.

At the start, learning to write in itself had meaning for Paul as for his parents and teachers. . . Although Paul was proud that he could write, writing never seemed only an end in itself, a self-justifying activity. Paul, like his parents, wrote (and read and talked) because what he was writing (or reading or saying) had meaning to him as an individual and as a cultural being. We humans are meaning-making creatures, and language - spoken and written - is an important means for making and sharing meanings (p. 107).

As content and purpose change so do the demands of the writing task. Calkins (1986) says "when writing consists of only a label or a sentence along side a picture, neither organization nor gaps in content are vital concerns. Longer pieces of writing - whether in a book or on a single page - provide new challenges" (p.58).

For example, Kristi's world book (Sample 15) was a listing of what she knew about the world, which may or may not be true. In a slightly different approach to listing, Brad was writing several page-long stories per session of different types of adventures (Sample 12). His stories consisted of a beginning and an end but there was little story development. However, at the same time, Errol was writing a sustained personal narrative (Sample 18) about his missing tooth that

was incorporating speech into his drawing to develop greater meaning in his picture, a development described by Dyson-Haas (1989).

Researchers have also studied content of children's writing, as did James Britton, who describes writing as expressive, poetic, or transactional. "Britton has a system for describing different acts of writing that takes into account the writer's self, her audience, her purpose, and the forms she uses" (Temple, C, Nathan, Temple, F. and Burris, 1993, p. 126). However, Britton qualifies this statement by concluding that early children's writing isn't aimed at any particular audience. Bissex also concludes that the above distinctions are not "truly descriptive of young children's writing".

Just as we need to recognize differences between children's and adults' categorization of speech sounds and representational principles in order to understand children's invented spelling, so we may need to look beyond the classifications currently used for adult writings in order to understand the forms and functions of young children's writings. Britton observes that a good deal of young children's writings is not aimed at telling anybody anything but at producing "written objects" to be displayed and preserved (1980, p.36).

She cites a study by a 1973 study by Rosen and Rosen who observed young children do not write out of a sense of audience with particular needs but for the teacher and her special demands. However, the children in my Grade 1 class did exhibit an awareness of writing as communication and writing for an audience, an awareness that was best demonstrated by the entries in the class concern book. The concern book encourages conflict resolution by providing my students with an opportunity to list individual grievances that occur during the day, inside and outside the class. Disputes are brought here, written down, and hopefully resolved before the weekly class meeting. However, the children have a form that they used to communicate with each other and me. They always sign their name at the end of what they've written.

In February, Errol suggested compliments be included in the concern book. His suggestion appeared to be garnered from the structure of class meetings. He said that the "good things and problems could be discussed in the group meetings", and he liked the way the meetings always began with compliments. Errol thought this should be continued in the book. Thus, the book became known as the concern compliments and suggestions book. The concern book or grievance book was very popular in my class. The children's need for order and

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	<p>_____.</p>

regulation could be found there.

Errol was the first to take advantage of the change of focus in the book. In Sample 20, he wrote to compliment Nigel on helping him out in the

Sample 20. Errol's compliment, February.

playground and for giving him a

candy. His compliment was a complete sentence with a period at the end. There was intention and gratitude.

In my class, most of the children's writing was autobiographical, but there were opportunities for poetry, descriptive writing, opinions, concerns, and suggestions. Even though I used a natural approach to writing, many of the activities were done for me because I asked them to be done. The children could choose to write whatever they wanted, but they did not have the wide-ranging freedom that they had in the concern book or during free writing time. Even the journal, which for children like Kristi, Brad, and Errol was an opportunity to give personal accounts of their thinking and feelings, proved to be a source of tedium for struggling children

such as Shayden and Jessica who would just rather not write at all.

The introduction of a message board affected some children more than others. For example, Brad wrote several messages. Once he came to school with a computer printout

cannot
kat be is my klab.

Sample 21. Kristi's complaint, March.

of an invitation for Scott to come over Saturday to play. "Write back soon," were Brad's instructions. It was addressed and signed. When an answer returned in the form of an invitation saying it was Brad's turn to come over, Brad decided not to write back but discuss it with his friend, Scott. Instead, Brad told Scott that he had not responded to his invitation and so he couldn't write back to him. Finally after a day of discussion, Brad wrote back that he would go over to Scott's because he wanted to try the Lucky Charms.

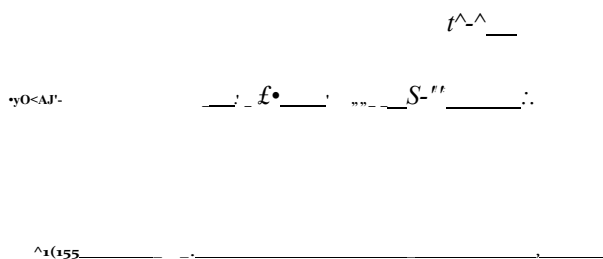
Kristi used the concern book (See Sample 21) to describe problems she was having in the classroom in March - someone wouldn't let her join in a game - and used her journal for the dialogue with me. She was struggling with periods but still managed to incorporate Sarah's dialogue into her note. I wrote back to ask her why she had been left out. In an entry the next day, Kristi wrote the problem had been resolved because the girls formed a new club in which Kristi was a member. Written conversation, a strategy first developed by Carolyn Burke, is a powerful way to develop writing (Bean & Bouffler, 1987, p.30). In writing about her concerns,

Kristi used a combination of invented and standard spelling. Her knowledge of punctuation included a period at the end of each line.

In her journal, Kristi really enjoyed writing to me, often asking questions. In February, with report card time approaching, I told the class it was only fair for them to write a report on me.



Kristi's picture, in Sample 22, detailed her love of calendar time. It recalled her memories of show and share, weather, special days and stories. She demonstrated good command of many of her letters and her pictures were becoming extremely detailed.



Sample 22. Kristi's report card, February.

In a March entry in the class concern book, Brad wrote to complain about Jessy squishing him like an ant underneath the sled. We had just finished reading a story about being "as snug as a bug in a rug" and Brad made the connection to Jessy.

Also in March, Brad became so involved in writing that when he was informed the lunch bell had rung, and his mom was waiting, he offered a startled, "Oh. I guess I'll finish this later then." He had been developing an idea about starting a thinking club. His thinking club would be activity-based, Brad informed the class. The Thinking Club or "thheike clad" (See Sample 23) would involve activities and games like mazes, patterning, and writing, he said. The other

children seemed enthusiastic. Brad and Scott were appointed to organize the club. Abstract

thinking was shown in this

19\evfe<; . ;txr\cl...: We :

sample. Brad wrote just as he

talked. He was developing an

K— a

awareness of audience - the class.

^^^Ktjkisivu^.. -cXi*X.v-----,

There were reversals, such as the

9_{CLL}

letter "d" for "b" in club. He was

writing well phonetically, but the

Sample 23. Brad's suggestion, March,

vowel sounds were still a

challenge. Finally, there were several standard spellings he was using regularly

CONCLUSION

The project, to look at the writing development of young children, has helped me develop my skills of observation and analysis and, in the end, helped me understand the reading/writing process and the children themselves. The stories of the six children, experiencing different levels of success during study period, tell of the initiation into the world of print and communication. Their victories and regressions along the way, particularly those struggling to overcome major obstacles, have been instrumental in encouraging me to undertake further study and develop other strategies to help them.

The main purpose of the study was to examine samples of writing of six Grade 1 students over a seven-month period, from September to March, to determine if there was a particular developmental process children followed in learning to write. The subjects of the study were chosen according to their abilities and were categorized as weak, average, and strong. One child was repeating Grade 1. One child was the youngest in the class. Another child entered my class with some reading and writing skills.

To create a profile of the maturing writers, the following case study techniques were used to gather data: 1. informal interviews with the child and his/her parents, 2. collection of writing samples over the seven-month period, 3. collection of personal data from ECS files, and 4. observation of the children's activities.

In studying the six children - two girls and four boys - I found both group and individual patterns of understanding of what was taught and the information was processed. Even though they may have been taught the same way and even though I tailored my

individual instruction to meet their specific needs, they took back with them different understandings of the lesson (Bright, 1995).

The writing and the writing process of the six children did contain two common threads. The autobiographical nature of their writing was one such thread, found in the early stages of their writing. Drawing was another thread. The children's early writing, predictably, was egocentric. The experiences they drew and wrote about happened to them and related to them. The topics, such as Kristi's dancers, Darcy's slippers, and Errol's loose tooth, were autobiographical, concrete and realistic. Drawing also centered around the children themselves, their families and their friends. In terms of the children's development as individuals with important life stories, I learned of the importance of Darcy's slippers, Kristi's interest in dance, Jessica's enduring love of cats, Shayden's special attachment to his grandparents, Errol's interest in action toys, and Brad's love of adventure stories. As I posed more questions about the stories, the children opened up to me and elaborated on their work. The language they used was animated and uninhibited in all cases.

Some of the children moved away from this egocentric approach more quickly than others. Even though Kristi was a year younger than anyone in the class, her most pronounced development was the move away from self toward a concern for others. In the end, even though her world book was still an inventory of information, or list, with no sequence of events, and each sentence in her world book could have been the last one in the text, her list looked at others within her world. This differed from Darcy's list of the colors of the rainbow and Jessica's list of animals and people that she loved in that Kristi was trying to make a different kind of sense of her world. It is something Robert Coles (1989) talks about in his interviews with children.

Kristi showed herself to be " a self observer, as well as an observer of others...comprehending, through language, the essence of what a human being can manage to be" (p.9).

Brad started to develop a personal narrative in his adventure stories. Though simple and concrete, there was a sequence of events that were governed by the topic, be it aliens or the jungle. Brad and his friend were still the central characters. However, his need to order and to list could be found in his Table of Contents, something he liked to mention and something Brad asked questions about and discussed for days before it took the form of his own opening to his 18-page book.

At the start of the study, the children's writing was supplemented by their drawings, which served primarily as a scaffolding on which their stories were constructed. However, drawing appeared to serve different purposes. This relationship between drawing and writing has been described by Calkins (1986) and Depree and Iverson (1994), and others. While all the children used drawing to supplement their writing initially, some moved away from the support more quickly than others. For example, Kristi eventually decided not to draw, indicating that the scaffolding was no longer needed. Brad, also a strong student like Kristi, chose not to draw in some of his stories. However, Shayden, who was struggling, did not want to draw mainly because he had poor fine motor skills and he was self-conscious about his work.

An analysis of the children's writing revealed no common pattern of grammatical development. Each child appeared to wrestle with the intricacies of period, capitals and spelling in his or her own way. A typical example of this is their understanding of sentence structure or the period at the end of a sentence. Kristi first put her periods at the end of every line, then started to think about the "who did what" element in a sentence. Brad looked at the punctuation

problem from a different perspective. He added a period every time he read the story aloud and needed to make a full stop. Shayden's communication was very brief so the periods at the end of a sentence had not, as yet, posed a problem for him. This was also the case with Jessica. Darcy was more concerned with getting his message across than worrying about the placement of periods. Errol didn't have any punctuation until one journal entry when he seemed to have developed an understanding of it quite automatically.

The children's writing development, with respect to spelling, sentence and grammatical control, showed an increasing use of capital letters and punctuation but this development was gradual and uneven, varied from child to child, and appeared to be dependent on the writing content. When Brad was working on a narrative or adventures, his punctuation and spelling were more erratic. As Brad, Errol, Kristi, and even Darcy gained more control over the phonetic patterns and more control over what they wanted to say, their concept of spelling improved. However, their printing tended to be more irregular when they concentrated on their message.

The children's writing, with the exception of Shayden's and Jessica's who were at times overwhelmed by the letters and sounds, was mostly spontaneous and uninhibited. Editing, for all of them, meant adding on a sentence or a page or even, as in the case of Brad, moving pages around. Most of the writing imitated speech rather than book writing. For the most part, the children were writing simple sentences. Their expansion of ideas was achieved mostly by using conjunctions such as "and," "but," and "then." In all cases, there was some use of descriptive words. In my class, the slow of development of descriptive words resulted in the continual supply of pictures and discussion so the children could elaborate on their stories without adding such additions to their text. From my own further reading, I am now encouraging the children

to jot down what they have told me and add it to their story. In the past, they used the time to personally add detail and I would let them do that without asking them to add anything to the text. According to Calkins (1986) "information contained in the picture and in the surrounding oral commentary can be moved into the text"(p.61).

The length of children's stories ran from two to six lines for Jessica and Shayden to 18 to 24 lines for Errol and Brad. In the case of Shayden and Jessica, their stories remained constant at three or four lines. However, they were able to provide more oral details during their writing conferences. The oral details were uninhibited and overflowing with detail though both children tended to be weak in supplying descriptive detail. Darcy, in the final weeks of the study, wrote more as he gained confidence from his conversations with the other children and me. Darcy was especially buoyed by the enthusiastic responses he received. Brad, Kristi and Errol varied the length of their stories according to the topics and experimented with the use of rhyming words, and expressions such as "as snug as a bug in a rug" to be rewritten as "squished as a bug in a rug".

The findings in this study have certain implications for my teaching. The project has made me re-examine my teaching and my approach to teaching. The research shows the importance of looking into the process of writing. Even though there is a definite movement back to the basics of skills development, particularly at the upper grades, looking at what young children do and think when they are writing is as important as the actual product they produce. Writing, particularly for the very young, is an approach to reading in which they figure out reading from the "inside out." That is something, especially at the Grade 1 level, which cannot

be treated lightly. I have concluded that writing is central to the development of good reading, thinking, and communication.

Studying my class has led to an examination of my own instructional practices. With reference to the work of people such as Atwell (1986), Butler and Turbill (1987), Calkins (1986), and Graves (1983), who provided descriptions of their classroom settings, I have evaluated my own teaching practices and tried some of their suggested strategies, such as process writing. Leaving the comfort of story starters, I embarked on my own journey to understand the children better and learn about their own "inner control" or the work done inside their heads (Clay, 1991 as [cited] in Bright, 1995). By end of my project, I was realizing that I was going through some of the changes Calkins (1986) outlines in her book.

When I first taught young children, I encouraged them to use word banks, list of key words, and picture dictionaries as resources during writing. .. I am, to this day, convinced that none of this was harmful to children. I was warm, supportive, helpful, and, above all, well intentioned. But I do not recommend any of these things any more.. .First of all, I have begun to realize that concern for spelling competes with concern for content. When children continually interrupt themselves during writing to worry about or search for a correct spelling they often lose track of what they want to say in the first place... I would much rather they learn, from the start, to focus on content and language during a first draft. Therefore, if I wanted primary-school children to find correct spellings in dictionaries or word banks, I would ask them to do this after drafting and revision, when the piece was done(p.63).

The writing process does not fit into teacher-led whole class methods (Calkins, 1986). Learning does not occur in fixed sequences, either, as I learned from the seven-month study of six children with varying degrees of ability. They were all at different stages of the writing process, grappling with different problems. For me, there are few fixed steps to teaching writing but a lot of recursive and overlapping ones.

In conclusion, the writing process is an intensely personal journey on which even the youngest child wants to embark and is capable of undertaking, if interest is not squelched in the early years. At the same time, it can be a wonderfully social activity in the classroom because the children are always describing, sorting, questioning each other and exchanging ideas. Children's learning does not follow a fixed pattern, and that alone can be a challenge to teachers who must meet the individual needs of their students. Writing is exciting and, particularly in grade one, it is the flip side of reading. Cambourne (1988) sees the difference in depth which children who write in addition to reading bring to their life experiences as having a far-reaching effect on how they read information and how they view the world. "Readers can read without necessarily being writers or knowing about writing and how it's done. But writers must be readers, and this creates a kind of language and thinking behavior which is quite unique" (Cambourne, 1988, p.184). The child who writes is a child who reads with a better understanding of the mechanisms involved in our very complex language and diverse culture.

In summary, the findings of this project show some of the valuable information that can be derived from looking at writing samples and seeing the development in a student's writing. In speaking with the children, the teacher learns to identify from what children say and write what needs to be taught in the "mini-lesson" (Calkins, 1986). In general, observations of young children's oral and written language show the importance of reflective teaching where the teacher and children are on a life journey together for a period of time. That poses an exciting challenge for the teacher interested in the writing process and in paving the way for children to gain greater enjoyment from writing and reading together.

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