A study of children's reading/writing relationships in a grade five classroom

Mary-Ellen MacMillan

University of New Hampshire, Durham

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A study of children's reading/writing relationships in a grade five classroom

Abstract
This research is based on an ethnographic study of how children in grade five choose to relate reading and writing. The two-year study, which took place in Mary Ann Wessells' grade five classroom in Stratham Memorial School, investigated how changing the classroom environment enabled the children to engage in the processes of reading and writing and make connections between learning in both areas. The data were collected through participant-observation in the room with fieldnotes, interviews with the children, and the children's writing, writing folders, reading folders and journals as primary data sources. The results of the study describe: (1) the rationale for and the changes in the classroom environment, (2) the changes in the children's writing and reading, and (3) the relationships the children establish between reading/writing particularly in the areas of genre, theme and stylistic devices. The findings suggest that when the classroom environment is changed to enable children to engage in the processes of reading and writing, the children then have opportunities to relate learning in one area with the other, reading to writing and writing to reading.

Keywords
Education, Elementary, Education, Reading, Education, Language and Literature
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A study of children's reading/writing relationships in a grade five classroom

MacMillan, Mary-Ellen, Ph.D.
University of New Hampshire, 1990

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A STUDY OF CHILDREN'S READING/WRITING RELATIONSHIPS
IN A
GRADE FIVE CLASSROOM

BY

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B.S. Mt. Allison University, 1977
B.A. McGill University, 1979
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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Reading and Writing Instruction

May, 1990
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c 1990

Mary-Ellen MacMillan
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DEDICATION

For my mother and father, whose love and support have guided me throughout my life.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this dissertation owes its existence to those individuals who have shaped my professional and personal life.

During the two years of this study, I had the opportunity to work with Mary Ann Wessells, a teacher who not only encouraged children to grow academically but as unique individuals. Thank you Mary Ann for being a teacher, colleague and friend.

I would like to express my gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee for their feedback and support: to Mary Clark for her positive comments and assistance with invented spelling, to John Limber and Bill Wansart for their assistance in shaping the data presentation, to Don Graves who has inspired and supported my writing and thinking since I entered the University of New Hampshire and to Jane Hansen, who as head of the committee, has been a constant source of feedback and support. In addition to the dissertation, I want to thank Jane for encouraging my professional endeavors, for being a mentor who truly has inspired me, and for being the caring individual she is.
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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF CHILDREN'S READING/Writing RELATIONSHIPS IN A GRADE FIVE CLASSROOM

BY
Mary-Ellen MacMillan
University of New Hampshire May 1990

This research is based on an ethnographic study of how children in grade five choose to relate reading and writing. The two-year study, which took place in Mary Ann Wessells' grade five classroom in Stratham Memorial School, investigated how changing the classroom environment enabled the children to engage in the processes of reading and writing and make connections between learning in both areas. The data were collected through participant-observation in the room with fieldnotes, interviews with the children, and the children's writing, writing folders, reading folders and journals as primary data sources. The results of the study describe: (1) the rationale for and the changes in the classroom environment, (2) the changes in the children's writing and reading, and (3) the relationships the children establish between reading/writing particularly in the areas of genre, theme and stylistic devices. The findings suggest that when the classroom environment is changed to enable children to
engage in the processes of reading and writing, the children then have opportunities to relate learning in one area with the other, reading to writing and writing to reading.
CHAPTER 1

JOURNEYS

Situated on a red sand stone bluff overlooking the ferry terminal, Borden Elementary school receives the full impact of the winds which blow off the strait separating Prince Edward Island from the mainland. As I pulled into the parking lot of the old yellow clapboard school, I could see beyond the children playing in the yard, the ferry Abegweit, just pulling into the dock a quarter of a mile away.

The children continued to play, only occasionally glancing at the ferry which to them, like most people raised on the Island, was a fact of life - a necessary link with the outside world. Day in and day out it plied the waters of the strait. Journeys began and ended with the ferry. A continual cycle of home and 'away'.

I continued to watch the ferry as I crossed the ice coated ground on my way into the school. The 'Abegweit' had just docked. Cars and trucks began to disembark. The ferry carried more than goods and products, it also carried
information. Knowledge and understanding gained from journeys and experiences in the world 'away'.

My visits to Borden Elementary were the result of many journeys I had made over the last five years - literal journeys to and from New Hampshire where I had studied and researched reading and writing processes, as well as figurative journeys in the form of knowledge and understanding about reading and writing processes. I was at the school to share with Arlene MacWilliams and her grade one students some of the insights I had gained during my time 'away'. Together we were working towards creating a classroom learning environment which would encourage the children to engage in reading and writing as processes.

Through classroom visits, afterschool workshops, and in-service sessions I've had the opportunity over the last two years to work with many teachers and children across the Island just like Arlene and her students - teachers who want to create a classroom environment conducive to process learning. During that time I have also learned from them more about the process of change, as their understanding of the processes of learning has grown and developed.
The journey to understanding, like all journeys, must have a beginning. As I tell the teachers I work with, the beginning depends on where you are. While some of us may travel more quickly than others, the purpose of the journey is increasing our understanding.

Although the symbol of a journey implies an end, the most exciting trips leave the traveller hungry for more experiences. Like the ferry's trips between the Island (what is familiar and comfortable) and 'away' (what is new and different), the journey for understanding is cyclical. As we become comfortable with what we've learned a new situation challenges our understanding and the quest is underway again. Reflecting on what we've learned and how we've learned it sets a context for new experiences.

At this point in time, much of what I've learned about the relationships between reading and writing processes has been a direct result of the time I spent as a researcher with Mary Ann Wessells and her grade five students at Stratham Memorial School, in Stratham, New Hampshire. I started working with Mary Ann in 1986 as part of a research team from the University of New Hampshire. My own research interest, in the relationships grade five children in process-orientated classrooms establish between reading and writing, gradually grew out of my experiences with Mary Ann and her students.
During the two years I spent in Mary Ann's room, we worked together to create a classroom learning environment where teachers and children could learn more about the processes of reading and writing. The starting point of our journey was writing process because Mary Ann had already been helping her students engage in the processes of writing for the last four years. During writing time, I observed and participated in all classroom activities from listening to children as they composed to asking questions when they shared their writing with members of the class. Mary Ann and I would then talk about what we had learned that day from one another and the students. We constantly looked for insights from the children about writing and tried to follow their lead into areas of interest to them. For example when several children began to use conversation in their stories, Mary Ann began using samples of her own writing to model how this technique could change the style of the piece.

Later we added reading process. Although I can point to the exact date we started reading process by collecting the basal readers and workbooks, the change did not occur over night. In theory and practice we already had an understanding of the basis of process learning from the writing. Our observations and reflections on writing process set the context for our journey into reading process.
Since this was relatively new territory for us, we wanted to reassure ourselves that the students would not miss any 'essential skills.' We examined the school district curriculum guide to see what the students were expected to know by the end of grade five. Then we used this information as a guide to construct a list of topics to address during the language arts block (reading, writing or spelling) whenever the opportunity arose.

In terms of structure, initially we simply incorporated into the language arts block, a reading component which paralleled the writing process block (i.e., 15 minutes silent writing, 15 discussing your writing with the teacher and/or other students, 15 minutes to read your writing to the class and receive comments and questions on what you wrote). The major difference between the two blocks was the response group in reading where each day Mary Ann sat down with a small group of students and discussed topics they found in their reading.

Over time this structure changed as we learned more about the relationships the children established between reading and writing, (e.g., rather than divide our time into separate reading and writing blocks, the children were free to choose when they would read and write). By constantly observing, discussing and reflecting on what was happening in the room we were able to respond to the children's needs.
and alter the learning environment accordingly, (e.g., when Andy began to talk about themes in books, Mary Ann chose this as the next topic for discussion in the response groups). By the end of 1988, we had a very open block of time where the children had assumed much of the responsibility for directing their own learning, (e.g., other than whole group share and response groups, the children decided how they would use their time during reading/writing which required them to assume control for planning their time and keeping track of their own schedules. (See Chapter 3, which describes the schedule changes in Mary Ann's room.)

Although the thrust of this document is The Relationships Children Establish Between Reading and Writing, such discoveries do not exist in a vacuum. The learning environment is critical in providing opportunities for teachers and students to observe and reflect on their own learning processes and the processes of others. As a researcher, I've learned along with them. They were my guides. This is a chronicle of our journeys toward understanding.
I could easily start this chronicle with Mary Ann and her students, however that would be misleading. Understanding what reading and writing process is all about, develops gradually over time. Two factors, theory and practice, influence the growth of understanding. In practice, each new experience with teachers and students contributes another piece of information and offers another opportunity for reflection. In theory, each new article and book read, offers a different perspective. Consequently, these two factors, theory and practice, vary from classroom to classroom and from researcher to researcher, which makes it difficult to pin down exactly what someone means when they talk about process.

Rather than trying to define 'process' teaching, I will illustrate how my understanding of this concept developed over the course of several years. This will provide a general overview of 'process' teaching and a context in which to place the study of reading/writing relationships with Mary Ann and her students. Using two students in different settings I will focus on three common factors.
which underlie 'process' teaching: theories of how children learn, theories about how to focus instruction on children's learning processes, and the learning environment. Although these three factors are difficult to disentangle from one another they are found in both settings, as well as Mary Ann's room which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

Sarah

Ten year old Sarah sat beside me in the Reading Lab at Mount Saint Vincent University in Nova Scotia, Canada, struggling to read the book on gymnastics. Sarah had been referred to the Reading Lab at the University because she had a great deal of difficulty reading her reader, responding to questions about what she read and completing her workbook assignments. Very little writing was done, except for assigned questions and workbook exercises. Occasionally 'creative' writing was done on special topics, usually related to a holiday or special occasion.

Sarah's classroom experiences with reading and writing are not atypical of the experiences faced by many children in schools in Canada, the United States and Great Britain. Britton et al. (1975) in their ground-breaking study of school-based writing, found that the majority of children, aged 11-18, wrote to convey information (transaction) to
the teacher as the primary audience. Writing in this context tends to be viewed in two ways: (1) it is a product of language arts instruction whereby children write to demonstrate how well they have mastered the conventions of written language and (2) it is used as a primary tool to measure learning in other subject areas (Moffett, 1981). At the core of both viewpoints is the treatment of writing as an end product of learning, rather than a learning process in and of itself. Knoblaugh and Brannon (1983) have described the instruction based on this philosophical perspective of writing, as representative of composition instruction in antiquity.

Traditional views of reading and reading instruction in the classroom offer children very few opportunities to engage in reading as a learning process. This situation is particularly true for children like Sarah who have been 'identified' as experiencing difficulty with the regular curriculum. Allington (1977) found that 'poor readers' spend most of their time on skill instruction during remedial sessions and very little time actually reading. Clay (1972) and Gambrell, Wilson, and Gnatt (1981) found similar results in their respective studies of grade one and four students: 'poor' readers spent less time reading than did the 'good' readers. In addition Gambrell et. al. (1981) found that 'poor' readers spent twice as much time on skill activities compared to the 'good' readers.
Two important points emerge from these studies: (1) in general skill-based instruction provides few opportunities for children to engage in meaningful reading and writing situations and (2) 'poor' students who need to read and write the most actually spend the least amount of time reading and writing. Furthermore, during the climb up the ladder of skill mastery, many children lose sight of the purpose behind these activities. The concept of reading and writing as meaningful endeavors has been buried under a mountain of skill sheets. This was certainly the case with Sarah.

I began working with Sarah on a one-to-one basis using a more holistic approach to reading and writing than she had experienced in her classroom (Smith, 1982; Goodman, 1978). We read from trade books and talked about what she had read. We worked on improving her decoding strategies in the context of reading the trade books rather than using isolated workbook exercises (e.g., we worked on developing her strategies for using the context of the story to help her figure out unfamiliar words). Every session Sarah wrote short stories about things of interest to her (Calkins, 1979; Martin, 1976, 1983).

Sarah pursed her lips as she tried to decode the words on the page of that gymnastics book she had before her. The process was so laborious that she often lost track of what
the first part of the sentence said by the time she got to the end (Perfetti and Lesgold, 1977). With a sigh she finally reached the end of the chapter and we started to discuss the book based on what she had read thus far.

Sarah really liked the book because it was about gymnastics which was an obsession of hers. I had selected the book as well as a number of others, hoping that it would appeal to her (Meek, 1982). (The fact that I had done the selecting reveals a lot about my own thinking at the time which will be discussed later). In the book, a young girl is nervous about participating in an up-coming gymnastics competition and worried about how she will perform. While most of this information could be easily inferred from the text, Sarah had a great deal of difficulty making inferences. Initially I thought this was due to her difficulty with decoding.

After several questions about how the girl in the book felt and why she felt that way, I asked what turned out to be the break-through question, 'How would you feel if you were in the same situation?' Astonished, Sarah turned to me and asked, 'Is it all right to use what's in your head?' Revelation for tutor and student. No wonder Sarah couldn't make inferences. She was limiting herself solely to what was in the text. Reading for her was not the construction of meaning using her past experiences and background knowledge to make sense of the text (Harste, et al. 1984;
Rosenblatt, 1978), but rather a process of decoding without personal involvement.

I've begun with Sarah for several reasons which relate directly to much of what we know about how children learn.

Sarah's story illustrates the mismatch between the approach to learning she had learned in school and an individual's approach to his/her own learning (Harste, et al., 1980; Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983). We all have different ways of learning and knowing about the world around us. Vera John Steiner, in *Notebooks of the Mind* (1985), presents powerful evidence that how we think is very different from previously held beliefs. The logical analytical thinker may think in images we would normally have attributed to the artist.

In a transmission and rote learning environment there is little room for individual differences. The structure inherent in many basal materials is based on an underlying set of beliefs about how children learn (Hall, 1987). Although there is a wide variety of basal materials in the market today and great diversity in what constitutes a 'traditional' classroom, I will deal with several factors which are common in many of these programs and use them as a contrast for a process-based approach.
Sarah's difficulties in coping with the basal program in her school, stand out more clearly in comparison with her peers. She was not progressing the way her classmates were achieving. There is a great tendency in many classrooms to teach and design instruction for the average student (Goodlad, 1984). This means that many students fall either above or below this 'norm'. Sarah fell below the norm—below what you would expect the average student in grade five to attain.

Identifying what is the 'norm' in different classrooms is often based on the student's ability to cope with the basal program. Basal programs, with their scope and sequence of skills, provide a guide for the teacher in designing instructional practices which will benefit the majority of students in the class. Often these experiences segment learning into incremental steps the child must master before they can move onto the next level of complexity (Durkin, 1983). Those like Sarah who can't cope are often placed in a different reading group, so they can proceed at a slower pace and receive more help from the teacher. In Sarah's case she also received help during twice weekly sessions with the resource room teacher before being referred to the Reading Lab. Despite all this attention, Sarah 'failed' to progress in the way that was expected.
As many experienced teachers can attest to, Sarah's experiences are by no means unique. Despite our best efforts there are a lot of Sarahs in the school system. The roots of her problem and many students like her are very deep and complex. Part of the reason for Sarah's 'failure' is the criterion for success against which she was measured - ability to cope with the basal program. This in turn is based on a wider set of assumptions about learning and teaching which underly many school systems in general (Newman, 1985).

Schools try to offer the same type and quality of education to all their students. Basal programs offer a standard - a program of study designed to ensure that all students receive the same information and set of instructional experiences. This in itself is a difficult goal to accomplish because from day one children come to school with very different background experiences (Taylor, 1983; Heath, 1983; Wells, 1986). Even children from similar backgrounds respond differently to what they have learned and how they have learned it. So the concept of equality in education might be better expressed as equal opportunity - each student should have an equal opportunity to engage in experiences which will enable them to develop to their fullest, although this may differ from one individual to another.
Providing experiences like these in a transmission, teacher-directed classroom is difficult if not impossible. Trying to cover the material, cope with two or three (and in some cases four) reading groups requires time and energy which is further diluted when there are twenty-five to thirty students in the room. Logistics aside, such practices fail to take into account much of what we know about how children learn.

'Children learn by doing' - a trite phrase which has been around since Dewey. The essential meaning behind that phrase involves the child in meaningful engagement in their own learning processes (Dewey, 1956; Judy, 1980). In the classroom Sarah had opportunities to read and write and do reading/writing type activities, but there was little opportunity for her to become personally involved in her own learning. She did not draw upon her background experiences and try to link prior learning with novel situations (Tierney, 1982; Anderson, 1977). The activities Sarah experienced were out of context - isolated exercises which she could not relate to herself and her experiences (Goodman, 1978). The result was a child who fell further and further behind her peers.

Not only did Sarah fail to compete with her peers, but her failures and frustrations had an unfortunate side effect. Sarah hated writing. She couldn't 'write neat'
(penmanship). She could never 'write anything good.' She hated reading. Reading was 'boring.' Reading was 'too hard.' Rather than becoming a better reader and writer, Sarah was 'turning off' to reading and writing.

My first goal as her tutor was to help her gain confidence in herself as a person who could learn. My approach to helping her was based on my beliefs about how children learn. First of all I believed that learning to read and write was more than the sum of its parts (Smith, 1982). Rather than segment reading and writing into individual skills, we used trade books and Sarah's own experiences as the basis of our 'curriculum.'

With writing, we initially set aside concerns about spelling, grammar, usage, and penmanship in favor of a focus on Sarah expressing her ideas. Together we brainstormed a list of topics she was interested in (often based on her personal experiences) and Sarah wrote about these during our sessions (Graves, 1983). At first this was a slow procedure until Sarah gained confidence that she did indeed have something worthwhile to communicate. Eventually she began working on her writing at home and bringing drafts into her sessions.

Now that Sarah knew she could write (express ideas) we gradually worked on the mechanics of writing in her drafts,
so she could communicate her ideas more clearly to other people. Each week we selected two or three skills to work on during our sessions. The role of skills in the composing process began to make sense to Sarah as she used them for a purpose - to communicate more effectively (Graves, 1983; Atwell, 1987; Romano, 1987; Calkins, 1986).

Initially Sarah's writing formed the basis for reading. Since she knew what she had written, automatically Sarah had a context for understanding that reading should make sense (Hansen, 1987). The problem of using her background knowledge was also eliminated because much of the writing was based on her own experiences. With these two factors under control, we worked on developing Sarah's ability to use strategies in decoding words (Clay, 1975). Again since she knew the story Sarah could often use the context of her writing to decode words when she forgot a particular word (Chomsky, 1971).

After several weeks as Sarah's confidence in her abilities as a reader of her own writing increased, we moved into trade books. Although I had readily accepted topic choice in writing, I had not yet reached the point were I had internalized the concept of topic choice in reading. Based on discussions with Sarah about her interests, I selected a variety of books at different reading levels to use in our sessions (Meek, 1982). If I had the opportunity to work
with Sarah today, I would automatically let her assume the responsibility for making her own selections.

Every session Sarah would read part of her book and we would discuss what she had read. These discussions focused on more global concerns in the story rather than literal questions of where something happened or what color was the gymnastics suit? The transition between reading her own writing and the trade books was gradual, but after the breakthrough session previously described, Sarah began to make steady gains.

...  

Sarah's story points out some basic differences between teaching practices based on holistic theories of learning processes versus hierarchial, skill-based theories of how children learn. In her classroom Sarah was expected to learn a set sequence of skills and strategies which she wasn't able to relate to a meaningful context. Only after she had mastered these would she be a competent reader. In the Lab we began with the belief that reading and writing are meaningful activities (Holdaway, 1979). The reader brings a wealth of background experiences to the text which helps her construct meaning (Adams and Collins, 1979; Cochran-Smith, 1984). Skills and strategies are merely
tools to help the reader and not the goal of reading instruction.

Sarah had very few opportunities to engage in writing which was meaningful for her in the classroom. Again writing like reading was a sequence of skill mastery out of the context of Sarah's own writing. In the Lab we began with Sarah's writing and focused on skills only to facilitate her ability to communicate ideas she felt were important.

The contrast between the Lab and the classroom provides an overview of differences in theories of how children learn as well as an indication of where I was, at that time, in my own understanding of how to provide instruction that capitalized on children's learning processes. The comparison however does not fully describe the role of the process-oriented classroom environment because the Lab situation was one-to-one. Jason's story demonstrates what writing process means in one classroom setting.

Jason

Jason's fourth grade classroom was located on the sunnyside of Oyster River Elementary School. Huge windows along one wall overlooked the front of the school and let in the bright autumn sunshine. I entered Jason's class in October
to begin an eight week research project on children's writing. In particular I was interested in how children choose the topics they write about.

Topic choice is one of the cornerstones of writing process and one of the hardest concepts for teachers to come to grips with in their classrooms. The idea that children can choose what they will write raises a myriad of questions and concerns. How do they know what to choose? What happens if they can't think of anything to write about? What happens if they won't write? What happens if they choose an inappropriate topic? How do you know they didn't copy the idea from someone else, the TV, a book, etc.?

As a teacher, who formerly spent hours looking for sure-fire topics designed to motivate students to produce their best work, I can sympathize with these concerns. It is difficult if not impossible to find that one topic which will motivate all twenty-five children in the classroom because those twenty-five children are all individuals with their own interests and concerns about writing. What is of interest to one child (or even the majority of children) in the class with not be of interest to others. Even with the most motivational of pre-writing presentations, there are always some students who merely satisfy the requirements of the exercise without putting forth much effort. These students in turn tend to receive the bare minimum mark
indicating that they did indeed fulfill the bare minimum requirements.

These two areas, individual interests and motivation are keys to topic choice. If students are all individuals with different concerns and if it is difficult if not impossible to find the sure-fire topic, then why not let the children choose their own? At this point most teachers will concede to the logic of that argument, however they still remain unconvinced that this approach will work in their classrooms. Understanding topic choice means understanding how it functions within the context of writing processes to enable students to pursue areas of interest while at the same time motivating children to write (Bissex, 1980; Calkins, 1980; Graves, 1976; Martin, 1976, 1983).

When children are allowed to write about topics of their own choosing, they generally pick an area they know something about or at least have a keen interest in exploring (Calkins, 1986; Atwell, 1987). Many children initially choose to write about a personal experience, (e.g., my birthday, my trip to Disney World, my dog, etc.). Beginning with a situation he/she actually experienced places the child in control of the story. He/she actually went to Disney World or has a pet dog named Snoopy, so he/she can describe what took place. The child thus becomes the authority on the topic and has a vested personal
interest in telling the story the best he/she can. The motivation for writing has undergone a subtle but important shift from writing for the teacher to writing for oneself, (and a wider audience of one's classmates which will be discussed later).

The preponderance of personal narratives (stories about personal experiences like trips, pets, family, etc.) as a starting point with student writing has led to the unfortunate misconception that all children engaged in the processes of writing write only about personal experiences. Personal narrative is a useful genre (type of writing) for establishing a writer's sense of authority, as well as helping them with character, plot and sequence which are imbedded in the narrative (Graves, 1984). In deciding to write what happened on the trip to Disney World, the characters are the people including the writer, who went on the trip. The plot becomes the sequence of events which happened.

Depending on the accuracy of the child's memory, the story becomes a re-telling of the events on the trip. However many children have difficulty deciding on how much information to put in the story and how much information is too much. The breakfast-to-bed story (Graves, 1983) is a frequent occurrence where the child wants to write about his/her birthday party which was in the afternoon but
begins the story in the morning with getting out of bed, getting dressed, eating breakfast and all the other events which led up to the party and what happened afterwards. The birthday party as the focus of the story becomes lost in the events of the entire day. Similarly a story about the trip to Disney World begins with getting ready, getting on the plane, what was eaten for lunch, the hotel, etc. Stories like these require the writer to make decisions as to what information to include and what to leave out.

The decision-making process in writing develops over time, as the writer gains more experience and feedback on what is effective writing (Shanklin, 1981). This is where teachers can support writing by allowing children to make the first and most critical decision—choosing their own topics. After that they can help children with positive feedback about what the child has written and areas the child may want to work on in his/her writing. Gradually the motivation for writing comes more from within the child (intrinsic) rather than from external motivation (extrinsic) to please the teacher, earn a reward like a sticker on the paper, or even marks. But what happens if the teacher’s worst fears are realized and he/she encounters the child who won’t write? This brings me back to Jason. I frequently use my experiences with Jason in workshops I give because if ever there was a reluctant writer, Jason was the one.
When I entered Jason's class in October, his teacher had already been focusing on the processes of writing since the beginning of the school year. For an hour everyday, usually the first thing in the morning, the class engaged in writing.

At the beginning of the year, Jason's teacher conducted brainstorm sessions with the class to help them generate topics they could write about. Brainstorm sessions combine modelling by the teacher with input from the class. For students unfamiliar with 'process writing,' especially in the upper elementary grades where they are used to having topics given to them, the teacher can suggest some topics she herself could write about. From there the children suggest topics of interest to them. All the suggestions are listed on the board, overhead projector, flip chart, etc., so the students can see what topics have been raised. The purpose of these sessions is to help students realize that everyone has something he/she can write about. After the brainstorm session, the students can make their own lists of topics using some which have been discussed in the session as well as others they have thought of during the session. Typically most students can come up with at least five or six topics of interest to them. These initial sessions are generally sufficient to enable students to generate a list of topics for writing which can be added to without the need for further brainstorm sessions for
several weeks. Teachers periodically like to conduct other brainstorm sessions depending on the students' needs (i.e., if a number of students feel they need one). Often individual brainstorm sessions are used with a student who seems to be having particular difficulty deciding what to write.

When I first spoke with Jason, he had lost his list of topics and couldn't think of anything to write about, furthermore he 'hated writing.' Armed with my prior experience with reluctant writers, I sat down with Jason to have an individual brainstorm session. After initial talk to establish a rapport, I began with one of my never fail opening questions, 'What do you like to do after school?' The immediate response was, 'nuthin.' With each succeeding question and 'nuthin' response, Jason slouched lower in his chair. This was not going the way it was 'supposed' to go. In desperation I asked, 'Well what do you like to watch on TV?' 'Nuthin.' Now I knew I was dealing with a very reluctant writer, because even the most resistant usually responded to that question. In addition to the virtue of patience, this session was rapidly teaching me a fact I continually tell teachers, there is no such thing as the 'ten best questions' to ask when talking with students about their writing, even at the point of choosing topics. The best questions are ones which express sincere interest in the writer and his/her interests and help him/her
explore the topic and what he/she has written. So far I wasn't getting anything I could respond to sincerely or otherwise.

Finally I succeeded in worming out of Jason that he had a dog and liked to ride his bike. We wrote these down as possible topics he could write about even though he 'hated writing.' Attempts to help Jason explore his topics produced mediocre responses. Despite this I continued to persevere and asked Jason to choose one of his topics. He picked his dog and grudgingly started to write.

While I was talking with Jason, the rest of the class was following the usual pattern established in the class since the beginning of the year. The day started with silent writing where children selected one of their topics to write about or continued writing on a story they had previously been writing about. Students were not expected to finish a story in one session but worked on it until they felt satisfied that they had said all they wanted to about that particular idea.

After about twenty minutes, the students were free to continue writing or they might choose to read what they had written to one of their peers and receive feedback on the story. This process of reading to another person and receiving feedback is often called 'sharing.' Sharing can
take many forms from one-to-one with a peer [peer
conferences], student-to-teacher [teacher conference],
small group, or whole class. Sharing through a conference
tends to be more intensive as it is one-to-one and usually
focuses on helping the writer clarify and explore his/her
topic. These sessions are called conferences, despite the
fact that usually only two people are involved, when the
word itself implies more than two individuals.

Jason finally started to write about his dog and I left him
in order to talk and confer with other students in the
class, until it was time for the whole class share. During
whole class share different students volunteer to read what
they have written to the class and receive feedback from
the teacher and fellow students in the form of comments and
questions. The comments usually indicate something the
listener liked or found interesting in the writer's story
(e.g., I liked the word 'crash' at the beginning of your
story; I liked the part where you described the beach;
etc.) Occasionally a student will relate a comment to
his/her own interests or experiences (e.g., I liked how you
described your cat because I have one and that reminds me
of him). The questions usually focus on a part the listener
found unclear in the story or center on an area the
listener wants more information about (e.g., I didn't get
it when you said you were at the beach and then you talked
about how you got there; what kind of dog is it; what's

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your cat like; etc.). The most important thing about questions is that they are stated positively and not interpreted as negative (e.g., where did you get the idea for your story versus why did you write something silly like that) (Elbow, 1973).

Jason didn't want to share his story that day and stayed very quiet during the whole class share, neither asking questions nor making comments. Although not every child shares everyday or asks other children about their writing, the teacher remains alert to children who may need some encouragement to share a story. Children are never forced to share. Jason's reluctance on that day was part of a pattern which persisted over several weeks.

The next day I had a conference with Jason to discuss what he had written the day before. After our previous session I was eager to see what he had written and Jason was willing to read his story to me. (Note: all writing samples are reproduced as the children wrote them, complete with errors in spelling and pronunciation. Where an error interferes with meaning, the standard form is given in brackets following the word).

My dog is blak brun and whit. He likes to run arond alot. he killd a cat onct.

I bravely tried to look encouraging in the face of Jason's
scowl. After all he had tried. Following my beliefs about the processes of writing, he had some text on the page and now we could begin to work on his writing. The only difficulty was Jason obviously did not hold the same beliefs I did. He felt he was finished. He had a dog. It was black, brown and white. At one time it had killed a cat. End of story.

Armed with my repertoire of past experiences in drawing kids out, I attempted to engage Jason in a conversation about his writing. I looked for the positive and commented on how he had described his dog which was a question other children frequently asked a writer. Jason was non-committal. I remarked on how he had talked about things his dog obviously liked to do (e.g., run around). Finally I arrived at the cat incident. Rather than comment on it at that time I tried to encourage Jason to tell me more about his dog.

ME: What kind of dog is he?
Jason: Just a dog.
ME: How long have you had him?
Jason: A long time.

I consoled myself with the fact that at least we had progressed beyond 'nuthin' as the stock response. My optimism was soon shattered.
ME: Are there special things you like to do with him?  
Jason: Nope.
ME: Well, does he do any tricks or things like that?  
Jason: Nope.

Since a conference like a conversation is based upon a certain amount of 'give and take' or 'turn and turn about' between the participants, I found myself in the unwelcome position of trying to engage Jason in a dialogue when obviously he wasn't interested. This situation was very different from almost all my conferences with children where they actively participated and at times I found myself trying to keep up with their enthusiasm for their topic. In a last ditch stand I attempted to elicit some response from Jason which indicated he felt something about his story and the incidents he had related (Sowers, 1987).

ME: In your story, I see that you talked about how your dog killed a cat. Can you tell me more about this?  
Jason: Nuthin much to tell.
ME: Well how did it happen?  
Jason: He just grabbed it and killed it.
ME: Well how did you feel when this happened?  
Jason: It deserved to die.

At this point in time I finally deferred to Jason's belief that the story was 'finished.' No matter what my interest in the story, Jason was obviously not interested. It was time to move on. I asked Jason if he had any ideas for his next story and he said he did. With a couple of more questions and indifferent responses, I finally discovered he intended to write an adventure story. I left Jason to write.
Many students in the upper elementary grades, particularly the boys, enjoy writing fiction stories which are action-adventure stories. This is not a 'sexist' statement but an affirmation of trends present in many classrooms. One of the features of allowing children to choose topics, is that it enables them to write about areas of interest which sometimes follow sex-based preferences (Graves, 1973). Girls tend to write quite frequently about friends and families. Boys tend to write more frequently about action and adventure. In both instances, it would be difficult to find assigned topics which would meet the needs of boys and girls who follow these trends.

While sex-differences in reading and writing preferences are not absolute givens, being aware of these influences helps in understanding some of the choices children make in writing (Sherrill, 1984; Joels and Anderson, 1983; Summers and Lukasevich, 1983; Tibbetts, 1974). This is particularly relevant with the action-adventure stories. In the 'best' of these stories there is a plot, character motivation, and character development. The main characters are usually on a quest of some kind and the adventure sequences are obstacles along the way to attaining a goal (e.g., the main characters are trying to find a treasure and have to cross a desert, climb a mountain, go through a swamp with man-eating alligators, etc.).
In some of these stories there is an evil villain who is trying to prevent the main characters from reaching their goal. In addition to placing life-threatening obstacles in their way, the villain or his henchmen frequently engage the 'heroes' in a series of violent confrontations. Only by outwitting the villain can the heroes continue their quest. Stories like this represent the eternal conflict between good and evil. Despite the elemental nature of this conflict, the 'best' of these stories still provide the reader with the motives behind the characters actions.

Less 'skillfully' crafted action-adventure stories tend to be merely a series of action sequences strung together with no character development or motivation and little apparent plot (e.g., we climbed the hill, fell in a pit, were chased by a bear, etc.). The reader is left wondering who are these people in the story, what are they like and why are these things happening to them. Probing for answers to these questions can result in a simple statement that these are the 'good guys' and the villain (if present) is doing this because he's bad. Without plot and character, the encounters between the 'good guys' and the 'bad guy' seem to be simply examples of gratuitous violence (Graves, 1988).

Although in many cases writing provides a safe outlet for the expression of ideas which would not be possible on
assigned topics, violent elements in children’s writing can be distressing for teachers. We all have different personal/professional opinions about what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior in our classrooms. Writing, as part of the daily classroom routine, is subject to the principles we establish for the class as a whole. Some teachers simply do not tolerate ‘aggressive’ expression in the room or on paper.

Unfortunately it is difficult to eradicate the written expression of violent actions. Attempts to do so often result in driving the behavior ‘underground.’ It’s still there but it finds different outlets (e.g., ‘humorous’ stories about food fights, fiction stories with ‘gross’ elements like eating ‘slimy’ worms, etc.). Rather than trying to totally eliminate the behavior, it is possible to work through it with the student and his writing. Conferring with the writer, asking him about his characters and looking for reasons why characters are acting the way they do, help the writer reflect on his writing. Initially the stock ‘good guy/bad guy’ response is used to explain the story. However over time, the writer begins to develop an understanding for the need to have reasons behind plot and character in an action/adventure story. This understanding does not develop overnight and even though the writer may respond during a conference, initially he
may not revise the story to take these factors into account.

During this process, peers are also a factor, particularly as they grow as writers. Incidents of 'gratuitous violence' in writing were rare in Mary Ann's class, in part because the writer had to respond to peer questions about plot and character. The children simply would not accept violence for violence's sake and quizzed the writer accordingly for plausible reasons for what was written. Although no firm guidelines or rules were established, the children developed an understanding of Mary Ann's expectations in this area - expectations which permitted quite a bit of latitude if the incidents were a necessary and supported part of the story. The key to this understanding was the rapport Mary Ann had developed with the children. They were free to discuss concerns with her and at no time did she make a writer feel he/she had transgressed even if the violence was 'too much.' Together they would sit down and talk it out.

Action/adventure stories can be positive learning experiences if we look at them as opportunities for growth rather than as 'aberrant' expressions. Conferences with the writer and peer responses help the writer develop his/her sense of plot and character. Reading is also a critical factor in helping the writer understand how other writers
have handled these complex issues. Jason's action/adventure stories illustrate one writer's discovery of what makes a more effective action/adventure story.

The action/adventure story Jason began after his dog story was the first of a series of untitled action/adventure stories which began with his story about Daniel and him.

One day I went to Dans hose (house). We went for a walk in the woods. We got lost. Thar (there) was a river with a Brige (bridge).

Despite several conferences, Jason had difficulty deciding where to go from here with his story. Finally he abandoned it to write a futuristic adventure story set in the year 2015 where he was flying his X-wing fighter down a canyon and firing his missiles. This story was also abandoned after a paragraph, in favor of a return to the Daniel story. The second version of the Daniel story, which was about a page in length, picked up where the other one left off. After a series of action sequences where the boys fell in a well, found a rope, climbed out and got lost again, they finally ended up spending the night in a cave. The story ended with Jason waking up in the morning to, 'thar was throw up on the floor, Danil did it. The End.'

Jason had written himself into a corner. He was frustrated with the way the story was going and to end the story he used the 'Daniel incident.' This was a variation on another
common technique used by some writers, where they kill off the main character(s) in order to extricate themselves from a story which is moving from one adventure to another with little or no plot and character motivation.

Jason's dissatisfaction with his writing, placed him back at square one where he decided that he didn't have anything to write about. Attempts to confer about the adventure stories were met with 'they're stupid.' Together we went back to his list of possible writing topics in the hopes of finding something he liked.

During the conference Jason began to tell me about his bike. He had assembled it himself and, contrary to his early assertions that he never did 'nuthin,' he enjoyed riding it. He could even do tricks on it. Initial topic conferences like these help the writer explore their ideas. As such they can be beneficial pre-writing experiences for the child. By talking about his bike, Jason discovered that he did have some interesting things to say about his BMX bike. Several days later he showed me the following story.

When I got my bike.
   2 years ago I got my Bike. I put it together, it toke (took) a hour. When I got it all finisht I toke it out side to ride it at the tenis (tennis) coop (court). I go up hill and down and at the bottom of the hill there is a jump. I go over it. It is fun. I rode home. The end.
Jason wanted to share this story with his class during whole group share. His peers responded very enthusiastically, particularly to the part about Jason assembling the bike and using it for jumps. Several of his peers' questions encouraged Jason to add more information to the story (e.g., it was a BMX bike, the hill was about three feet high, and he could do lots of tricks like standing up on the bike and doing wheelies). When questioned about the 'tennis coop' he explained that it was the place where people played tennis. Awareness finally dawned with the students when they realized he was describing a tennis court. Jason however continued to assert that it was a 'coop' and not a 'court'. Consequently, he did not change this terminology in the draft. Deciding when and what to revise is definitely the writer's prerogative and an indication of Jason's sense of ownership in his writing. Although, children in classrooms like Jason's are never forced to revise, he did revise his story to include the make of the bike, the height of the hill and the tricks he could do.

Despite the discussion about the 'coop' Jason was quite pleased with how the other children had responded to his story. For the first time he seemed to feel part of the writing community in the class and even expressed some guarded enthusiasm for his next story.
Quite a few of the other boys in the classroom were writing action-adventure stories which were very popular during share time. Bouyed by his recent success, Jason wanted to return to this form of writing. As part of pre-writing, Jason and I had several conferences in which we discussed the characteristics of an action-adventure story beginning with what makes an adventure. Jason came up with several possibilities: someone could be in trouble, someone could be captured by someone else and you had to rescue him, and you could be looking for a treasure. We looked at each of these responses and talked about some specific details such as who was captured, who was doing the capturing, etc. When we came to the treasure, Jason told me about the lost city of Atlantis which he had just heard about. He talked in quite a bit of detail about what kind of treasure might be there. Finally he decided that finding the treasure might be an adventure story.

From this point Jason and I talked about other aspects of the story such as who was going to be in it and how he was going to try to find the treasure. My role in this conference was basically following Jason's lead by trying to ask questions which would help him clarify his thinking, (e.g., why were the bad guys chasing you, how do you find out about their plans, etc.). Gradually the skeleton of a story emerged.
The purpose of these conferences was not to develop an 'outline' for a story but to explore possibilities. Although Jason and/or I occasionally jotted down ideas as a record of what we'd talked about, the story was still Jason's responsibility and he had to remain open to new ideas he might discover as he wrote. Rigid 'outlines' can sometimes adversely affect writing. If the writer is too focused on following the outline he/she sometimes misses opportunities to explore new ideas which can occur during the process of writing. Being flexible enough to follow a new direction which emerges during writing can lead the writer to new insights. 'Writing as a means of discovery' can be a powerful tool for learning not only more about writing but also about the topic being written (Murray, 1984).

Jason's 'Lost City of Atlantis' story took several weeks to write during which he gradually became more open and interested in his writing. In many ways this was a breakthrough piece he could share with his peers as he wrote and about which he received positive feedback.

One day I was lisining (listening) to the radio. When a special news bulletin (bulletin) said a man was trying to find the lost city of Atlantis (Atlantis). He died (died) doing it. The cost guard (Coast Guard) found his camera and his body floating on the water. Now bake (back) to your regular scheduled program. I decide to go to the beach. I casted by bot (boat) in out in the water. Just as I got my bot in the water someone in a speed bot zoomed across the water and shot machine guns at my gas tank. I jumped out...
and the bot blow up. I called the police, they did not believe me. So I borrowed some radar to track down the Bad guys. I found their hideout. I planted a microphone in their hideout and listened to their plans.

They said they were going to try to find the city again so I went back to the beach. I waited for a hour and they did not come. so I drove to the airport and borrowed a helicopter. I took off and zoomed to their hideout. I discovered that no one was there so I thought if they not hear them at the beach I zoomed to the beach and saw their bot so I dropped a bomb on it. It blew up. Suddenly I heard another helicopter of in the distance.

I saw it. it was chasing me. I zoomed down a narrow canyon. i got ahead. It was shooting at me. it was the boss of the gang. I fired a guided missile at him and killed him. I did not find the city.

The changes in Jason's writing are evident in the story. There is a purpose for the story (to find the lost city), a conflict between himself and the 'bad guys' both of whom are trying to find the city, and a conclusion when he destroys the leader of the gang but does not succeed in finding the city. Of interest in the story is his use of the news bulletin to set the stage for the existence of the city and where it might be found because of where the Coast Guard had found the body and the camera.

Jason worked very hard on this story. It was the first time he had attempted to plot an adventure story and the first piece of writing he had produced which was longer than a couple of paragraphs or a page in his own handwriting.
Towards the end he was running out of fresh ideas. After he had disposed of the 'boss' he didn't want to write about trying to find the city which accounts for the rather abrupt conclusion, 'I did not find the city.' This is also a variation of the 'quick way' to end a story he had used in the piece about Daniel and the woods.

The support Jason received from his peers is also indicated by the changes he has made in his spelling (Hillocks, 1986). Jason was interested in publishing this piece and several of his peers were helping him edit it, by assisting him with his spelling. In Jason's class, when children wanted to edit their stories for spelling, they were asked to identify words they felt were misspelled. Then the teacher or peers helped the writer convert his spelling into standard forms. The inclusion of some of these corrections accounts for the inconsistency in the spelling, (e.g., 'scheduled' is spelled in standard form while 'their' is written as 'thear'). When he published this story, he edited it so the final draft contained standard spelling. However, allowing Jason to use 'invented' spelling in his early drafts enabled him to write what he wanted without being confined to words he knew how to spell correctly.

The purpose and function of 'invented' or 'non-standard' spelling is the subject of a great deal of literature in
the field of writing. The basic principle behind its use is simple. Children can write at a very early age if they are allowed to use the words they need to tell a story, even when they don't necessarily know the standard spelling (Giacobbe, 1981; Sowers, 1981, Bissex, 1980). In primary classrooms where children have the opportunity to engage in the processes of reading and writing, most of them begin writing the first day of school using 'non-standard' spelling. Over time their knowledge of spelling conventions increases and more and more standard spellings are used in their writing (Sowers, 1982). However, even professional writers use 'invented' spelling in drafts, leaving the confirmation of spellings to a later date when the writer has his/her message intact.

The situation in classrooms where children must know standard spelling before they can write, severely restricts their writing. Patterned writing based on mastered spellings often occur (e.g., I like my mother. I like my father. I like balloons., etc.). Allowing the children to use written language as freely as they use their oral language opens up the world of writing. If the child knows a word he/she can use it in a story without worrying about conventional spelling until after he/she has said what he/she wanted to say in writing (Hillocks, 1986).
Unfortunately two of the severest criticisms and misconceptions about 'invented' spelling are that children don't get enough phonics training and it leads to 'poor' spelling habits. Having observed children in both 'process' and 'skill mastery' oriented classrooms, the differences between the two are clear. The children in the 'process' classes are constantly using the principles of phonics to 'sound' out words. The end result may not produce the standard spelling but phonetically they are accurate representations of what the child hears or senses in terms of where and how the sound is produced in the vocal system. For example compare Jason's spelling of 'finished' as 'finisht.' The problem here is not with Jason and his 'phonics skills' but in the nature of our English language.

The alphabetical spelling systems in English are not strictly phonetic, but phonemic. They give a single 'basic' spelling for each morpheme from which all the pronunciations are predictable. In the case of the 'ed' suffix, we spell it as 'ed' but it can be pronounced several different ways depending on the root word. For example compare the pronunciation of 'ed' on the words, 'wanted,' 'saved,' and 'flipped.' In each word, 'ed' has a different pronunciation (e.g., 'id' on wanted; 'd' on saved; and 't' on 'flipped') depending on whether the final consonant is voiced or voiceless. The end result is Jason's spelling of 'finisht' is an accurate representation of what
he hears when he uses his phonics cues to spell the word, even though his spelling does not correspond to the alphabetical conventions of standard English spelling. Mastery of phonics skills, therefore, does not ensure absolute spelling accuracy.

In addition, generally the 'phonics' exercises used in many traditional classrooms take place outside the context of writing situations. Only when a child has mastered the spelling of a word, can they use it in writing. This requires a child to transfer learning in one area, phonics sheets, to another area, writing. Furthermore the vocabulary available to use in writing is limited by the child's spelling ability. The 'process' children are using their abilities to 'sound out' words within the framework of writing and are motivated to do so by their desire to tell a story versus completing an exercise.

The attention and concentration the children in 'process' classrooms devote to the sounds of our language when writing is a sharp contrast to the way many children respond to 'phonics' exercises. I've seen children deduce the pattern of the phonics exercise and hastily fill in the blanks, circle the sound, etc. with little thought or attention to what they are 'supposed' to be learning. The 'process' children are focused on their 'task' because they
have a personal need to use the words they want to tell their stories.

The accusation of encouraging 'poor' spelling habits is unfounded in light of the growth of spelling ability over the course of the year. Accompanying this growth is the expansion of the children's vocabulary, which even they themselves recognized as having increased with the new focus on the processes of reading. Through reading and writing children in 'process' classrooms overall have a broad-based vocabulary containing words which are generally above the expectations for that particular grade level (e.g., pandemonium, portmanteau, paraphernalia, and encumbered, were some of the words from the books the children in Mary Ann's grade five class were reading). Considering the vocabulary they were using, their spelling abilities showed similar development.

Children who write using 'invented spelling' also learn to place the conventions of language in the proper perspective. Spelling and similar conventions of our written language are necessary to communicate effectively. In early drafts, the writer generally reads his/her story to the teacher and peers. Since the writer has written the draft he/she can generally read it and/or use the context of the story to decode words they've forgotten.
Allowing children to use 'invented spelling' enables them to devote more attention to the story itself rather than getting 'bogged' down trying to recall specific rules for spelling or grammar. Looking at Jason's draft, within the context of what he was trying to accomplish in his writing, shows a great deal of growth compared with his earlier stories, although his use of conventions is still not standard. If Jason had been in a situation where he had to worry about spelling, grammar and usage as he wrote he would have had little attention left to devote to the telling of his story. Now that he not only has a story written, but is pleased about what he has done and how his peers responded, he has the incentive to work on the language conventions - a process he has already begun. For a child who had a history of difficulties in traditional reading and writing classes, he has come a long way in six weeks. In watching his interactions with his peers, the benefits have been personal and social as well as academic.

Looking at Sarah's and Jason's journeys towards understanding through the processes of reading and/or writing I see reflections of my own voyage. They came a long way in their thinking, as did I. When I look back on these experiences I see just how far I've come from that first session with Sarah where I still hadn't fully internalized or put into practice what I knew in theory. Working with Jason I was able to better combine theory and
practice in the writing classroom, as well as find the opportunities for growth with a 'reluctant' writer. Since both children had a history of difficulties in reading and writing, their progress makes their journeys even more remarkable. For myself however, I had an even more remarkable voyage of discovery awaiting me with Mary Ann and her students — empowering children to learn through the relation of reading and writing processes.
During the two years I spent in Mary Ann's room, Mary Ann and I collaborated in changing the classroom environment to enable the children to have opportunities to relate reading and writing processes. The changes we made, in themselves, became a process of discovering what the children were learning, reflecting on how we could better facilitate their learning and changing the classroom experiences accordingly. This cycle of observation/interaction, reflection and change does not take place overnight but develops over time in response to the children's needs.

Understanding our rationale for the changes we made, offers some insights into our own thinking about how to teach in response to the children's learning processes. In trying to respond to the children's needs, the classroom became more dynamic and our 'agenda' more flexible. For example, Andy began to use the concept of mood in talking about his reading, so Mary Ann used this as the discussion topic for response group the following week, even though we had originally intended to talk about it a little later in the term. On another occasion, we were talking about metaphors
and similes and Danny asked if he could use examples from his own writing to illustrate the concept, rather than finding examples from the books he was reading. From that point on, in response groups, we used the children's writing, as well as that of professionals, to teach the concepts we wanted the children to learn.

This chapter describes the changes Mary Ann and I made in the classroom, as we and the children became more involved in reading and writing processes, as well as our reasons for making these changes. Underlying this description and rationale is the constant process of observation and reflection. However, the first part of this chapter deals with the more formal aspects of the methodology involved in the Study of the Relationships Children in a Grade Five Classroom Establish Between the Processes of Reading and Writing.

**Methodology**

The question which guided this study evolved during the first year I spent in Mary Ann's room. Initially my interest was in topic choice in reading and writing - do the topics children read about, influence their writing? Gradually I realized that this focus was too restricted, particularly in light of the move to 'reading processes' and the accompanying changes in the children's reading and
writing. Daily the children were demonstrating that they were relating reading and writing in areas like genre, theme, and literary style which were far beyond the parameters of my narrow focus. I became interested in looking at the relationships the children established between reading and writing as their learning environment changed to encourage a closer connection between the two processes. The formal statement of this research interest became: When a grade five reading and writing program is changed to encourage the children to engage in the processes of reading and writing, what aspects of the processes do the children choose to relate?

The nature of my research interest, as indicated by the question, meant that I would need to look at the children within the context of the classroom environment as they engaged in reading/writing and interacted with their peers and Mary Ann. The research methodology would have to be one which would permit as thorough an investigation as possible while at the same time interfere as little as possible in their classroom routines.

Whyte and Whyte (1984) identify four areas which they feel are important issues in research: (i) scientific research versus social reform, (ii) one set of methods versus an integration of methods, (iii) analyzing the processes of data analysis, and (iv) development of
theories. I found aspects of each of these elements important to my developing understanding of research.

Scientific research versus social reform.

Whyte and Whyte are concerned with the dilemmas that face many researchers in the social sciences when trying to balance doing 'pure' research and attempting to apply the research to affect change in the social situation. This issue is one of the primary differences between qualitative research and the quantitative methods which characterize the 'received' view described by Agar (1986). Quantitative methods try to control for researcher bias and support researcher detachment from the questions being investigated. Involvement with the people in a situation would undermine the quest for 'objectivity' in the research. Whyte and Whyte have used action research to study different situations while at the same time having a positive influence on improving the situation of the people involved.

In the field of educational research this is a dilemma faced by many researchers, especially when they encounter situations where they feel the students and teachers might benefit from practical applications of the research. Such situations are not easily resolved but change may be facilitated by the active involvement of the teachers and administrators. This was the situation in Mary Ann's school.
where changes in the classroom were supported by the principal and board administrators.

Whyte and Whyte also illustrate the problems of attempting to apply research findings from one area to another area, without understanding the local conditions and the perspectives of the people in those situations. This issue of involvement also encompasses the day-to-day questions of the degree of participation and observation in the research setting. Whyte and Whyte provide a very thorough analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of covert versus overt roles and the balance of participation versus observation.

Reinharz (1979) also found it difficult to achieve a balance between the role of researcher and participant. Her dissatisfaction with both participant-observation and survey research lead her to look at experiential methods where the researcher studies and reflects on his/her own growth and development during the context of the study.

In Mary Ann's room my role as a researcher alternated between participation and observation depending on the particular activity. Whyte and Whyte's discussion of roles was helpful in increasing my awareness of the necessity of being cognizant of the changes in my role during various classroom situations (e.g., conferring with children versus passive observation) and at different points in the research.
(e.g., initial entry versus my growing professional and personal relationship with Mary Ann).

(ii) **One Set of Methods Versus An Integration of Methods.**
Whyte and Whyte were invaluable in describing ways different methods could be integrated to take advantage of the strengths of each and compensate for their weaknesses. Particularly in the area of interviewing I found suggestions for my research, using open-ended interviews to gain more understanding about the perspectives of the students. I also found that tabulating the information in the children's reading and writing folders helped give a broader picture of overall patterns. While I would hesitate to call this a quantitative method, quantifying some aspects of information gathered in the field is a helpful adjunct to observational fieldnotes.

A serious limitation of the methods used in the 'received' view is the emphasis on those behaviors which are quantifiable using accepted statistical methods. This narrow focus severely limits the type of questions which can be investigated as well as the variables which can be considered at any one time. Human beings are complex, as are the social forces which shape them and which they in turn shape. To try to reduce this complexity to dependent and independent variables seems unrealistic, as well as
very limiting to understanding the children in Mary Ann's room.

MacKenzie (in Irvine, 1970) and Lazarfield (in Woolf, 1961) provided strong arguments for questioning the foundation of the statistical methods characteristic of quantitative research. The use of any one method to the exclusion of others seems to be an undesirable consequence of focusing solely on method and not on the nature of the problem.

(iii) Analyzing the Processes of Data Analysis:
Whyte and Whyte offered many useful suggestions for focusing and analyzing the data - they tried to make explicit ways of thinking about data analysis which is often implicit in a given researcher's way of analyzing the data. (Becker and Geer, in Burgess, 1986; and Burgess, 1984; also provided useful ways for indexing and analyzing data). In particular the issue of depth versus breadth is an important concern in any study using participant observation. In my study I tried for breadth in developing an overall view of the general trends in the students' perspectives.

(iv) The Development of Theories:
The area of theory development is a very difficult topic for me. I like Whyte and Whyte's approach to the development of theories from an orientating theory, through
substantive to formal theory. Yet I feel very hesitant at the idea of developing a formal theory based on my own research. The orientating theory is useful for providing an initial focus for the study, (e.g., opportunities to engage in the processes of reading and writing will enhance the children's learning).

The study of reading/writing relationships in Mary Ann's room was based on qualitative methods of research, in which I adopted the role of a participant-observer. I was in the room three to four days a week over a period of two years, during that time I collected data from a variety of sources: (1) the children's reading calendars which listed the books they had read as well as their vocabulary lists, (2) their writing folders which contained all their writing for the year, (3) their reading journals, (4) fieldnotes of observations taken during the conferences, shares and response groups, (5) interviews with the children as well as their spontaneous comments about their own learning, and (6) Mary Ann's records of the children's progress (as well as her observational notes which she began taking during the second year).

The data collected was analyzed to discover overall patterns which pointed to specific areas to investigate. For example, when the children began to read more, we began to look more closely at the kinds of books they were
reading, which in turn, lead to focusing on the themes in the books. Re-reading the data in light of new observations led to the identification of categories within the overall trends. Continued observations, reflection and discussion with Mary Ann led to a refinement of the categories. For example, analyzing the comments and questions category revealed other categories like qualified recommendations and introductions to stories.

The broad scope of the research question necessitated limiting the time frame of the study. The first year provided valuable background information in understanding the classroom environment and the process of change. This initial year also informed the data collection methods for the second year, during which the question was refined. The data collection was most intensive during the last half of the second year when the children had had the most exposure to the changes in the classroom.

A narrative format was used to report the findings of this study in order to tie the data as closely as possible to the context in which it occurred. The qualitative research methodology upon which this narrative is based opened a door into the literate lives of the children in this classroom.
The Setting

The sea coast area of southern New Hampshire is a mixture of small New England towns and rock wall bounded farms. History and tradition run deep in this area and are reflected in the sturdy architecture of its Cape Cod and Salt Box houses, many of which have been standing since the 1700's and bear plaques denoting their historical significance.

In recent years, however, both the towns and the surrounding countryside have been affected by the Boston suburban sprawl. In seeking a better quality of life in mainly rural New Hampshire, more and more families are moving into the area and commuting to Boston to work. The effect of this urban migration can be seen on the land as each year it spreads further and further north from Boston, into the Seacoast area.

Driving south on route 108 from Durham, where the University of New Hampshire is located, to Stratham Memorial School, in Stratham, New Hampshire, the transition between the old and the new is evident. This twisting two-lane road passes by centuries old farmland, over mill dam bridges and through the town of Newmarket, a typical 19th century New England mill town - notable as the place in
which Lizzie Borden's sister quietly lived out her final years.

Older buildings within the town are being renovated. On the outskirts of town, farmland is gradually being taken over by condominium and housing developers. A new health club has been built across the road from the golf course.

The density of new building increases, the closer you get to Stratham, which is located on the outskirts of Exeter. New shopping and office complexes have sprung up along the route so that the division between the two towns has been blurred. Stratham seems to flow into Exeter with only a town sign to mark the transition.

While the urban influence is evident along route 108, off the main road, Stratham retains much of its rural character. Tree shaded narrow two lane roads again wind through farms and orchards many of which are still working farms. Stratham Memorial School is located on just such a road, a mere two hundred yards from route 108.

The exterior of the school is unremarkable - a typical brick faced one story building whose most prominent feature is the gymnasium which also doubles as the cafeteria. Behind the school is a raised playing field, bounded on three sides by trees, with playground equipment located in
one corner. The original layout of the school has been disguised amid additions made over the years in response to the demands for new space as the school population increased.

Entering the school through the main front doors, the walls are painted with murals done by the children as part of the visiting artists program. To the left is the secretary's office and behind it the principal's office. Next is the nurse's room and the staff room. On the opposite side of the hall is the gymnasium. In addition to permanent and temporary displays of the children's projects, the most notable feature on the walls of the main corridor is the Award of Excellence plaque, the school received in 1986, as one of the outstanding elementary schools in the country.

Continuing down the main hall, the resource room is located on the left and occupies the corner between the main hall and the corridor to the classrooms. At this corner a right hand turn leads into the library, off which is located three of the grade five classrooms and a small counselling/testing room. Mary Ann's room is located at the intersection of these two corridors with the front door opening into the corridor and the side door into the library. (See Figure (1), page 60, Diagram of Mary Ann's Classroom Year Two).

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Figure (1): Diagram of Mary Ann's Classroom Year Two
Entering Mary Ann's room by the front door, to the right was a book shelf containing children's books. To the left are the children's coat racks. In front of the racks is a long table the children used for conferences, writing, or to spread out materials when publishing books. The floor space between this table and the children's desks was the area used for whole class shares. At the corner of this wall and the south wall was a sink. Later, the computer station was set up next to the sink and a round table displaying new children's books placed in front of it. (The first year, this table displayed children's writing and books and was placed at the front of the room in the left hand corner).

Most of the south wall consisted of huge multipaned windows which overlooked the playground. (In the second year, we lost our view because of the addition of mobile classrooms which were erected within several feet of the windows). Vinyl pull down shades on the windows intended to cut down the glare of the afternoon sun where later used to display the children's vocabulary words (described later in this chapter). Below the windows were low book shelves which contained a variety of text books, reference books and children's books. A table at the front corner was used to hold file boxes where the children put their writing folders.

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At the corner of the south and west wall was a door leading into the next classroom. The bulk of the west wall was covered by a black board with bulletin boards on the sides, used for displaying the children's projects, and listing the class schedule and weekly classroom job assignments for the children (e.g., watering plants, picking up recess milk, etc.). A second door on this wall opened into a tiny storage closet for classroom materials not currently in use.

The west and north walls intersected at the door opening into the library. The remainder of the wall was again blackboard space, in front of which was a round tabled used for conferences and response/small group shares.

In the center of the room were the children's desks in groups of four or five, positioned so that the children were facing inward toward each other. The first year, Mary Ann's desk was located at the front of the room, although she rarely sat there except to do book-keeping tasks. Usually she moved about the room, conferring with the children at their desks or at the round table. The second year, Mary Ann moved her desk to the middle of the wall in front of the windows.

In size and equipment (with the possible exception of the computer station), Mary Ann's room was fairly typical of a
classroom in almost any elementary school. However, the use we made of the space, reflects our learning philosophy. The children's desks were grouped together to facilitate interaction and cooperative learning. About every three weeks these random seat assignments were changed to enable the children to experience working with different classmates throughout the year.

Over the course of two years we modified the physical environment to accommodate the needs of the children as they engaged more fully in the processes of reading and writing. The new book table was added at the back. The reading folders, writing folders and writing/publishing supplies were placed within easy access to the children on the tables at the front of the room. In short, any materials the children needed, from reading calendars to colored pens, were located so that the children knew where they were and would simply get something as they needed it, without interrupting Mary Ann or myself to ask for something. If we wanted the children to assume more responsibility for their own learning then the room had to be set up in such a way that the children could function independently as much as possible. Having to ask for another sheet of paper or a writing folder, as I've seen in some classroom situations, is unnecessary if the children know the location of the materials and are free to get them.
without raising a hand and asking permission to move about the room.

**Classroom Environment**

The freedom to move about the room was a logical consequence of the changes we made in the routines we developed to help the children engage in the processes of reading and writing. Contrary to some perceptions of 'process' classrooms, there is a great deal of structure in the way these rooms function. The differences between structure in a 'process' class and the kind of structure we generally see in more 'traditional' classrooms center around two issues: (1) external/overt routines and (2) student awareness of learning processes.

In many 'traditional' classrooms which use basal programs, the materials themselves suggest (or even dictate) routines to be followed in the classroom in order to meet the learning objectives of the programs. Although the routines and objectives vary from program to program, they frequently have one component in common - the teacher is often the only one in the room truly aware of the learning objectives and why the children are doing what they are doing in order to meet these objectives. The children, on the other hand, frequently don't see the real purposes behind the activities they are asked to do and what they
are expected to learn. For example, 'grammar' exercises which ask students to correctly punctuate a series of sentences are intended to teach children how to use written conventions, which in turn is intended to improve their writing. Such exercises are done outside the context of a situation where the children are actually engaged in writing (de-contextualized). Hence, the children must 'master' these skills and remember them until such time they are required to write a story. Other than to fulfill the requirements of an assignment the children often don't see the purpose for the activity in terms of how it applies to a writing situation.

These routines and activities contained within the program (internal/covert) when followed too closely, can have a detrimental effect on the teacher as well as the students. Time and again I've heard teachers express concern that no matter how much time and energy they devote to a particular 'skill', like paragraphing, the students still have difficulty with it. When students don't see the 'real' purpose behind an activity and have little opportunity to use it in a meaningful context, then it is not unusual that they have difficulty understanding classroom activities.

The second adverse effect of the internal/covert routines for teachers, is that they frequently disregard the teachers' expertise as professional educators. Programs
which detail how to introduce a new story in a reader, complete with questions to ask the students before, during and after reading, seem to display little confidence in the teacher's ability to understand his/her students and their needs and then structure appropriate learning experiences which may vary quite a bit from the 'suggested' activities of the program. Teachers who do exercise their professional expertise through judicious use of some basal materials supplemented by learning activities of their own design can also encounter difficulties when they are also held accountable for 'covering' a certain amount of the program material during the school year. Accountability, which has become a popular educational issue in recent years and a concern of many educators, will be discussed as an issue Mary Ann and I considered when we initiated 'reading process.'

The external/overt structure in Mary Ann's room enabled the children to make connections between what they were doing and what they were learning. The children understood the purposes behind the whole group shares, conferences, response groups, etc. and could see the need for using 'skills' within the context of reading and writing situations of their own choosing. Examples from the children's own comments about the classroom 'routines' and their learning, will be described later in this chapter.
under the appropriate subheadings (e.g., response group, conferences, etc.).

Year One: Classroom Schedule

When I entered Mary Ann's room in the fall of 1986, she had already established her schedule for reading using a basal reading program and writing based on encouraging children to engage in the processes of writing. In this section, I will focus on writing which later lead into changes in reading.

Initially the children engaged in the processes of writing four days a week for approximately one and a half to two hours per day. An approximate schedule would be:

Figure (2) Classroom Writing Schedule Year One

8:45 - 9:15  Silent Writing
9:15 - 9:45  Conferencing - Peer and/or Teacher
9:45 - 10:15 Whole Group Share

I have described this schedule as approximate because on some occasions we would have longer or shorter whole group shares depending on the students. Sometimes a student would have a longer piece to share or the share would spark a discussion which Mary Ann and the students would follow up on at that time. Generally four or five students would share during one particular session.
Another reason for describing this schedule as approximate is due to the scheduling problems within all elementary schools which affect daily classroom routines. Assemblies, sports days, visiting speakers, Christmas concerts, etc. which are important components of elementary school experiences, tend to also necessitate changes in the classroom schedule. When these situations would occur, Mary Ann would make scheduling changes to ensure the children still had ample time for reading and writing. One of the assets of a flexible approach to writing is it enables the teacher to accommodate some of these unanticipated schedule changes.

The final reason for my focus on scheduling is to reassure teachers that it is possible to allow children to engage in writing (and reading) processes within the typical crowded elementary schedule. Often teachers focus on the block of time Mary Ann and I had for reading and writing during the second year and find it difficult to see how they could fit a similar block into their own schedule. Ideally this long block helps the children become more aware of reading and writing processes, however it is still possible to help them have similar experiences by juggling the classroom time within the constraints of very diverse schedules to permit longer reading and writing periods.
Within our writing time, there were four basic components: silent writing, peer conferences, teacher conferences, and whole group shares. Each of these components and how they functioned in Mary Ann's classroom offers some additional insights into the question raised in Chapter Two - 'What is Process?' An important consideration in this discussion is the role of the individual teacher and his/her translation of 'process' into his/her own room.

Looking at how the children engaged in the processes of writing in Mary Ann's room reveals certain basic principles which are common beliefs held by many 'process-oriented' teachers, as well as aspects of individual differences which reflect Mary Ann's unique perspective as a teacher. For example, more than any other teacher I have met, Mary Ann demonstrated a unique rapport with her students which enabled them to talk about sensitive topics raised in reading and writing. The class discussions which followed were perhaps more frequent than in other 'process' classrooms I've seen, yet these discussions were an important part of reading and writing processes within Mary Ann's room. One of the strengths of helping children engage in reading and writing process, is it also permits the teacher to exercise his/her own judgement and use his/her own unique strengths to create a learning environment which reflects that particular teacher's beliefs. Hence, since no two 'process' classrooms are exactly identical I will focus
on the basic principles/beliefs which Mary Ann followed, while still creating an environment which reflected herself as an individual teacher. These beliefs/principles will be also be discussed later in this chapter in conjunction with the four components previously listed: silent writing time, whole group shares, peer conferences and teacher-student conferences.

**Basic Principles/Beliefs Underlying 'Process'**

(1) **There are Many Processes Involved in Writing**

One of the most common misconceptions regarding 'process' is to label it as singular. I, myself, am 'guilty' of this as well because it is more convenient to say 'process' rather than 'processes of reading and writing,' which tends to be a very awkward expression, particularly when written. There are many processes involved in reading and writing, hence my preference for referring to 'process' as 'processes of reading and writing.' This is not a minor question of semantics but a critical issue in understanding the ideas embodied in the belief systems which underlie 'process.'

The word 'process' unfortunately can convey the idea that there is a single 'approach' to helping children engage in the processes of reading and writing and that all children...
follow the same writing (and reading) process. At various
times when talking with teachers, particularly those who
are unfamiliar with the ideas embodied in that term, I've
tried to broaden their perspective by describing 'process'
as an 'approach' or 'orientation.' Neither of these
descriptors are accurate either because they tend to focus
undue attention on the more observable surface components
like classroom schedules rather than on underlying beliefs.
In the extreme, I've had teachers say they couldn't 'do
process' because they have specials (e.g., music, gym,
band, etc.) first thing in the morning. Writing doesn't
have to be first, but the fact that these external
structures are the reflection of underlying beliefs tends
to become obscured as teachers struggle to grasp concepts,
that teachers like Mary Ann have spent years developing in
their classrooms.

When carried to the extreme, misconceptions about a single
'process' have resulted in teachers describing their
classrooms as being based on the 'five-step' or 'six-step
Graves' approach, (e.g., having students do pre-writing
exercises, a first draft, a revised draft, then editing and
publishing versus pre-writing, a first draft, revised
draft, second draft, editing and publishing). Such
misinterpretations of the processes involved in writing
are far removed from the original intent of 'process
learning,' as well as the practical implementation of these concepts in classrooms.

Donald Murray in *Write to Learn* (1984) described some of the processes he engages in while composing, as collecting, focusing, ordering, drafting and clarifying. These elements of writing are interrelated.

When the process works it is more than its parts....Writing is produced by a process, but effective writing is not the simple following of steps in that process. The main reason for this is that writing does not so much work from parts to a whole as evolve from a constant interaction of parts and whole. (Murray, 1984:13).

Murray's discussion of his own composing process offered valuable insights into how one writer engaged in writing.

Donald Graves' work with young children (1983) demonstrated that children could write much earlier than had been traditionally believed, if they were permitted to choose what to write and were allowed to learn the conventions within the context of meaningful writing situations where they had feedback from the teacher and their peers. Graves describes how the teacher can encourage children to engage in the processes of writing by providing opportunities for them to choose and discover topics (brainstorming, modelling, prewriting, etc.) and write (drafting). Some pieces of writing stop there, but children may choose to
receive feedback (conferencing and sharing with the group), and may refine their ideas (revising). All children polish their use of conventions (editing) in order to share some of their work with a wider audience (publishing). This is a very different conception of the processes of composing than the part-to-whole approach which had dominated writing instruction in the elementary schools (e.g., children couldn't write until they had mastered particular conventions of writing, like spelling, punctuation, etc.).

When individuals adopt the surface features of 'process' without understanding the beliefs upon which it is based, there is the unfortunate tendency to treat the processes of writing as a 'step-by-step approach.' The practical implications of this type of misinterpretation in the classroom mean that the students' experiences with writing more closely resemble the 'traditional part-to-whole' approach than a true engagement in the processes of writing. Understanding the processes of writing and creating a writing community in the classroom, requires introspection and reflection about basic beliefs we hold as teachers.

(2) The Role of the Teacher

Helping children engage in reading and writing processes involves a basic change in the 'traditional' roles of the
teacher as transmitter of knowledge and the children as passive learners. 'Process' empowers both teachers and children to take more control over what is learned and how they will go about learning. For example in Mary Ann's room there were no assigned topics for writing. The children chose what they would write and Mary Ann helped them discover topics through brainstorming and modeling. The children thus assumed more control over what they wrote and Mary Ann assumed more responsibility for facilitating their engagement in the processes of learning through writing. Mary Ann and the children were no longer bound by the constraints of writing assignments as the impetus for writing. (Topic choice, one of the cornerstones in helping children engage in the processes of writing will be discussed from the children's perspectives in the following section.)

Mary Ann's perception of her role as a 'process-oriented' teacher and the children's roles as active learners had begun before I began this study and continued to develop during the two years I spent in her room. (According to recent conversations I've had with her in March of 1989, she continues to refine her ideas.) Initially, when I began working with her in 1986, Mary Ann, who was entering her eighteenth year as a teacher, had already had four years experience with helping children engage in the processes of writing. She had attended the summer writing workshop at
the University of New Hampshire and continued to keep abreast of new developments in reading and writing through her own professional reading and coursework in conjunction with her professional development plans and through a year-long in-service on writing for the teachers at her school. Thus Mary Ann had formulated some practices and procedures which reflected general 'process' principles and beliefs, as well as her own personal perspective on particular issues. One of the main examples of this was in the area of genre choice.

Based on her previous experiences working with children and helping them engage in the processes of writing, Mary Ann believed in topic choice, however she did place restrictions on genre. Writing fiction was delayed until after Christmas in favor of writing personal narratives during the first term. When we discussed this topic, Mary Ann explained that in addition to helping her get to know her students better, she felt writing personal narratives helped the students develop a better sense of story - instead of focusing on character and plot development which are part of fiction writing.

They (the students) have trouble receiving pieces (writing done at the beginning of the year) - in knowing what to say to the writer. I find I'm using my own writing to illustrate areas they need to know more about. The day I discussed more about using quotes in my writing to show the use of dialogue, I was responding to several writers who are ready to use this in their writing. By discussing it maybe they'll be
able to recognize this in their writing. Again I have to be patient. Last year the students were good at asking questions and making comments both as listeners and as authors. An author would ask the group to listen to a fiction story and tell him if it was too far-fetched - 'is this (the story) getting out of hand?' This group (the students) isn't at this point yet.

This example of restricted genre choice illustrates an interesting point about how a teacher can implement change in his/her classroom in response to his/her own developing understanding of 'process.' Mary Ann had made her decision about genre based on her reflections of past experiences with students. Over the course of the study, especially with the implementation of 'reading process,' she revised her stance. Observing and reflecting on the children's growth as they engaged in reading and writing processes, placed genre choice in a new light. If we wanted the children to make connections between what they were reading and what they were writing, then restricting genre limited some of the possible connections the children could make. This became readily apparent in the second term when what the children were reading influenced what they wrote. For example many of the students were reading books by Judy Blume, Betsy Byars, and Beverly Cleary which focused on relationships and issues involved in growing up. Students like Jennifer and Lindsey began to write about similar themes in their own fiction stories. Opportunities to experiment, in writing, with some of these ideas discovered in reading would have been severely limited under a genre
restriction. The end result of these first year experiences was that personal narrative as a genre restriction was applied only during September of year two so Mary Ann could get to know her students and have a baseline for gauging writing growth. In retrospect, this initial restriction on genre is somewhat ironic in view of how the room changed the second year to allow the children an even greater degree of control over structuring their own time and learning than we had considered the first year. The depth and breadth of these changes can be seen by comparing the schedule in September of the first year with the changes we subsequently made (which will be discussed later in this chapter).

(3) Empowering Children to Take More Control Over Learning

One of the major ways we empowered children to take more control over their learning was by encouraging them to engage in writing and reading processes through their participation in various classroom 'routines.' As part of their daily 'routine,' the children had opportunities to read, write, conference, share and receive feedback from Mary Ann and their peers. Beginning with topic choice in writing, the students later moved into choosing what they would read which in turn enabled them to engage in the processes of reading.
The following sections of this chapter will discuss the ways in which Mary Ann and I provided opportunities for the children to learn by reading and writing.

**Topic Choice**

Despite the genre restriction first term, the children exercised a great deal of control over what they would write. In fact, they even tested the boundaries of the restriction on fiction writing before Christmas by writing non-fiction stories which were not strictly personal narratives. When Amity wrote about her dreams, which more closely resembled the situations in a fiction story, she inspired a bit of a trend as other children picked up on the idea and wrote about their dreams.

**Amity:** I wrote the dream story and after that lots of people wrote about their dreams. I'm making a book myself at home about my dreams.

Both Amy and Darlene, who followed this trend, described their dream stories as their favorite pieces. Amy even managed to write about cartoon characters because:

**I wrote about the Jetsons because it was part of a dream I had.**

Many of the children turned to hobbies and sports as topics for factual accounts which were different from the typical personal narratives. Jim and several other boys wrote about
how to collect baseball cards and the strategies for acquiring valuable cards. Chuck and William wrote about drawing in which they described how to learn how to create cartoon characters.

Whether with personal narrative or factual writing, a majority of the children used some form of brainstorming as a way of discovering and choosing topics. However even with this common approach, many of the children's strategies varied because they reflected their own individual experiences and preferences.

Chris: I usually write down things that happened or things that I'm doing. Then I take the one that is the most interesting.

Darlene: Good topics to write about are dreams, weekends, friends and turtles, because I have a lot of information about these things.

Jessica: (who had written a series of stories about her pet ducks): I get my topics from watching my ducks. The way I get information is by watching them. Another way is by reading books on ducks and geese. My father has books on ducks and geese.'

Jeff: I usually think them (topics) up as I go along. I don't like to write topics. I find a story and expand on it. I think of things I've done. Usually I pick a couple of ideas and write two stories at the same time. I write about a paragraph on each. Then I decide which one to write about and the other goes in my folder.

Decisions about what to write are usually described as pre-writing - a time for collecting thoughts and ideas. In addition to the strategies described above, some children
use different processes as entry points into writing. Danny (from year two of the study) used drawing and mapping as a way of discovering ideas for his fantasy stories and as aids in story plotting. From his elaborately drawn maps of fantasy worlds he could plot out which hazards his characters would face during their quests. Thus there is no single 'process' for discovering topics and deciding which one to write about. Allowing children choice enables them to follow their own personal interests and individual paths of discovery.

**Silent Writing:**

One of the discoveries underlying current thinking about the processes of writing was the realization that children had very little opportunity to write during school time for audiences other than the teacher. This creates an artificial situation where children tend to try to second guess what the teacher wants and/or likes and then structure their writing accordingly. Even in the area of 'creative' writing where traditionally children had more input into what was written, the spectre of the teacher as evaluator hovered over the writer's shoulder. Questions like 'How long does this have to be?,' 'Does spelling count?' and 'When is this due?' reflect the children's preoccupation with writing as an assignment rather than an intrinsically worthwhile activity in and of itself.
Allowing children time to write on a regular basis on topics of their own choosing for audiences other than just the teacher provides them with opportunities to engage in the processes of writing. Silent writing time which was scheduled the first thing every writing day (four days a week) established a 'routine' the children could look forward to when they came to school. Since they knew silent writing was first, they could get out their folders as they settled in for the day and be ready to write when the class announcements were finished. Sometimes children on a 'hot' topic (one they were very excited about) began writing as soon as they had hung up their coats.

Another advantage of a regularly scheduled silent writing time was the children often thought about writing and ideas while they were at home, or on the way to school in the morning.

Lindsey: (in referring to real events as sources for ideas) I did that with 'Life With An Older Sister' I was thinking about it on the way home on the bus and it sort of jumbled all together in my head and then I put them (ideas) in the story.

The consistency of writing almost every day kept writing in their minds and facilitated picking up a story where they had left off the previous day. Infrequent opportunities to write, especially on assignments which are carried over a number of weeks, means that the children have to spend
considerable time re-orientating themselves to their train of thought when they re-enter the draft.

The silent writing time was also of sufficient duration that the children could get involved in the writing. Ten or fifteen minutes simply would not have provided time to explore ideas and experiment with new concepts in writing. It is also important to note that the end of silent writing time did not mean that all the students stopped writing. Silent writing was a quiet time within the class. When it ended the children were free to continue writing or they could have a conference with Mary Ann or their peers if they so desired. The most frequent pattern was at the end of silent writing, most children would choose to have a conference and then return to their writing with the insights they had gained from the conference. So in actuality the children had forty-five minutes to an hour in which to write, depending on whether or not they had taken time for a conference.

The basic difference between the silent writing time and the writing during conference time, was in the input of peers. The noise level was slightly higher during conference time and there was more movement about the room as the children moved to be near a conference partner(s).
One of the questions teachers frequently ask about silent writing time is 'What does the teacher do?' Interpretations vary on this issue. Some teachers use this time to write themselves as their students write, and they do not hold conferences until after silent writing. Mary Ann and I used a combination approach. For the first part of silent writing we would write, however before that time was up, generally both of us would move quietly among the students and hold brief 'status' conferences to see what the children were writing and if they had any difficulties. During these brief contacts we tried to be as unobtrusive as possible. As we were to discover later in the second year, the students could be extremely adaptable and tolerant of background 'noise' while writing. Our reason for 'violating' the silence of silent writing was quite mundane. Even with our relatively large block of writing time sometimes it was necessary to squeeze in even more conference time in order to meet the needs of the students.

Peer Conferences:

Conferring with peers is an important source of feedback for students concerning their writing. Generally conferences follow a turn-and-turn about format where first one person reads their story and his/her partner responds with comments and questions. Then the roles are reversed.
The points discussed, in relation to a story, during a conference are as individual as the students themselves. Frequently students begin responding by focusing on points of interest to them (e.g., I liked the part where you described the party because it was funny.). The comments and questions raised by Mary Ann and the other students during whole group shares also served as models for issues to discuss during the peer conferences. The students' perceptions of peer conferences clearly reflect their views about the purposes of conferring during the processes of writing.

Becky: It's important because they ask you questions that aren't answered in the story. Then you can add more so they will be able to understand more. The comments tell you what parts they like and how you wrote it. If they like the description then that helps you in describing other things in the story or different stories.

Chris: It's important to get questions so you can get the information in the piece. If they don't understand it you can go back and fix things. It helps you because you know what to add.... They (comments and questions) tell two different things. The comments tell what people like. The questions ask about things so you can understand the piece better.

Jeff: When I read a piece to them (peers during conferences), it gives me a general idea of what they like and what needs improving... The comments help because they tend to be good. I've never heard a bad comment. They tell you what people like. The questions tell more of what's wrong with the piece. They (comments and questions) serve two different purposes to me.
As the children grew and developed as writers themselves, they also became more adept conference partners. Even though many students initially chose to confer with friends, the partners still had to take their responsibilities as responders seriously in order to provide meaningful feedback to the writer. Students quickly tired of a partner who did not help them with their writing.

Chris: ...I like people which aren't too wild who will listen and aren't itching to get up and read their own and not listening to you. People who will listen and ask good questions, not dumb ones like a question about something I've already had in the story, then you think they weren't listening to you...I like them (peer conferences) because you can hear other people's writing and get ideas. When I read they ask questions and I can get the answers before the large group share (referring to revising a draft in response to a peer's question before sharing it with the larger group where someone is likely to raise a similar question.)

Lisa and Lindsey:
Lisa: It's (peer conference) like sharing but with not as many questions. With sharing there are a lot of people and they think different things. With conferences you share with your friends. The boys share with their friends and the girls share with their friends.
ME: Do you always share with friends?
Lindsey: I've never seen non-friends share.
ME: Why don't boys and girls conference together?
Lisa: Boys write about things they like and girls write about things they like. I'm not interested in. The things boys like, like baseball and cars.
ME: But in the story you wrote you talked about baseball?
Lisa: That's different. It was a dream and it was funny. Boys write about things like players and I didn't.
Lindsey: It's easier to talk with a friend when you conference.
During the year many of the students also became more selective in choosing conference partners. Shannon who was having difficulty deciding how much information to include about her fish in her story, sought out Becky as a conference partner.

Shannon: I like conferencing with Becky because she writes ideas for the story about my fish, (Becky wrote out questions for Shannon to consider in her story concerning information Becky felt needed to be added.)

Amy T. liked to write about her experiences with her horses and horse showing. In this familiar territory her stories were quite well-written, except for her tendency to overlook the fact that non-riders often didn't understand the technical terms she used. When she ventured into fiction during second term she experienced some difficulty with the plot of her stories and frequently got 'stuck' in deciding what to write next.

Amy T: I like getting help from other people. When you're stuck, they can help you figure out how to get out of it and they can give you ideas to get unstuck. Jill, Lisa and Lindsey help me a lot. (All three of these writers had written very popular fiction stories.)

The ability to choose conference partners based on their particular area of expertise was more pronounced in the second year of the study. Danny, when changing from his preferred genre of fantasy to writing mysteries, sought out
Andy as a conference partner because Andy was viewed as the 'best' mystery writer in the class. Similarly when Josh wanted help with a fantasy he asked Danny, the 'best' fantasy writer to help him. Later both sets of partners ended up collaboratively writing a fantasy story and an adventure story.

**Teacher Conferences:**

Mary Ann's conferences with the children varied according to their needs. Some were very brief - merely to see what the children were writing and how they felt their writing was going. Other conferences were more detailed and involved more time, particularly when the children were editing pieces to publish (e.g., Chuck's thirty page story, 'Pet City.')

Both Mary Ann and I conferred with students on a regular basis. During the first year I spent a lot of time conferring with Jessica and Darlene, both of whom were receiving resource room help in addition to their regular classes. An excerpt of a conference with Darlene illustrates how there is no set format for a conference other than listening and trying to respond to the child's needs.

Darlene came up to the round table where I was sitting and asked me to help her with her new story, 'William's
New Diet.' She had written about a page and was now 'stuck' because she didn't know what to do next with the story.

ME: What's the story about so far?
Darlene: It's about an eight year old boy called William and he's very fat and short for his age and he gets teased a lot especially by his mother about being fat.
ME: Could you read me what you have so far?

Darlene reads her story which stops at the point where a friend of William's comes over to play with him. From here Darlene didn't know what to write next.

ME: Looking at your title, I was wondering if William is going to go on a diet?
Darlene: I'm not sure, maybe I should change the title.
ME: Well you don't have to do that now. Perhaps if you could think of some things which happen next in the story, you could go back later and change the title if you want to. (Darlene had a tendency to get side-tracked and lose her focus on the problem at hand, which is why I suggested tackling her problem of being 'stuck' before she attempted to tackle the title). What do you want to do with this story?
Darlene: 'Well I want it to be funny.'
ME: OK what are some things which could happen in the story which would make it funny?
Darlene: Well, he's short for his age and very fat (pause) and maybe his mother could hide food and snacks so he couldn't eat them and he'd have to find them and he'd have trouble like getting up to the cupboards. Maybe he'd have to take books and dictionaries and things and build them up so he could reach the top of the fridge and cupboards and get stuff.

Darlene continued to think of humorous incidents she could use in her story based on her own ideas as well as thinking of funny situations other students like William had written which the class found funny. In our discussion, Darlene began to realize many of the most humorous incidents were ones which were exaggerations of things which could happen.
in real life. When Darlene had discovered a number of possible ideas for her story, I suggested she have a peer conference to get another opinion about how to proceed with her story, particularly which incidents a peer would consider funny.

The routine for requesting teacher conferences was fairly informal. Mary Ann kept a list of conference requests in her writing folder. Unless there were a lot of students editing and publishing books, most students could be seen on a given day or the following day. Even without a request, students were free to approach Mary Ann (or myself) if she was not currently engaged in a conference.

The students viewed teacher conferences as beneficial in helping them with their writing. The opportunity for one-to-one interaction was an added incentive because it enabled the students to have a more indepth look at their writing.

Shannon: I like to conference with Ms. Wessells because she can help you.

Jessica: It's easier to share with the teacher because she can help. I'm not saying that your friends don't help but talking with the teacher gives you more information. There is a difference between the two (peer and teacher conferences).
Whole Group Writing Share:

Whole group shares basically provide students with opportunities to share their writing with a larger audience (the entire class) and receive feedback through comments and questions posed by the teacher and children. Like the conference, feedback should be a sincere response to the writer's story.

In Mary Ann's room, the usual procedure for whole group shares consisted of the students sitting in a semi-circle on the floor by the round table (in the second year the share circle was moved to the back of the room where there was more space). The students who wanted to share that day had generally asked the previous day or first thing in the morning if they could read that day. Usually four or five students shared per session.

In her writing folder, Mary Ann recorded who shared, which story they had read and particular issues which had been raised about the story during the session. This record keeping system enabled her to keep track of the children's progress. By scanning across the columns she could see which children had not shared recently. Mary Ann would then approach that child and see if they had something he/she wanted to share with the group.
Like most aspects of writing the children displayed individual preferences for how frequently they wanted to share with the class. Some children like Kevin and Jim, who although they could see the benefits of a response from the whole class, shared very infrequently at the beginning of the year because they were shy. In a discussion about choosing pieces to publish they stated:

Kevin: I'd pick the piece which was most exciting. 
Jim: I'd pick the piece which was funniest. 
ME: How would you judge which was most exciting or funniest? 
Jim: When it's read to the class you can tell. 
Kevin: You can tell by the comments and questions. They ask a lot when they like a story but I never share. 
Jim: Me neither. I never have. I'm shy. 
Kevin: Me too.

Both boys preferred the more intimate forum of sharing pieces with one or two close friends during peer conferences or with Mary Ann and myself during teacher conferences. Children were never forced to share. However, Mary Ann was very adept at approaching children, asserting why they were reluctant to share and encouraging them to participate when they were more comfortable. Over time these gently nudges gave even the most hesitant writer the confidence to read his/her writing to the group. Deciding when and how much to nudge a child was a judgement call based on the individual child.
It is important to note that some children shared less frequently than their peers for reasons other than being shy. Andy liked to have a good start on a story and an overall sense for where the story was going before he shared. Once he had laid this groundwork he was ready to receive feedback and in fact the further along he was in his writing, the more frequently he shared installments of his longer works, like his forty page story, 'What a Life.'

Sharing by installments was a strategy we frequently used with children who had written longer stories. Initially, Mary Ann would ask the writer to give a brief recap of what had happened in the story up to the point where they had stopped reading the last time they shared. When Danny shared his story, 'Land of Murewhere' he began with:

Danny: I'm going to read, 'Land of Murewhere,' and this is Chapter one and I don't know whether to start at the first or not.
Mary Ann: How long is it?
Danny: Six and a half pages.
Mary Ann: (to Danielle who is to share next) How long is your story? OK. (to Danny) Maybe you better read where you left off. Can you remind us of the background?
Danny: OK, Tobin had been hit in the arm and he was just waking up, then I'll read the last two and a half pages, (begins to read)

Even a brief reminder like Danny's was usually sufficient to jog the children's memories. In fact on occasion when the writer had forgotten which part he/she had last read to
the group, the other children were often able to tell
him/her where they had stopped. This was particularly true
with stories the children were anxious to hear.

Danielle: I'm going to share my story, 'Living in an
Upside Down Town,' and I don't remember where
I left off.
Melissa: You were at the part where they were going to
the shelter.
Danielle: Yah, OK.
Andrea: Can you tell us what the story's about?
Danielle. Well there is a big storm coming and all the
people in the town have to go to shelters
because of the storm.

Later in the second year many of the children automatically
did this without being prompted. In fact giving a brief
synopsis or 'set-up' for a story before reading it was also
used by many of the children even if they were sharing for
the first time. This strategy was even more prevalent when
the children shared the books they were reading with the
group (discussed in section on reading shares).

While introducing or 'setting-up' a story, some children
also asked their peers for help with a particular part of
the story (e.g., I'm 'stuck' and I don't know what to do
next), or requested they listen for specific elements in
the writing (e.g., Is it funny?).

Melissa: I'm sharing my story, 'The Fuses,' and I think
I need help. It's the part about the George
Washington birthday party, and I changed part
of it before that and I'll read this because I
need help here (reads section where all the
family except David, the youngest, are
watching a TV show about George Washington).
In the rest of my story there's a George Washington Birthday part and I'm not sure I should have that.

Mary Ann: What makes you think it might not work?
Melissa: It doesn't work because I don't think it's realistic that parents would have a George Washington birthday party.

Mary Ann: (to the children) How do you people feel about that?
Andrea: Is David based on your brother?
Melissa: Yes. I'm going to write a series based on each member of the Fuse family.

Mary Ann: He's (David) planning a party but you don't feel that's realistic? Who's coming to the party?
Melissa: Eleven pre-schoolers.

Mary Ann: Why do you think it's not real? Because there are too many kids?

Jennifer: I think parents might let him do it but four year olds whine a lot.

Mary Ann: Perhaps if you thought about your mom and what she would do, that might help you with realism.

Although Mary Ann's questions tended to ask the writer to think about possible solutions to a problem, the students' responses to a writer's request for help when he/she was 'stuck' tended to be quite specific. Often the children offered 'suggestions' to the writer concerning particular incidents or ideas he/she might wish to consider. For example Melissa later wrote a fiction story inspired by her and Andrea's real life experiences babysitting. When she shared her story she requested help because she wasn't sure what would happen next. During the comments and questions, Andrea suggested Melissa might want to use the incident when one of the children they were babysitting climbed a tree and then fell on Andrea when they tried to rescue him. 'Suggestions' like these often served to spark the writer's
own thinking even if he/she did not use any of the peers' specific ideas.

Overall the children in both years of the study felt that whole group shares were an important source of feedback, as the following comments indicate.

Amy T: I like how everyone always comments, like the parts they liked and how they liked the description and things like that. With the questions, if someone doesn't understand a part, then you can go back and look at it again or fix it.

Shannon: You get to hear other people's stories and you get ideas so I like to hear them (during whole group share)...Both (the comments and questions) are helpful. You can expand on the comments. If someone likes parts then you can put in more of those parts. For questions you can answer them in your story.

Lisa and Amy:
Lisa: It (whole group share) gives you ideas like the conference except you get a chance to share with more people so you get ideas from other people you might not share with when you conference. You get lots of questions to help you with the story.
Amy: Most of my ideas were said. I agree with Lisa.
ME: Is there a difference between comments and questions?
Lisa: Sometimes the comments tell you what people like so you write more like that in the story because you know that the other people like those parts.
Amy: Some help in one area like the chance to share with other people you find parts they didn't understand and you can fix that and sometimes they give you ideas.
Transition to Helping Children Engage in the Processes of Reading

'Writing provides insights for readers that they cannot get elsewhere. Initially, they expect writing, regardless of who wrote it, to have an interesting, accessible message. When they share, they learn that different parts of a piece of writing speak to various readers. Over time, they realize that a writer writes to satisfy himself but wants others to find significance in his insights. Thus, when he reads, he knows that although it's his responsibility to think of what might be central to the author, mainly he reads for himself.' (Hansen, 1987: 222).

As Mary Ann and I watched the children grow and develop as writers during the first year of the study, it was evident that the children were not only learning through the processes of writing, they were also enjoying the learning process. When we looked at reading, we recognized the children's experiences with writing were very different from their experiences with reading through the basal reading program. More and more our discussions began to focus on one main issue - how could we provide opportunities for the children to enjoy and learn as much about reading as they were doing with their writing? In addition to our own observations, several other factors influenced our thinking.

Both of us were avid readers with quite similar tastes for science fiction, mystery, biography and autobiography as leisure reading. We talked about what we were reading and
recommended and loaned books to one another including children's literature and professional books. In short, we loved reading. Despite our own personal commitment to reading, we still faced a dilemma common to many teachers—how do you help children develop a love of reading?

Our thinking was also guided by our participation in the University of New Hampshire's three year research project on Evaluation, which focused on children's abilities to self-evaluate. During the fall we had the opportunity to participate in several book shares as part of the University of New Hampshire research team workshops. At these sessions, teachers and researchers brought a book they liked, divided themselves into small groups and essentially talked about why they found the book interesting. Frequently someone would read a passage from their book which they found particularly significant. Everyone enjoyed these sessions and found it quite informative to hear about books they might like to read themselves. If we could do this, then why couldn't the children?

At the weekly University of New Hampshire research meetings, attended by the school staff and university researchers, we had opportunities to write and share our writing with our colleagues, as well as discuss insights we had gained in the classroom. During that first semester
many of the teachers in the school were focusing on their beliefs about children's learning processes in reading and writing. Some of the teachers, like Mary Ann, were already very familiar with 'writing process' and a few were working on 'reading process.' Consequently, many of our discussions revolved around ways of providing opportunities for children to engage more fully in the processes of writing and reading. What did we believe would be ways in which we could help the children engage more fully in both processes?

In addition to engaging in the processes of reading and writing, there was also the consideration of providing opportunities for the children to relate learning in writing to reading and vice versa. *Breaking Ground: Teachers Relate Reading and Writing in the Elementary School* (Hansen, Newkirk, Graves, eds., 1985) and *When Writers Read* (Hansen, 1987) offered many insights into reading/writing relationships as well as practical examples of how different teachers had fostered such growth in their classrooms. How could we provide similar opportunities for the children?

Mary Ann and I continued to reflect and refine our thinking. Essentially we knew we wanted reading to reflect the same philosophy which informed writing in the classroom. In writing we focused on time, choice, and
feedback (audience) as important elements in helping children engage in the processes of writing. If we wanted the children to have similar experiences in reading, then the children should be able to choose their own books and have time to read, as well as opportunities for sharing and receiving feedback on their reading. Thus, time, choice and audience became our first three criteria for providing opportunities to engage in reading and writing.

In addition, based on our experiences with genre in the children's writing (restricted genre first term versus genre choice second term year one), we also recognized the importance of genre choice. Different genres place different demands on the writer. For example, a personal narrative which is a straight-forward retelling of an experience requires very little 'plotting' compared to a fiction story which is written as a mystery. Expository writing, when viewed in terms of the 'traditional' written report, generally requires a different style of writing than is found in a fiction story. (See Ben and Laura, Chapter Six, for differences between the 'traditional' approach to the report and one written as historical fiction). Experience with a variety of genres second term and in year two, helped the students develop skills and strategies to cope with different learning situations.
Reading in different genres, like writing, also places different demands on the reader based on his/her background experiences and purposes for reading. For example, if you like mysteries, then reading a mystery novel for your own enjoyment is a very different experience compared with reading an expository text, like a social studies book, which is required in order to take a test. Exposure to a variety of genres in reading and writing was the fourth criteria for providing opportunities for the children to engage in both processes.

With time, choice, audience and genre as focal points, we now turned our attention to figuring out the practical aspects of what this would look like in the classroom, (Figure (3): Facilitating Engagement in the Processes of Reading and Writing, page 101). Nancy Atwell's, In the Middle: Writing. Reading and Learning With Adolescents, which had just been published, was an invaluable resource as well as an inspiration. Based on her experiences with middle school students, Atwell presents a very readable description of how she structured her class in order to encourage engagement in reading and writing processes. Her concept of a 'dining room table' as a way to engage readers as well as respond to them and what they read, was the impetus for the 'response groups' we subsequently developed, (which are discussed later in this chapter). One
of the reasons we started the response groups was to bring reading and writing closer together.

Figure (3): Facilitating Engagement in the Processes of Reading and Writing

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<td>prewrite</td>
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Response Groups
Journals

At the same time we were looking at these practical aspects, we were also considering evaluation and accountability. Engagement in reading processes was quite a departure from the basal reading program. How would we evaluate the students' growth? How would we document that growth? Although we had no hesitation about our abilities to evaluate and document growth in writing, the step into reading processes, for us, was new territory. Participation in the University of New Hampshire project on Evaluation also gave us ideas about evaluation.
More for our own reassurance and peace of mind, we looked to the school district grade five reading curriculum guide which listed the skills and strategies the children were expected to know at this level. The guide was quite comprehensive and specific (e.g., from mastering plural forms to characteristics of critical reading). When Mary Ann and I examined the guide we realized that many entries referred to skills and strategies the children were already learning through their own writing. Others were covered in the spelling program. (Although Mary Ann recognized that the spelling program was inconsistent with her philosophy of writing and reading, we decided that for the time being to leave it in place particularly since so much of our attention was directed to the reading). Some of the remaining entries, like reading and interpreting maps, were dealt with in other subject areas. Having culled the list we were left with the skills and strategies we felt we needed to be accountable for in reading.

Since the list looked at the 'parts' of reading, we shifted our focus back to reading as a 'whole' experience for the children. How could we describe what it meant to be a reader engaged in the processes of reading? We came up with three key descriptors: (1) enjoyment of reading, (2) literary appreciation, and (3) flexibility of reading strategies. These became the components of our 'reading curriculum' along with (4) word recognition skills, which
we included in deference to entries in the grade five curriculum guide which did not fit into our three core descriptors.

Mary Ann and I then returned to the grade five curriculum guide and matched the entries to our four descriptors. It is interesting to note that for our most important descriptor, enjoyment of reading, there were no guide entries. Consequently, Mary Ann and I discussed ways in which we could 'objectively' document growth in this area. Through journal entries, the children's oral responses (which we both recorded) and changes in reading patterns were data sources we could point to with confidence.

Figure (4): Elements of 'Reading Curriculum'

(1) Enjoyment of Reading
   (a) Responses in journals
   (b) Oral responses in conferences, large and small group shares
   (c) Reading pattern changes (e.g., reading more and reading a variety of books)

(2) Literary Appreciation
   (a) Author's purpose and style
      mood
      motives
      character development
      plot development
      cause and effect
      point of view
      theme
      literary devices (e.g., 'lead', metaphor, etc.)
   (b) Variety of genres
   (c) Relating to personal experience and/or feelings

(3) Flexibility of Reading Strategies
   word attack
   context cues
   inference
prediction
self-questioning
self-evaluation

(4) Language
(a) vocabulary
(b) word recognition skills (e.g., root words, prefixes, suffixes, etc.)
(c) conventions (e.g., plurals, possessives, contractions, etc.)

Our final step was to create a schedule which would enable us to put our plans into action. Based on our writing experiences and the way our thinking about reading evolved, it no surprise that our reading schedule paralleled the writing, (see Figure (5): Reading/Writing Schedule - February 1987, below). Children had time for silent reading, opportunities to share with the whole class, and though not explicitly stated, opportunities to conference with peers while the response group was being held. (Only four or five students participated in a group which met once a week. Therefore the other sixteen students not in that day's group could continue to read and confer with peers.)

Figure (5) Reading Writing Schedule - February 1987

**Writing:**
- 8:45 - 9:10 Quiet writing
- 9:10 - 9:30 Conferences (peer and teacher) and Writing
- 9:30 - 9:50 Whole group share

**Reading:**
- 9:50 - 10:15 Quiet reading
- 10:15 - 10:45 Response group (1 group of 4 or 5 students per day) Conferences and reading for
In Mary Ann's room, there were four response groups consisting of four or five students per group. The groups were heterogeneously mixed, randomly selected, and arbitrarily designated as groups A, B, C and D according to which day of the week they met, (e.g., Group A met on Monday, Group B on Tuesday, and so on).

The response groups served two primary purposes. First of all they provided a forum in which the children could have more in-depth discussions about what they were reading. Having heterogeneous groups exposed the children to a wide variety of books and encouraged the exchange of ideas in a supportive milieu where 'reading ability' was not a factor. With the focus on the child's response, it didn't matter if Danny was reading *Johnny Tremain* and Ben was reading *James and the Giant Peach*, both could talk about what they had learned through what they were reading.

Secondly, Mary Ann used the groups to introduce the children to concepts they would encounter in their reading. Using the books she was reading as a model, Mary Ann would present a concept, discuss it and ask the children to
relate it to the books they were reading. These concepts then became the topic for next week's discussion, in addition to the children's responses to what they were reading. Topics for discussion centered around the concepts we'd identified in Figure (4), (e.g., theme, character description, plot, etc.)

The rationale for this approach was to increase the children's awareness of what authors did in creating texts, as well as giving the children a meaningful 'working vocabulary' they could relate to their own books and use to talk about their reading. For example, in one session Mary Ann introduced the concept of theme in, Roll of Thunder, or Thunder, Hear My Cry, which she had previously shared with the students. Both Mary Ann and the students discussed the themes of racism and prejudice in the book. Together they brainstormed a list of themes for the books the children were currently reading or had read before.

The next week when the group met, the student would discuss what they had discovered about theme in their reading. The following excerpt illustrates John's turn.

John: I'm reading The Magicians by C.S. Lewis
Mary Ann: Oh, that's one I didn't know about.
John: This is the fifth one in the series.
Mary Ann: How many are there altogether?
John: Seven, but this is the last one we have here in the library. The sixth one is The Boy and His Horse. I forgot the last one.
Mary Ann: There must be a list in one of the books.
    That doesn't look like a complete list, probably because that one was published before the last one was written.
John: Yah, it was published in 1955.
Mary Ann: Have you tried Stratham Library?
Nat: They have them all.
Mary Ann: Do you belong to the library?
John: We used to but now we go to the one in Exeter.
Mary Ann: Could you check the one in Exeter if you want to read the other two?
John: Yes.
Mary Ann: Let me know if you have any problems and I'll see if I can find them. Ok, what's your theme?
John: War and peace because this queen they find in this world they go to, she destroyed everyone on the planet.
Mary Ann: How would you classify her?
John: Sort of like a witch.
Mary Ann: Is she good, evil, pleasant?
John: She's trying to act good but they know she's evil because she says she wants to go to their world and when she gets there, she tries to do the same thing.
Mary Ann: She's a greedy old lady. Anything else?
John: Not really.
Mary Ann: So they're sort of battling back and forth. What attracts you to these books? The fantasy aspect?
John: Yes. This could be the first book because it happens 100 years before The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, because it tells how the port got there and how the witch broke the piece and threw it and then it grew there.
Mary Ann: I should read it because I didn't know about this.
John: And she ends up being the white witch later.
Mary Ann: Oh, now I see. That's really interesting. I wonder how many others in the class know about that book.
John: Nat does.
Nat: I've read two of them.
Mary Ann: Maybe you'd like to share this in whole group because some of the other have read, The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe. Ok, I think you've got the general idea on theme.
[chorus of yes].
Mary Ann: I'm amazed because Ms. MacMillan and I were just discussing when we used the basals and you had dittos and stuff. When we got to theme, the kids never understood. You people
have been talking about it all along only we never gave it a name. I'm really impressed.

There was a lot of interaction between Mary Ann and individual students during response groups. Typically, although there was a focal topic, the discussion wandered as John's did into where he could find the next book in the series. Each student had an opportunity to talk about their book, discuss the concept of the week, or read from their reading journals. Peers listened first to what the reader had to share and then entered into the discussion at will.

As Mary Ann suggests at the end of the excerpt, many of the children were aware of a particular concept yet they didn't have a name for it. Over time the children gradually developed a 'working vocabulary' which increased their awareness of concepts and enabled them to convey their ideas more clearly. The following excerpt illustrates how children could take concepts and use them to enhance their own reading experience.

Response Group A, Mon., Mar., 14
(The topic for discussion was theme and Jon was the second person to share. He shared the theme of his book and then shared information about a concept from a previous week.)
Jon: I read, I'm done with it now, The BFG by Roald, (pause on pronunciation of author's last name). Dahl?
Mary Ann: You got it.
Jon: And I'm going to read my journal entry. (Reads). 'The theme, I think, is about Sophie and the BFG's friendship. I think it's about their friendship
because they go places with each other and they share things with each other. So I think that the theme is friendship.'

Mary Ann: Yes, it's definitely a friendship theme in there. Two unusual people or two people with different situations - she was an orphan and different sizes (the BFG is a giant and Sophie is a normal child). She's an orphan which makes her kind of different from other children and he's different from other giants because he's not?

Jon: A man-eater. He's smaller.

Mary Ann: Right. He has a different temperament. He's a nicer giant and stuff.

Brian: It's like two handicapped people getting together.

Mary Ann: I'm not sure handicapped would be the word, but two people with unusual circumstances. They have something about them that is different.

Jon: And I have this - it's the ULTIMATE CHARACTER DESCRIPTION!

Mary Ann: The ultimate character description! Well then let's have the ultimate character description.

Jon: This is the best. This is about the Blood-blotter. He's the leader type kinda. He's the biggest.

(Reads)'The Blood-blotter is a gruesome sight. His skin was reddish-brown. There was black hair sprouting on his chest and his arms and on his stomach. The hair on his nose was long and dark and tangled...and his mouth (pause) what's c-r-a-g-g-y?

Mary Ann: Craggy.

Jon: (continues to read). 'There were yellow craggy cheeks stuck out between the frankfurter lips...'

Mary Ann: That is the ultimate character description.

You get an image. Is he attractive?

(chorus of no)

Jon had been aware of how authors used description to enhance their writing. Being able to recognize this particular paragraph as an illustration of character description gave him a name for the concept embodied in the passage. He could now conveniently refer to the entire paragraph by that name which made it much easier to
describe this one as the 'ultimate!' During the year the children began to use the concepts discussed in response group in their writing, which will be discussed in Chapter Six.

One other feature of the response groups was the way Mary Ann used a portion of the group time to help the children with words they didn't understand in their reading. The books the children read covered a wide range of topics, genres and reading levels, so it was inevitable the children met new words. With everyone choosing what they read, 'traditional' approaches which stressed introducing new vocabulary and looking up definitions prior to reading would not have worked. Besides, using a dictionary is only one strategy for discovering a meaning. To be effective readers, the children needed multiple strategies.

During the year, Mary Ann helped the children with a variety of strategies they could use to figure out new words they encountered while reading, including using context cues, word structure and the syntax of the sentence. Children were free to ask a friend for help or as another option they could look up the word in the dictionary if not knowing the word distorted their understanding of what they were reading.
Frequently the children could still get the gist of the passage without a complete understanding a particular word, in which case they noted the word and continued to read. The children listed words like this on a 'vocabulary' list they kept in their reading folders. At the end of each response group Mary Ann asked the children if they had any vocabulary words. As a group they would try to figure out the meanings, as the following excerpts illustrate.

Mary Ann: Ok, does anyone have any vocabulary words?
Jon: 'P-e-w-t-e-r.' (spells the word because he can't pronounce it.)
Danny: I know what that is.
Mary Ann: What is it?
Danny: Pewter.
Mary Ann: What's pewter?
Danny: A kind of metal.
Mary Ann: Yes, it looks a little like silver. You get polished pewter and it shines like silver does.
Danny: I know that because of all the advertisements of the Franklin Mint.
Mary Ann: Do you know what it is, Jon?
Jon: I have an idea.
Mary Ann: Ok what's the next one?

Jon: m-a-h-o-g-a-n-y
Danny: Mahogany.
Mary Ann: Have you ever heard the word, 'mahogany,' Jon?
Jon: It's not familiar.
Becky: I know.
Mary Ann: What is it?
Becky: It's a color.
Mary Ann: Yes it is a color, but the color comes from what it actually is? Do you know Mike?
Mike: It's a kind of wood.
Mary Ann: It's a type of wood, mahogany, - very dark color. The stain color comes from the color of the wood.

During these sessions, as I mentioned earlier, Mary Ann helped the children use different strategies to try to
figure our words. Sometimes when the children had
difficulty pronouncing a word, once it was decoded, they
understood what it meant. If not, Mary Ann would use it in
the context of a sentence at which point most children
could figure out the meaning. Although the children had
noted the page on the book were they had found the word, it
was quicker for Mary Ann to give a new context rather than
having children flipping through their books. Indicating the
page number was an important backup when the children
discovered words even we didn't know the meaning of (e.g.,
osteomyelitis).

Josh: c-u-l-p-i— i-t
Mary Ann: What's the word, Josh? (can he pronounce it)
Josh: I don't know.
Mary Ann: Can you say this part, c-u-l?
Josh: cul
Mary Ann: What's p-r-i-t?
Josh: prit
Mary Ann: Ok, put it together.
Josh: culprit
Mary Ann: Someone in this room has been stealing all my
styrofoam and I found out you the culprit is.
Josh: The person who stole it.
Mary Ann: Yes, the person who is doing wrong - the bad
guy.

Mike: Subconsciously
Mary Ann: Do you know what the prefix 'sub' means, like
the prefix on 'submarine.'
Mike: under
Mary Ann: Right, very good, like under water. Do you
know what conscious means.
Mike: I'm not sure.
Mary Ann: Ok, you right now are very conscious of wht
you are doing. In other words you know what
you are doing. You are conscious of me
standing here, you are conscious of the
people around you, you are conscious of what
time it is, ok. You are aware. When you do
things consciously that means you know
exactly what you are doing. Laura?
Laura: under aware, not aware of it.
Mary Ann: Yes, sometimes you might do something subconsciously, without being aware. Sometimes it's a habit you do...

At the end of each session, the words were written on sheets of bristol board and tacked around the room. Eventually we ran out of space and taped them to the window blinds.

This approach to 'vocabulary' words had an interesting effect on the children. They began to enjoy figuring out words and when we had to consult the dictionary, we had more than enough volunteers. The other phenomenon we observed was the children remembered words other children had talked about in the groups. Not only that, but if they later encountered the same word and couldn't remember the meaning, often they could remember who had first brought it up. Thus the children were not only exposed to new words through their own reading but through the reading of the other children in the classroom.

Amy and Lisa:
Amy: You learn new vocabulary words.
Lisa: You find a word on the list [posted around the room] and then you know it when you see it in reading even if it is in a different book or even if it wasn't your word on the list.
Amy: The person who found the word can help you if you forget what the word means.
Lisa: Just before we started talking, Amy asked me about the word 'pagoda' (which she had found in her reading) and I could tell her it was a Chinese building.
Journals:

Each student kept a journal in which they responded to what they were reading. When a response group met, Mary Ann would collect the journals of the children in that particular group, write a response to what they had written and pass the journals back the following day. Collecting the journals by response groups, meant that on any given day Mary Ann would only have four or five journals at a time.

When the children got their journals back from Mary Ann, they had a week (before their group met again) in which to make three entries. One entry was generally a reply to Mary Ann's comments and questions. Another entry was on the discussion topic from the response group. The third entry, (although there was no assigned order to which 'type' of entry was written first, second or third) was the children's responses to what they were reading. Excerpts from Ben's journal over a two week period, illustrate the three 'types' of journal entries.

1/30/88
Dear Ben,
You need to try cursive please.
You said you think, Clues in the Woods, is a good book. What are some things about it that make it good?
Love,
Ms. Wessells

Clues in the wood 2-1-88
Peggy Pairish
I think it is a good book because it is a mistery and I like mistery.

love Ben

More scarry storyes (title collection of short stories)
the Bride (title of story in above book)
2-2-88
Alvin Schwartz (author of the book)
my seting (setting which was that week's topic) is in
the adic (attic) of the house of the Bride when they
are playing hide and go seeck (seek) and she got locked
in the tronk (trunk).

love Ben

More Scary Storyes
Alvin Schwartz
Feb 4.88
I started this because I like scary storyes and I think
there (they're) neat stories I stoped There's a boy in
the girs bathroom and I think I am goint to stop Clues
in the woods.

love Ben

2/6/88
Dear Ben,
I can understand liking mysteries, but I would like
you to tell me what makes a mystery interesting to you.
Why do you enjoy them?
Why are you stopping your books?
Love,
Ms. Wessells

Gilly Hopkins
Katherine
Paterson
I enjoy them because they hold my intrest (interest). I
stoped them because I am reading so many books at once.

Scary Stories
to tell in the Dark
Alvin
Schwartz
big toe (title of another short story)
the setting in this is in the garden and the boy finds
a big toe it is at the adge (edge) of the garden

MILL
David Macaulay
This book is about how the mills were buld (built) and
I like the book because I like to see how they are
buld and what they look like and how they are put
together.

love Ben

-115-
2/12/88
Dear Ben,

Mill sound very interesting. David Macaulay writes great books like this. Have you read Castle (book by the same author)? I would love it if you would share this book with the class. I hope you'll consider it.

When did you get interested in this and what kind of mills are they?

I'm in agreement that you were probably trying to read too many books at once. It is good to give your full attention to one or maybe two.

Love,

Ms. Wessells

The journals enabled the children and Mary Ann to carry out a written correspondence about reading, which the children enjoyed. Although Mary Ann frequently shared what she was reading with the children, they were always interested in finding out more about her books, as Nat's entries demonstrate.

2/16/88 Island of the Blue Dolphins
Scott O'dell

Dear Ms. Wessells,

I'm going to give you a summary of this book. Well it's about a tribe of Indians and Russians come and ask if they can kill seal. So Ramo's (the girl) (parentheses around 'girl' are Nat's) tribe agrees. Then the Russians said they would give Ramo's tribe some jewels. But after the Russians are done they take back the jewels at night time.

Then Ramo's tribe started a war and I think that was a bad move because lots of them died and only 12 ladies or girls were left and 2 old men and Ramo's little brother. So the Russian's took everybody but Ramo's brother. So Ramo jumped from the boat.

What are you reading?

Love,

Nat

3/1/88
Dear Nat,

I know you stopped Island of the Blue Dolphins, but I was wondering about something. You said you felt it was a bad idea for the tribe to war against the
Russians even though they tricked the tribe. What do you feel would have been a better thing to do?

I'm reading, *It* by Stephen King, *Hitler*, a biography, several books for my class at the University, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and *West with the Night*.

Love,

Ms. Wessells

3/2/88

Boy Crazy Stacy
Ann M. Martin

Dear Ms. Wessells,

The reason I think it was a bad idea for the tribe to fight the Russians, because the tribe was not ready to fight. I mean they didn't have very many weapons or enough people to fight.

What is *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* about?

Love, Nat

3/8/88

Dear Nat,

... *Roll of Thunder* is about prejudice against the blacks back in the early part of the century, down South.

What are you reading now?
Are you learning anything from it?

Love, Ms. Wessells

The complexity of the children's responses in the journals was as varied as the children themselves. Over time, more and more of the children began to use some of the topics from discussion group as guides in writing their own personal responses. For example Danny had discovered that a simile he found in his reading was also embedded within a metaphor.

Simily

April 10, 1988

Someone is Hiding on Alcatraz Island by Eve Bunting

Dear Ms. Wessells,

I thought I could hear the soft fall of light rain touching the metal above me and there was the sound of the sea, *it's murmur like blood* in the arteries of the island.
She (referring to Eve Bunting) (parenthesis are Danny's) is comparing the murmer of the ocean to blood.
Your student
Daniel G. Dolan

Metaphor April 10, 1988
Someone is Hiding on Alcatraz Island by Eve Bunting
Dear Ms. Wessells,
'I thought I could hear the soft fall of light rain touching the metal above me and there was the sound of the sea, its murmur like blood in the arteries of the island.'
I know its the same as the last entry but this entry is a metaphor, not a simile. The author is making the island become a living thing.
The one and only,
Daniel G. Dolan

No matter what form the children used in their entries, the most important consideration was what they were learning and discovering about their reading.

9/24/87
Superfudge
Judy Blume
Dear Ms. Vesles,
Even though I've read this book before (before) I just had to read it again (again). This book really (is) funny, but even if it didn't have the comedy (comedy) it still would work because it not just comedy it about changes and life for Peter Hatchet. But I must say this book has a lot of charm. It's about a boy named Peter and his life suddenly (suddenly) changes drastically (drastically). First his mother has another (another) child as if Fuge (Fudge) his younger brother weren't enough (enough). And then they move away for a year. And then he finds out that Fuge (is) coming to the same school as him. Peter really (really) has trouble (trouble), and that is what I think makes the book work besides the comedy (comedy).
Andy

Andy's comments indicate that even very early in the year, he has begun to look below the surface of the story for
underlying themes (e.g., life changes, sibling rivalry, etc.). The response groups and journals provided a more intimate way in which he and the other children could share their insights about reading.

**Whole Group Reading Share:**

Like the whole group shares in writing, the shares in reading enabled the children to hear and discuss what they had read. Basically, the reading shares followed a similar format to the writing. A child would request an opportunity to share at a particular session. Usually, the student began by telling the group a bit about the book. Then he/she could choose to read a section from the book, read the synopsis ('blurb') on the back or simply talk about where they were in the story and their impressions about the book. The child then asked for comments and questions from his/her peers.

The response to the books varied with the children's interests and background reading experiences. Sometimes another child had read the same book and compared his/her perceptions with the reader. Sometimes a child had read another book by the same author which he/she would relate to what he/she had just heard. Despite the individual nature of the responses, there were a number of questions
which occurred at almost all shares: (1) Why did you pick that book? (2) What's keeping your interest? (3) Why did you read that part? (4) What do you think will happen? and (5) Do you recommend it? Some children anticipated these questions and included this information in their introduction to the book. If they didn't, someone was likely to ask them at least one of these questions.

When Danny shared, Someone's Hiding on Alcatraz Island, he provided very little introduction before beginning to read. The response to his book, illustrates how the children keyed in on areas of interest to them: gangs and prisons. Also note that Ben and Chris both asked one of the questions listed above.

Whole Group Share: Wed., Apr. 6

Danny: I'm reading right now, along with, The Fellowship of the Ring, Someone is Hiding on Alcatraz Island by Eve Bunting and I'm going to share a part, if I can find it.

[Danny flips through his book, finds the spot he wants and begins to read]

At first I was paralyzed with fear, but I got such a spurt of panic that I moved faster than I ever thought I could. I began thrashing up the ladder, but I could hear Jelly Bean moving closer behind me, so close that I knew his right reaching hand was only a couple of rungs behind me...

[Danny continues to read about the boy, (also named Danny) and his attempted escape from Jelly Bean and other members of the Outlaws gang who are on Alcatraz island. In order to get away, Danny finally kicks Jelly who falls from the ladder and breaks his leg.]

Danny: Comments or questions?
Ben: Why did you read that part?
Danny: Because it was neat. It was neat.
Ben: Why?
Danny: Because Jelly Bean fell off the water tower and broke his leg and he was one of the Outlaws. It was exciting.
Jon: I have two questions, on the front [referring to the cover illustration], is that Danny?
Danny: Yes, that's Danny right there.
Jon: How did he get to be on the island?
Danny: He took a tour boat.
Jon: And why are they after him?
Danny: Because he beat up Priest's brother. See there are four Outlaws. There's Maxie, Cowboy, Priest and Jelly Bean.
Jon: Jelly Bean is probably going to die.
Danny: No, he just broke his leg, but he might die. I don't know.
Jon: Is Alcatraz island like I saw on a show - like a jail?
Mary Ann: It was, but it's not in use anymore. That's why they were taking a tour boat out there, but it was at one time a penitentiary.
Danny: First it was a military prison. Then it was the state penitentiary. Then it closed.
Mary Ann: And now it's a tourist attraction.
Jen: Are the Outlaws going to do something to Danny?
Danny: Yes, it said in here that one kid told on the Outlaws and they made him eat two quarters.
Shannon: This is for Ms. Wessells. Why did it close?
Mary Ann: That's a good question. I'm not sure I have the answer.
Andy: It became obsolete and it was run down and cost too much to heat and run.
Mary Ann: So instead of trying to renovate it which would cost a fortune, they closed it down. The one part you read, where you said that's a simile, but there was also a metaphor there because the blood in the arteries was equating the island with a living thing and that's a metaphor (Danny also referred to this in his journal).
Mary Ann: Are you learning anything from this book?
Danny: Yah.
Mary Ann: What?
Danny: Not to mess with the Outlaws.
Mary Ann: Sounds like a good idea to me.
Molly: The don't have Outlaws, really?
Mary Ann: Well it's a gang.
Molly: Do they really have them.
Mary Ann: In large cities they have gangs.
Molly: But do they have Outlaws?
Mary Ann: That's the name of the gang. They name their gangs, ok, like the Outlaws, the Rebels, the
Devils and things like that.

Chris: Do you recommend it?

Danny: Yes.

Chris: Why?

Danny: Because it's neat.

Chris: Why is it neat?

Danny: Because it's exciting.

Mary Ann: How about the writing. Is it descriptive? It sounded like it was.

Danny: Yes it is very descriptive.

Mary Ann: Is that part pretty consistent in terms of description throughout the book?

Danny: Yes.

Mary Ann: Do you know why they have the names they do, like Jelly Bean and what are the others?

Danny: Cowboy, Priest and Maxie.

Mary Ann: Do you have any idea how they got their names?

Danny: Well, Jelly Bean got his name from being fat. Cowboy got his name because he always wore a ten gallon hat and leather boots. Priest was short and fat and I don't know how he got his name - well, not fat stout, and Maxie, I don't know. I guess it's his real name.

Mary Ann: Anyone else for Danny? Ok, John you're next.

The shares were often related to the children's personal experiences, either spontaneously or through questions posed by Mary Ann. Given the themes and topics in the 'realistic fiction' books the children were reading, there were plenty of opportunities to make connections between something in a book and the children's feelings. The following excerpt about Andrea's book illustrates how Mary Ann helped the children explore their feelings on topics raised in books.

Andrea: I'm reading, *Who's Afraid of Sixth Grade*, by Janet Alblea? or something like that?

Mary Ann: Let me see it - Adelbloss.

Andrea: And I'm going to read the back but first I'm going to tell what it's about. Well it's about these four girls and this guy and they're worried about sixth grade and her brother tells
her all kinds of mean things, and I'll share the back of it and I'm up to the chapter where she goes to school and the summer has already been over. I read: 'What's sixth grade really like? Sky and her friends aren't sure what to expect in sixth grade at the middle school. Her older brother, Bill, tells her that they have to wear pyjamas to school, eat worms in science class and that the older kids make you carry their books to class walking backwards. Sky and her friends just decide to ignore what Bill tells them, after all sixth grade can't be that bad, or can it?'

Jen: I read that book before. Did you get to the part where he tells them more of what happens?
Andrea: No.
Mary Ann: Does the thought of going to sixth grade make you nervous?
Andrea: No.
Mary Ann: Does the thought of going to seventh grade make you nervous?
Andrea: Well, sorta, I'll probably get all mixed up.

Classroom Schedule Year Two

During the first year of the study we had ample opportunity to observe the children's growth as readers and writers. Not only had they engage in the processes of both, they had make progress in relating what they learned in reading to writing and vice versa (discussed in Chapter Six). The children were not the only ones who had grown. Looking back to September 1986 we had come a long way from a divided language arts program which used 'writing process' for writing and a basal reading program for reading. Now we had established a classroom environment which encouraged the children to engage in reading and writing as learning processes. In addition, Mary Ann had also developed a
record keeping system (which underwent several revisions) to keep track of the children's progress.

At the end of the first year we felt confident that overall the components (shares, conferences, response groups, etc.) of our parallel reading and writing schedule were facilitating the children's learning. The children agreed with us, although, like writing, they had personal preferences about the forum in which they shared, (e.g., I like whole group shares because you get to hear about more books or I like the response group because everyone in the group gets a chance to share).

Jeff: Reading process is good because you don't learn out of textbooks. You get to discuss what you are reading and how you feel about the story which you can't get from texts. The texts were only excerpts and the workbook quizzed you about them.

Chris: I love it ('reading process'). I hated the other way because you had to read what the group was reading and now you can read what you want. I also like to write to Ms. Wessells because she writes back and I like to hear and see what she has to write.

Becky: I like reading (this semester) because I get to read more books. I never used to read and now I'm enjoying it more.

Satisfied with our 'basic approach' and the progress the children had made, particularly in relating reading and writing, we turned our attention to ways in which we could facilitate a closer connection between the two processes.
The first year we had two whole group shares which occurred at the end of each section (one for reading and one for writing). If we combined the two, then the children would be exposed to both processes within the context of a single session. Furthermore, if we held that share at the beginning of the day, this would allow the children to respond to comments and questions and revise if they chose to do so, with more immediacy than waiting till the next day, which had been the situation in the previous schedule. In terms of reading, a share at the beginning of the day would also give children who had finished a book some ideas for their next selection.

After the whole class reading/writing share, the children had thirty minutes for quiet writing and conferring, followed by thirty minutes of reading, conferring and response group. Students whose group did not meet that day could continue to read or write in their journals while the group met. The children adapted readily to the schedule and particularly enjoyed the combined shares.

After two months of observing the children's learning within the context of the new schedule, Mary Ann and I began to realize that although we had removed one external barrier between the process (by combining the shares), the children's experiences were still segmented. We still had a schedule which said, 'this is is reading time and this is
writing time.' These external divisions were not consistent with the kinds of internal connections the children were making when they related reading and writing. How could we further modify our schedule to physically and temporally bring the two processes closer together, as well as empower the children to take more control over their own learning?

We again modified the schedule. Mary Ann extended the language arts block from 8:45 to 11:30, with twenty minutes for snack between 10:20 and 10:40. Two other points in the schedule were fixed - the whole class reading/writing share from 8:45 to 9:15 and the response group from 11:00 to 11:30. During the rest of the time the children, decided when they would read, write and confer. For example, if Danny while reading The Black Cauldron gained some insights into his fantasy story 'Land of Murewhere,' he could switch to his writing while the idea was fresh in his mind. The only requirements were that thirty minutes be spent on reading and thirty on writing, at some point during the language arts block. The students monitored their own reading, writing and conference time and recorded their time engaged in each activity on their individual record sheets. (See Figure (6), below).

Figure (6) Class Schedule Year Two

Reading/Writing Block

8:45 - 9:15 Whole group share - reading and writing
9:15 - 10:20  Reading/writing/conferring
10:20 - 10:40  Snack
10:40 - 11:00  Reading/writing/conferring
11:00 - 11:30  Response group - 1 group of 4 or 5 students per day
               - other students continue with reading/writing
               and conferring

Through these latest changes and the ones which preceded them the children experienced changes in reading and writing as they engage more fully in the process of both.
CHAPTER 4

CHANGES IN WRITING:

The many changes we implemented in the classroom to encourage the children to engage in the processes of reading and writing were reflected in the changes we saw in the children's writing, as well as reading (which will be discussed in Chapter Five). The most significant changes occurred in the areas of genre, stylistic devices, conventions, theme, length of story, self-evaluation of writing, comments/questions, and recognition of influences on writing. The first seven of these eight changes will be discussed in this chapter, while recognition of influences of writing which deals with peers and reading will be discussed in Chapter Six - Reading/Writing Relationships.

Changes in Genre

The most striking change in the children's writing during the two years of the project was in the area of genre. This change is particularly noticeable when comparing writing done during the first term with writing done the second term. As mentioned in the previous chapter, at the beginning of the school year Mary Ann encouraged the
children to write personal narratives for several reasons. She felt it was an opportunity to get to know the children and to gain some insights into their writing when everyone was using the same genre. In addition, Mary Ann also felt that starting with the personal narrative gave the children an opportunity to get to know Mary Ann and her expectations concerning their writing.

Despite this initial restriction on genre which was removed after Christmas the first year (and after the first month of school, the second year), the changes in genre are very apparent when comparing writing done the latter part of the first term with writing done the second term. The genre restriction which Mary Ann and I discussed was also a strong indication that limitations can have serious consequences on the children's writing. The way the children's writing changed when they were able to experiment more fully with reading and writing processes suggests that we should seriously consider what effect restrictions have on writing before we implement them in the classroom.

The changes in genre were numerous. From the base of personal narrative the students began to experiment with a variety of genres. A few like Jessica continued with the personal narrative even into the second term. Occasionally
some children returned to that form later in the year. The majority continued to try new genres.

The changes in genres we observed across the two years are summarized below.

Figure (?): Changes in Genre in the Children's Writing

Personal Narrative

Fiction:
- Realistic - particularly with themes about personal relationships and/or problems growing up
- Mystery
- Fantasy/Science Fiction
- Parody
- Humor
- Historical Fiction

Poetry

Biography

Factual Writing:
- Letters - Business and personal
- Reports

I will illustrate how the children's writing changed by looking at three children and samples of their writing of personal narratives compared with a genre they tried later. Like many issues in writing, it is difficult to separate what impact a change in one area has on another component of the processes of writing. Consequently, in discussing the children's writing, I will focus on six of
the eight changes: genre, stylistic devices, 'conventions', theme, self-evaluation, and length of story.

In selecting the three children, I've picked students who would traditionally be considered to fall within the 'top', 'average' and 'experiencing difficulty' range within the classroom.

Please note that as with Jason's stories, the samples of the children's writing are reproduced as they originally wrote them, using their own spelling and punctuation. Where a word is unclear or difficult to understand I've added the standard spelling in parenthesis following the word.

Jennifer

'Swimming at Great Bay' by Jennifer K.

One day this summer I went swimming at the Great Bay with Jennifer G., Jodi V., Chucky V., and Michael G.

When we got to the bay we had a picnic. Then we set up by getting out the towels.

After we did that we went swimming. We had to wear sneakers because of rocks and things.

Then Chucky and Mike went under water and tried to pull Jodi under, but Jennifer and I helped her get away.

After an hour of warming up Chucky found a real skinny board and tried to surf board, but there was no surf so it didn't work. After a while I found a really big board. Jennifer and I tried to stand on it but we fell off. Then Chucky lost his sneaker.

After getting out of the water we all dried off and went back.
When we got home we had a water fit (fight). We all sprayed each other. We had a lot of fun even though it was the last week of vacation.

Jennifer's story about, 'Swimming at Great Bay,' is fairly typical of the personal narratives written by the students at the first of the year. Her story basically is a straightforward retelling of events as they happened on that day. There is little description of either the place or events and no dialogue.

In terms of 'skills' or 'conventions', Jennifer demonstrates she has a good understanding of sentence structure, paragraphs, capitalization and commas in series. Although 'correct grammar and usage' were not stressed in initial drafts, many students in both classes tended to use the skills they knew when writing even very rough first drafts. The expertise in conventions of writing varied with different students. Later during editing or conferences all the students worked on new skills needed in a given story as well as refining the ones they already used.

Jennifer's second sample, written in March, is very different. In addition to the change from personal narrative to fiction, this story also illustrates several other changes we found in the children's writing which Mary Ann and I listed under the heading of 'Stylistic Devices' (e.g., description, dialogue, simile, metaphor, vocabulary,
plot, character development, character description, etc.). Jennifer uses dialogue interspersed with narrative passages to describe the incidents in the life of a teenager dealing with younger siblings, parents and friends.

'Kitty' by Jennifer K.

'Here Kitty.'
'Scratch, Crash!'
'Nice going silly, you just crashed into the couch.'
'Meow.'
'Come on eat your food.'
'Jenny come look at Barbie her hair sticking up.'
'Wow really neat,' I said as I looked in the living room and saw (I didn't count) 100 clothes on the T.V., chair, lamps and couch and not to mention the ones taked to the window sill.
'Oh come on Stacy, pick it up. Now before mom gets home.' Oh ya mom will be home in a half an hour. I went over and got out the vaccum cleaner. Plugged it in and ran into the living room with it and shut it off.
'What will you do with that Jenny?'
'I'm going to vaccum your Barbie clothes up O.K.'

Immediately you can notice that the entire tone of this piece is different from 'Great Bay'. The story is more active and immediate. Through the use of very active verbs like 'scratch', 'crash', and the dialogue, Jennifer places the reader in the story as it happens.

She very effectively conveys a sense of character without directly telling the reader about the person. The reader is left to infer what the characters are like through their actions and what they say. Even in the first page of the story, the reader develops a feeling for the main
character, Jenny, and her frustration dealing with her younger sister. Jenny is the responsible one, who feels much put upon by her parents and the allowances they make for her younger siblings. As the story continues, Jenny's frustration builds. Her sister, Stacy, throws a temper tantrum. Jenny encounters her brother's messy room, rescues her hamster from her sister, cleans her own room and her mother returns to find Stacy missing.

'No, No, No don't Jenny please don't.'
'O.K. but you better pick up and I'm telling mom that you put holes in the window sill.' You should of seen Stacy running around then she stop. Then she screamed. Then holding one foot she jumped up and down.

By then she was rolling around on the floor all of a sudden she started to pick up all of her Barbie doll clothes. Then she ran upstairs, I put back the vacuum and picked up the clothes that Stacy dropped on the stairs. I through then in her room and went to my brother's room the door was shut and his 'DUMP' sign was on the hall way floor. I placed it on the door. Then I went in his room. All his toys were all over the place for instences his G.I. Joes were hanging off his lamp with his toy alligators under neath. His room was a mess. I couldn't see my brother Michael at all. Then I saw a big lump in the middle of the dump. There under neath his toys and stuff was Michael taking a nap. In the middle of his dump...

'Where's my Sweety Pie and Honey Pie?'
'I put them in the trash can's to rought [rot]' I said, 'Mom there a pain.'
'Where are they?' she said after she went out to check the trash cans.
'There're in their room's mom. Oh ya Stacy put holes in the family room window sill.'
'So, you did too.'
'I jest stod [stood] their thinking I was about to say 'I did?' When I heard
'Jennifer Lynn O'Donnell you better find your sister
Revealing characters by showing them in action rather than telling the reader about them indicates how much Jennifer has grown since her earlier story, 'Swimming at Great Bay'. Jennifer has now created scenes which are familiar to many teenagers with younger siblings and used the dialogue to reproduce those circumstances. Mom's greeting of 'Where's my Sweetie Pie and Honey Pie?', indicates mom's apparent favoritism towards the younger children - a common perception among many students with younger brothers and sisters. Mom's use of Jennifer's full name, 'Jennifer Lynn O'Donnell you better find your sister,' struck a responsive cord with most of the children who related that they knew they were in trouble when their parents called them by their full names. Family and sibling relationships were common interests among many of the children and frequently became themes in their writing.

Other instances in the writing give it a contemporary flavor: for example, the toys - G.I. Joe and the Barbie doll with her hundreds of clothes. Expressions like 'Mom their (they're) a pain,' and 'oh ya' capture some of the informal ways of speaking common in everyday life. All of these elements, (the dialogue, description, active verbs, everyday expressions, and 'showing the situations and not telling about them') give the reader a sense of Jennifer's style of writing in this piece - a style very different from the straight forward narration of 'Swimming at Great Bay.'
In stressing the growth in Jennifer's writing, I've not overlooked the area of 'skills' or 'conventions'. At first glance many teachers would probably notice and be concerned about several areas where Jennifer appears to have 'slipped.' She confuses the homonyms 'there,' 'their' and 'they're' and in one instance even uses 'there're.' Her sense of paragraphing in the narrative sections appears to be not as strong as it was in the first story, although her paragraphing in the dialogue is pretty competent. At times she leaves out the occasional word or fails to add the appropriate verb ending (e.g., 'then she stop Then she screamed...').

On the surface it might appear that Jennifer has 'regressed' in her use of skills. However this is not really the case if you look at the processes involved in writing as a series of constraints on the writer's attention. Jennifer is trying to attend to a multitude of factors while writing this story. First of all there are the demands of plot and character inherent in the new genre of fiction, demands which were not present in her narrative story where the plot involved a retelling of the events on a particular day and the characters were real people, many of whom the other children knew (which again underlies the importance of identifying real people with the first name and last name or initial so everyone will know who you're talking about).
Secondly Jennifer is trying to 'master' a new form of writing by using dialogue in her story. Teachers who have 'taught' dialogue to children using exercises which are structured will recognize the demands of this task. Usually such formats start with very straightforward examples like, "'Where are you going?' I asked." or "I said, 'I'm going now.'" and build in complexity. The structured format incrementally builds on the students' mastery of the punctuation and capitalization required by each example of dialogue. Examining Jennifer's story reveals that she is experimenting with a variety of dialogue forms as they are needed by her characters to express themselves in a natural way. Her omission of the speaker in many situations (e.g., 'Here Kitty' and 'Nice going silly you just crashed into the couch') again lends immediacy and reality to her story which would not be possible if she constantly used a dialogue form she had 'mastered' (e.g., 'Here Kitty,' I said." or "Nice going silly you just crashed into the couch,' I said.")

The third factor is Jennifer's focus on the description in her story. She sets up Jenny's entrance into her brother's room with the 'DUMP' sign on the hallway floor. From the opening of the door we see Michael's dump through Jenny's eyes as she scans the room - G.I. Joes hanging from the lamp, the lump in the middle of the floor, etc. Writing
like this requires concentration which is already being
divided among the other constraints previously discussed.

With so many demands on the writer's attention, it is
little wonder that sometimes less attention is paid to one
area while the writer is focusing on another area.
Generally newer concepts require more concentration which
is diverted from more familiar areas. In Jennifer's case,
her explorations with fiction, plot, character development,
dialogue and description have diverted her attention away
from her focus on skills she already knows, (e.g., the
homonyms). Familiar skills assume less importance as she
becomes more involved in figuring out how to work with new
skills.

Another factor which enters in at this point is her
enthusiasm for her story. Jennifer was excited about her
story and the response she received from her peers. At
times her ideas ran ahead of her pen, hence her omission of
words occasionally. Even adults occasionally experience
this when we write something in a rush to get ideas on
paper only to read it later and have to revise it because
we have made 'mistakes'.

The final factor to consider in analyzing Jennifer's
stories is the concept of a 'mistake'. This was Jennifer's
second draft. Using the comments and questions of her
peers, she had revised the first draft for content, (e.g., is there enough description, can the reader clearly tell who's talking, are the funny parts funny, etc.). The content of her piece (and hence all the other factors previously discussed which influence content) was her focus. Jennifer knew that later when she published the piece she would have the opportunity to edit it. During the editing phase she would have the opportunity to standardize her spelling or grammar 'mistakes'. For the time being, she could read her draft to her audience and be understood. Non-standard spelling or grammar did not interfere with the listeners' comprehension. When Jennifer wanted to share her story with her peers in a written form, through publishing her story, then she could focus on the conventions which make reading easier. That published story conformed to the conventions of writing.

Jennifer's perceptions about her own growth in writing (self-evaluation) can perhaps be expressed most precisely in her own words.

I have two favorite pieces, 'Kitty' and 'Swimming at Great Bay' ... because they're both funny and I like the events in the stories. The events are funny...'Kitty' is the best written because it was the first fiction story I wrote, well almost the first and it came along way. I like the way I wrote it. It was long... I meant it to be funny but it turned out to be serious because the sister ran away. I learned new things about writing like how to paragraph dialogue... I published them both... because I thought they were the best I'd written... [changes in writing] The changes are the different things I write about. Instead
at the beginning I wrote non-fiction about real things like my family. Now I take ideas about my family and expand them into fiction. I get ideas from real events. Sometimes I like little ideas. At night I think of new things like humor. The serious situation in 'Kitty' ended up being funny. My stories are longer and I'm trying to make them funny.'

**Shannon**

A change in genre as well as changes in stylistic devices (e.g., description, dialogue, vocabulary, plot, character development, etc.), 'conventions,' theme, length of story and self-evaluation can also be seen in Shannon's stories. However, her growth and concerns about writing are not necessarily the same ones seen in Jennifer's stories. Shannon is a very different writer from Jennifer. In order to understand Shannon's (or any other writer's) journey it is necessary to look at the writer in comparison with him/herself and not against other writers.

The pre-teen years of grade five and six are interesting times for teachers and children - the age when children are trying out the guise of being teenagers while at the same time retaining many of the characteristics of childhood. In Mary Ann's class, some of the children like Jeff were well on their way to exploring the concerns and interests of the young teenager. Some, like Jennifer, were balancing on the edge between the teen and the child. Still others like Shannon retained more of the wonder and innocence of
perspective characteristic of childhood. The strength of having a process environment was that each was free to follow their interests in what they read and wrote without fear of censure by their peers.

The supportive atmosphere in Mary Ann's room enabled Shannon to grow as a writer, even though she did not experiment with relationship orientated writing or read books with similar themes like many of her peers. Shannon entered the fiction genre with her story about Herbie, the Valentine Bunny - a story more in keeping with her childlike nature where a bunny could magically appear on Valentine's day. There are no issues about growing up in this piece and the only relationship or theme she explores is the friendship between Herbie and the little girl, Jane. Again this story, while very different from many of her peers' fiction pieces, demonstrates growth in her writing when compared with her early story, 'My Dog Dublin.'

'My dog Dublin' by Shannon M.

My name is Shannon. What is your name? My dog is a cocker spaniel he is so soft. I think he mostly looks like a cocker spaniel the most. His name is Dublin. He has tan fur and soft fluffy ears. He is pretty small but he barks very loudly. You might think he's a big dog.

He has his own small room and he has about a ton of toys. My sister got him this huge bone almost bigger then he is.

One night my parents came home from the mall with a cute puppy. He was six weeks old when we got him. My family played with him almost all night. We got
Dublin's name because my parents got home from Dublin Ireland about a week before. He was so little we left him in the bathroom that night because that's where he went when he was scared. About a week after we found a place for his room.

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I feel bad when I go away because he looks so sad and he goes straight to his bed and just stares at us. He knows that we're going away.

He is so small he probably won't get too much bigger but he is still cute. If he got a lot bigger I wouldn't think he is cute because he's cut (cute) when he's smaller.

We have him groomed every five to six weeks. The lady cuts under his chin he looks more like a cocker spaniel. He's one of my favorite dogs. I've had a lot of dogs but he's one of my favorite dogs. I've had a lot of dogs but he's one of my cutest and nicest dogs I ever had.

The End

In this first story, Shannon demonstrates that she has responded to many of the questions her peers tend to ask about pet stories. She has included when she got the dog, how old he was, what he looks like, what he does, and why she likes him. Beyond the straight narrative there are flashes of more descriptive writing (e.g., 'He is pretty small but he barks very loudly. You might think he's a big dog.' or 'My sister got him this huge bone it's almost bigger than he is.'). Comparisons like this give the reader a better sense of what the dog is like.

Shannon's competence with the conventions of writing are pretty good. Overall she has a good sense of sentence structure and paragraphing as well as spelling.
In several places Shannon becomes a bit repetitive in her writing, 'I think he mostly looks like a cocker spaniel the most' and 'He's one of my favorite dogs. I've had a lot of dogs but he's one of my favorite dogs.' Instances like this are common in many children's writing when they are trying to make sure they are making a strong statement and emphasizing a point. On other occasions repetition can simply be false starts in experimenting with which phrase or expression sounds better. The writer then sometimes forgets to remove the expression they don't want (e.g., 'he mostly looks like a cocker spaniel' or 'he looks like a cocker spaniel the most'). Still another purpose for repetition is as a 'place holder' where the writer focuses on one point as he/she tries to collect his/her thoughts to link this piece of information with the next part of the story.

One final comment on this story is Shannon's beginning or 'lead.' 'My name is Shannon. What is your name?' is a formulaic opening like 'Once upon a time...', 'One dark and stormy night...' or 'One day....' Young writers frequently employ these stock openings as a way of orientating themselves and their readers to the story. Shannon goes one step further in trying to engage the reader by introducing herself and asking the reader's name. At one time or another all young writers try variations of the stock opening. As writers gain more experience with how to engage
the reader or 'catch' his/her attention, they use more varied openings than the 'stock' beginning. The opening of, 'Valentine Bunny' tries to set the scene for the reader by providing a brief background to the story of Jane and Herbie, the Valentine Bunny.

Valentine Bunny by Shannon

Jane, has a little bunny his name is Herbie. Herbie come out of Jane's closet on Valentines day. Jane met herbie one day on Valentine's day when Jane was small. Ever since Jane was small she wanted herbie to come out of the closet.

One of the times Jane went in her closet, Herbie was gone. But one day Jane locked behind her clothes and she found a hole just a little bigger then herbie. Jane thought a mintint (minute) then she tried to push the hole in. it went in and ther were a set of steps. Jane tried here hardest to get in that little hole and she made it. she waked (walked) down the seps and there was a exelator (escalator). Jane went down the exelator (escalator) right into a beautiful room decerated with Valentines and red white pink decerations all over the place. And guess who was plop down in the middle of the coach (couch) sleeping was Herbie. Jane ran up the exelator then up the steps. The she went down her steps in her house because her mom was calling her for breakfast. OK she yelled i'm coming.

After breakfast Jane went back into her room she was doing her homework for monday. She kept looking at her open closet she was tepped (tempted) to go in her closet. But she jsut had to wait until tomorrow Feb. 14, 1987 for herbbie to come out. Jane spent all day cleaning with her mom because they were going to have company for Valentine's Day. Only grown ups were coming because none of the kids were invited so since none of the kids were invited i was going to stay in my room and wait for Herbbie to come out of the closet....

Shannon's story continues as Jane makes a list of things she would like to do with Herbie when he comes to visit on Valentine's Day. The following morning Jane finds Herbie
curled up in her bed and they review the list of things to do. Herbie notices item four on the list which says 'ask about the closet'. Herbie questions Jane about this item and finally she confesses that she has found his secret home and would dearly love to be able to see all of it. The story concludes with Herbie and Jane going to visit his home as he explains that his appearances on Valentine's Day, as well as the way his home is decorated with valentines, are the reasons he is called the Valentine Bunny.

The complexity of this story in plot and character development indicates how much Shannon has grown as a writer since she wrote, 'My Dog Dublin'. The first story is basically description based on her own personal experiences with her dog. Occasionally we get glimpses into how she feels about her dog, (he's my favorite or if he was bigger I probably wouldn't like him as much because he wouldn't be as cute) as well as how the dog reacts to situations (he hides in the bathroom when he's scared and looks at them with a sad expression when they leave). In the 'Valentine Bunny', Jane's character is more developed. The reader gets a better sense of how she feels and how she reacts to situations in the story. After Jane's discovery of Herbie's secret room 'she was doing her homework for Monday. She kept looking at her open closet. She was tempted to go in her closet but she has to wait until tomorrow, Feb. 14,
1987.' Here the reader can see some of Jane's frustration and feelings of anticipation.

Jane's character is further revealed in the exchange between herself and Herbie when he discovers she has written down a list of things to do, one of which says 'ask about closet'.

Herby stopped and looked at idea 4. then Jane said what is the matter Herby. Herby said the list said ask about closet. what do you mean by that herby asked Jane. Oh, oh nothing. It must mean something herby said. I felt like I was going to burst out with tears but then herby would really be scared or confused so I kept my self together and said Herby I went in my closet and I found a hole. I went through it... with you in the middle of the couch I didn't know what to do so I ran back upstairs. But why didn't you tell me that you were down there. I don't know I said in a whisper. Please take me down in you home so i can see the whole thing...

Through Shannon's writing, Jane is revealed as a sensitive person who has discovered Herbie's secret but is afraid how he will react if he realizes she knows. As it turns out Jane's greatest wish, to see the secret room, is realized. Insight into a character's feelings and motivations are the beginnings of character development.

In terms of skills or conventions, Shannon demonstrates several inconsistencies which often accompany writing growth. Like Jennifer she is using dialogue and using it effectively to propel the plot. However she still has to work on punctuating passages that contain conversation.
Herbie's name is spelled in a variety of ways. Non-standard spelling like this occurs in many first drafts. When the writer is unsure how to spell the word, he/she will often try several spelling variations. Shannon's inconsistency in capitalizing proper names is probably due in part to her haste in trying to get her ideas on paper. Obviously she knows this skill as 'Jane' and most spellings of 'Herbie' are capitalized. Since this is a new genre more than likely Shannon is finding her attention divided among the demands of plot, character and dialogue. Hence, she is focusing less on familiar skills.

Another 'skill' of interest is the switch in narrator. Initially Shannon wrote from the third person perspective (Jane, she), however at certain points Shannon became Jane and the story was told in the first person ('I felt like I was going to burst...'). Once again this is very common as children experiment with different genres and telling stories from different points of view. The fact that Shannon has used the third person as well as she has indicates that she is adopting different perspectives on her writing. She is trying to stand outside the action and tell it through the eyes of another person. In situations like this, as you try to visualize the story it is very easy to 'slip' into it.
In 'The Valentine Bunny' we see the emergence of Shannon's developing sense of style in writing. The story begins with Shannon introducing the main characters, Jane and Herbie, and giving the reader some background about their relationship. Essentially this opening sets the context for the rest of the story. The reader is 'hooked' into wanting to read further in order to find out if Herbie will reappear.

The opening (lead) of 'The Valentine Bunny' is a very different invitation to read compared with 'Dublin'. Shannon has begun to recognize that attempting to engage the reader by asking personal questions may not be as effective as catching their interest with a 'well-written' lead. While Shannon has changed her opening, she has not entirely abandoned the strategy of involving the reader by asking them questions. Later in the 'Valentine Bunny' when she discovers a lump under the bed clothes, she addresses the reader with 'guess who it was?'.

Rhetorical questions or statements to the reader are common strategies used by many children to try to establish a rapport with the audience of readers. (Shannon's classmate, Tami, invariably began her first few stories with, 'Hi my name is Tami. What is yours?'). Seeking a rapport with the reader is in turn part of the child's growing awareness of the needs of a reader (audience awareness). Young or
inexperienced writers often have difficulty understanding what they need to include in a story so a reader can understand the text.

Initially many of these concerns center around information – how much is too much or how much is too little. 'The breakfast to bed' stories are instances of too much, however they are common phases in the growth of writing with many writers. As the children gain experience they become more adept at deciding what information to include and what to leave out.

The second example of too little information is essentially the 'flip-side' of the same issue – audience awareness. Instances of too little information tend to have a much greater impact on the reader's comprehension because the writer frequently omits information which is essential to understanding. At the very least many of these omissions cause the reader to pause, re-read or make numerous inferences which distract the reader from his/her enjoyment and appreciation of what he/she is reading.

Some of the questions teachers raise about a child's difficulty with 'sequence' in a story are in fact 'errors of omission'. The child knows what happened in the story and can tell you what happened first, then what happened next and so on. So the difficulty is not so much due to the
child not understanding a 'sequence' of events but in recognizing what the reader needs in order to read the story. Children frequently assume too much. If they know what happened and it makes sense to them, then they assume the reader should also be able to read the story. Jason (Chapter Two) is a case in point. He possessed more information in his head about his stories then he was willing to put on the page. While Jason took the extreme stance that his readers were 'stupid', most children have no experience with audience and, therefore, are simply unaware of the needs of the reader.

Peers play an important role in the writer's growing awareness of the readers' needs. Through conferences and shares, peers make comments and pose questions which alert the reader to segments of the story which are effectively written, as well as areas which are unclear. The writer is then faced with several decisions. If the listeners like particular parts of the story, especially incidents of humor or suspense, the writer may then decide to include more of these elements or he/she may simply accept the comments as positive remarks which are not acted upon in terms of adding similar incidents to the story. If the listeners find certain areas unclear because of too much or too little information then the writer must decide how to address his/her audience's concerns. The writer may choose to revise the troublesome areas in an attempt to clarify
these segments. On the other hand the writer may consider the concerns raised and choose to leave the draft as it was written.

Even writers like Jason (whose initial response was to blame his readers) eventually develop a better sense of audience. Growth like this takes time. It would be unrealistic to expect that the writer will respond to each and every comment/question by revising the draft. The strategies for revision grow as the writer grows. The important thing to remember is that feedback lays the groundwork for building audience awareness and coping with revision. Feedback gives the writer an 'external ear' - someone who listens to the story from a different perspective. Someone who doesn't possess the intimate knowledge the writer has in his mind about a story. Sincere listeners/readers respond not only to the content and information but also, as their own writing grows, they are able to respond to segments of the draft where the writing itself may be unclear.

The relationships between writers and responders is very dynamic. Often apparently sudden spurts of writing growth are the cumulative effect of many smaller daily interactions the child experiences as he/she writes, receives feedback, responds to other children's writing, reads, and participates in discussions. Shannon's changes
in writing style certainly indicate that she has internalized much of what is going on in the room. In most cases it is difficult to point to any one incident as the catalyst for growth. This situation is particularly true when looking at changes in writing in terms of class trends.

Shannon was surrounded by peers who, although they wrote in a variety of genres, were particularly interested in fiction. Discussions about 'realistic' fiction, mysteries, fantasies, etc. were common everyday occurrences. The children, especially in the response groups, looked at 'leads', character description, plot development, active writing styles, etc. Whole group shares enabled the children to see what others were writing about and how those stories were received. When Shannon began 'The Valentine Bunny', fiction writing was the most popular genre, with many students writing 'realistic' fiction stories that dealt with themes concerning the problems and issues of growing up. From the feedback during whole group shares, it was easy to see that most of the students enjoyed writing fiction, as well as listening to the fiction written by their peers. This does not mean that 'any old' realistic fiction story received automatic acceptance. For the most part, they were critical listeners, quick to comment on areas they liked and question areas where they were uncertain what the writer
meant. In fact the more the children wrote fiction the more insightful their comments and questions became.

In this milieu, it is not surprising that Shannon eventually tried her hand at fiction writing. What is particularly interesting is the subtle peer influences which encouraged exploring new genres and learning more about reading and writing. These influences were positive - based on an over-riding enthusiasm for what they were doing in reading and writing. Even as trends caught on in both reading and writing, the positive learning environment still encouraged the children to follow their own interests. Children were not succumbing to peer pressure (you have to write fiction in order to belong) but responding to the enthusiasm of their peers for something they enjoyed doing. A child could experiment with a genre, decide he/she didn't like it and go on to something else without fear of censure by his/her peers. Children who did not follow a particular trend were not 'put down' by their peers. The key to understanding the differences between peer pressure, to do what others are doing, and peer influences hinges on the issues of respect and belonging which permeated the learning environment.

No matter what Shannon wrote, she would still belong to the community of writers in the classroom. Belonging did not depend on following trends but in participating in the
broader 'club' of readers and writers. Thus the writer did not HAVE to write fiction in order to be popular. The learning environment encouraged children to pursue their own interests, make their own choices and still retain the respect and support of their peers. As the children built a stronger community of readers and writers, there was a marked growth in their ability to express their own personal opinions even if these were not the viewpoints of the majority in the class. There were also more opportunities for children to respond to trends from their own unique perspective.

Shannon's choice in fiction was very different from the humorous or issue-oriented realistic fiction of her peers. Shannon's story was about a bunny. A bunny named Herbie. A bunny and a little girl who shared an imaginary world in a secret room below the closet. The innocence and joy in the fantasy world of children's stories about imaginary animals underly Shannon's well thought out story and are part of her world view. The child teetering on the edge of the teenage years. In this classroom Shannon's story could be appreciated and enjoyed by her peers. It could stand alongside Jeff's 'Girl Watching Society' (See next section) without fear of ridicule. Each piece had its own merits and each writer was recognized for their unique contributions to the crafting of their respective stories.
The 'leap' into fiction enabled writers like Shannon to experiment with the demands of a new genre within the safety of a supportive writing community. Shannon recognized how her writing had grown as well as the importance of her peer audience in the writing process.

[Changes in writing] 'I'm using dialogue and I'm writing about different topics like I wrote about my dog and then about the twins [her latest story written after 'The Valentine Bunny']. I'm writing on more topics...My favorite story is the 'Twins'...because I like the description and how I wrote it - how I put things. Like the dialogue. This is one of the first times I used dialogue, so there is not just one person telling the story...'My Two Friends' is well written. It's not finished yet. There are two people on a phone having a conversation. It's hard to write with one person on the phone and then the answer is made. Conversation is hard to do. I added some sound effects like the 'brrrrng' of the phone ringing...I've published 'My dog Dublin' and I plan to publish 'The Valentine Bunny'...I plan to publish 'The Valentine Bunny' because it's well-written, you can understand it and it has dialogue...I publish the ones I think are well described and that I like and that others might like...You can tell [others like them] by the comments and questions. Some people say comments and questions when you share the story...You can expand on the comments. If someone likes parts then you can put in more of those parts. For the questions you can answer them in the story...Conferences help you add to the story. If you need an ending they can give you ideas for the ending and what to add and what to put in or leave out or put in another spot.

Clearly Shannon's insights into her writing processes reflect her own individual growth.
Jeff

Just as the writing community and environment enabled Shannon to write about her dog, Dublin, and Herbie the Valentine Bunny, Jeff had similar opportunities to write about his interests which were as different from Shannon's as their respective personalities. Jeff was out-going and gregarious while Shannon tended to be quiet and shy.

One the most popular children in the class, blonde-haired, blue-eyed Jeff was a leader in the room and considered to be somewhat of a 'sophisticate' in the eyes of his peers. His 'sophistication' was certainly revealed in the subject matter of his stories and his often humorous, tongue-in-cheek style. Not that Jeff couldn't be reflective and serious. In fact he often had deep insights into the processes of reading and writing. But somehow despite his best efforts to maintain a serious demeanor, humor bubbled just below the surface.

Humor was a frequent device in much of his writing along with certain themes. Teetering on the edge of adolescence, Jeff was keenly aware of the issues and conflicts involved in growing up, especially the appeal of the opposite sex. Writing became a vehicle for exploring: (1) his concerns and insights on life, (2) friendships and (3) girls. Even
under the restriction of non-fiction writing at the beginning of the year (discussed on at the beginning of this chapter) Jeff found a way to write about these three themes with a humorous bent and still stay within the realm of personal experience and the boundaries of 'acceptable' topics. Although the second version of the 'Girl Watching Society' pressed the outer limits because of its sexist overtones, still, testing boundaries is part of adolescent life and Jeff's writing certainly reflected his own journey towards maturity.

One of his early stories was based on a deep-sea fishing trip he and his friend and classmate, Chris, took the previous summer, and both boys wrote about the trip as straight personal narratives (e.g., who went, what they caught, etc.). Later, however, Jeff focused on what to him was one of the more interesting incidents on the trip - the presence of the captain's eleven-year old twin daughters. This single incident was the spark for further reflections on other encounters he and Chris had had with girls. These musings were the beginnings of 'The Girl Watching Society.'

Jeff and Chris's Girl Watching Society

Chris and I have ran into lots of girls. We tell each other our girl problems. We seem to have an understanding and give good advice.

Our first romance was a ship board romance but I should say deep sea fishing romance. Yes of course it had to be the captains twins. They were our age. They loved to go fishing, so did Chris and I. We had a lot in common (common). I said to Chris witch one do you
want? He said it didn't matter they were identical. We asked them if they wanted to join us for coco. They did not refuse. They caught more fish than us. The other romance was at the movies.

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We were seeing Oh God You Devil. We sat in the front seats, two girls sat in back of us. When the movie started they kept gigeling (giggling) in back of us. I took a look at them. I dropped my popcorn spilling half of it out. I whispered, Chris I'm in love.

Oh sure said Chris. Then he looked back. Then he looked at me. He looked happy. Then I knew the love bug struck again. He said lets take them on a date. I said we all ready are.

Jeff has certainly captured the age old phenomena of 'puppy love' - a phenomena many of his peers understood and could relate to their own experiences. Jeff's stories were almost always incredibly well received by his classmates. His ability to relate his feelings under the guise of humor helped him write about issues which would have been quite difficult to express as straight exposition. Humor made the revelation of inner feelings acceptable. Writing was a safe outlet for coping with the conflicting emotions of adolescence.

The second version of 'The Girl Watching Society' picks up where the first draft ended. The response of his peers along with his own impulse to test limits probably encouraged Jeff's expansion of the story. Jeff introduced this version of his story with, 'This is supposed to be humorous. It's kind of an advertisement.'

Mary Ann: I'm afraid to ask - an advertisement for what?
Jeff: Well, for girls.
Mary Ann: Is it appropriate?
Jeff: Yes, but it's funny. It's an advertisement for a girlfriend and it lists the things I'd like and things like that.
Mary Ann: Ok, let's hear it.

I said lets watch the movie Chris. But Chris looked like he could keep his eyes on more than the movie.
Now that you know that we are Ladies men. You can call us. This is our hot line 767-0000 or 776-0220 ask for Jeff or Chris. Date at your own risk.

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And if anybody had romances like us. I would like to her about it. We cant stay out any longer that 11:00.
We like lots of girls. Chris likes anything but red-heads. I like anything but fat red-heads or just plain fat.
This is what you could expect on a date at the movies with us. Weirdness, laughing hystericalay (hysterically) at jokes, throwing pop corn at bad parts, and we tell funny jokes. Are we perfect or what. We are true party animals.
We like to dance. Chris is very bashful. Don't be annoyed by this. Eventually he will start up but some of you may think we're loony tunes. Warning we fall in love easily.

In the supportive environment of this classroom, discussions on 'sensitive' topics frequently took place.
Mary Ann was always approachable to the children and sensitive to their concerns about life. She was also a firm believer in helping children cope with their own conflicting emotions, as well as helping them develop a sensitivity to the feelings and emotions of others. Above all Mary Ann believed that all people should be treated with respect. Jeff's story required a deft hand in order to acknowledge his right to his own feelings and his legitimate need to express them through 'acceptable'
channels, counter-balanced against protecting the feelings of the other children in the class.

Jeff's story touched on several issues which could affect the developing self-images of both boys and girls. As a leader in the class, his focus on the physical attributes of attractive girls could send several messages to his peers. For both boys and girls it could mean that physical beauty was more important than inner qualities. To the girls, who were already concerned about their physical development, his statements could be distressing especially to those children who were not slim.

During whole group share, most of the children responded enthusiastically to the parts where Jeff was poking fun at himself and Chris and their reactions. The part about advertising for dates received a mixed reaction of groans (how can you be so conceited) and laughter at 'we can't stay out any longer than 11:00.' Quite a few children fell silent when Jeff read about his preference for slim girls.

When he had finished, the comments and questions soon evolved into a discussion centered around feelings and attractions. Mary Ann's skill at asking the right questions at the right time in response to the points raised by the children, eventually helped the children focus on the area in the story which was bothering them - a writer should try
to see how other people's feelings might be hurt by the content of what is written.

Mary Ann: Well, advertising is certainly a legitimate form of writing. I was wondering what would be the advantage for the girls in this ad? What makes the girls come out on top?

Jeff: Well, we're neat guys and they'd enjoy going out with us.

Mary Ann: You're confident of that?

Jeff: Pretty confident.

William: Who'd answer the ad? Who'd bring a girl to you?

Jeff: We say the things we like to do, so someone who likes the same things. We also tell what we want her to look like.

Mary Ann: I'm curious. What prompted this story?

Jeff: Well I was writing and this sort of came out.

Mary Ann: And is looks the most important thing?

Jeff: Well sort of, but we also say things we like to do.

Mary Ann: What if someone didn't meet the criterion, the list of things you said you'd like? How would that person feel?

Jeff had meant the part about 'fat girls' to be funny. However, he failed to take into account how some of his classmates might feel about these sections. During the discussion Mary Ann tried to help Jeff realize that he had plenty of humorous parts in his story without having to include sections which tried to get laughs at someone else's expense.

The other critical issue raised in conjunction with Jeff's story was stereotyping people by physical characteristics, which, in turn, could be the roots of discrimination and prejudice. Although Jeff was unaware of these implications when he wrote the piece, in the discussion that followed,
both he and his classmates raised lots of examples of situations where this applied, (e.g., discrimination against blacks). Through Mary Ann's leadership, the children also began to look at sex discrimination which is often based on stereotypical ideas about women and men and the roles they assume in our society.

Discussions like this on a variety of topics were fairly common throughout the two years Mary Ann and I worked together. Writing (and later reading, e.g. The Great Gilly Hopkins, by Katherine Paterson; Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, by Mildred D. Taylor; etc.) were often the catalysts for helping the children develop a greater awareness of the issues and concerns they face in today's society. Mary Ann's sensitivity in following the children's lead, while at the same time focusing their attention on different aspects of an issue led to some lively debates. In this classroom social and academic development found common ground in reading and writing.

It is a tribute to Mary Ann's skill as a teacher that writer's like Jeff whose stories sparked such debate, never felt that there was something wrong with their stories. More often, they and their classmates came away with a new perspective on an issue they had not really considered before. With the recurrent themes of friendships,
relationships and growing up, there was plenty of subject matter to consider.

Jeff's use of the conventions of writing were fairly strong in this story. Overall he used standard forms in spelling. He had a good sense of sentence structure and paragraphing. Unlike Jennifer and Shannon, he had already begun to use dialogue in his stories. Although he correctly identified the speaker in each instance of conversation, he had not yet used the correct form of punctuation in these passages. This was one of the skills he later identified that he wanted to work on during editing.

The second example of Jeff's writing is a fiction piece he wrote later in the year. Although this is a mystery story, it still contains elements of style which he has used before - humor and the ability to capture the reactions of typical 'kids' his age. The basic plot of the story revolves around three boys, who while visiting Jeff's grandfather's farm, discover a secret passage under the barn.

The Secret Passage

I was in Kentucky visiting my grandfather's farm. I was with my best friend Chuck and of course my 8 year old brother Tim. Chuck and I both were 12. Chuck was kind of short, he had blond hair and blue eyes. He was a little chubby not fat just kind of rugged. I myself was a medium size tall about 5 feet. I have
dirty blond hair and brown eyes. Tim has brown hair; some freckles. He was the size of any old 8 year old. His two front teeth were missing and everytime he grinned he looked like Count Drackular (Dracula).

My Grand father's farm was old. My father was born on that farm. Chuck and Tim got up like at six o clock in the morning. The started hitting me with pillows. I got up and belted them both.

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Me and Chuck went down stairs and turned on MTV. Our favorite group was the Beastie Boys. On MTV it was Marti Gras weekend. Then the vj (video jockey) said here's the Beastie Boys with fight for your right (song title, 'Fight For Your Rights'). The video (video) started. My brother entered behind out back and was cheering. We did not pay attention to him. the video got to the part when the mother was talking to her two nerd sons. She said, 'Now Boys be good while mommy and daddy are gone and don't make a mess.' The parents left. Then one of the nerds said, 'Do you like parties. the other one said yees. The other one said, 'We can invite all of our friends and have soda (soft drinks) and pie. Once more the other one said yeeaa. The the other one said I hope no bad people come. The the Beastie Boys yelled.

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We watched it until they got into pie fight. Then my brother disapered into the kitchen. We turned the channel and hit the playboy channel. I guess my grandfather was cooler than I thought. Chuck said, 'Wow she has the biggest.' I covered his mouth and said, 'There is an eight year old in the house. In 15 minutes we got board. Once you've seen one nude woman you've seen them all.

I finally dragged him away. What are we going to do now Chuck yelled. I said, 'We'll explore. 'Great said Chuck and talk about girls. Definately I replyed. Chuck brought his radio. We both brought pocket flashlights and pocket playboys. We would need them for encouragement along the trail...

The story continues as the boys explore the barn and discover the secret passage under the barn which is being used as a smugglers' hideaway. After several narrow escapes, the boys succeed in helping the police capture the criminals.
Jeff's story sparked discussion concerning his description of the boys in the video as nerds. According to Jeff's explanation, this was the portrayal intended by the video and not his own idea. The conversation among the children revolved around the fact that nobody liked to be called a nerd and the video was using stereotypes of people.

Jeff's references to the playboy channel and magazine led to more talk about what was appropriate or inappropriate viewing for children in grade five. Despite natural curiosity at this age, most thought that if they did watch something like this, then they, like Jeff stated in his story, would probably get bored after fifteen minutes. The 'explicit' content of television shows in general was discussed and most of the children felt that their parents monitored what they watched. It was interesting to note that no matter what their opinions of their own viewing habits, all of them would try to keep their younger siblings away from such exposure (as Jeff did in his story when he covered Chuck's mouth because there was an 'eight year old in the house').

Jeff's growth as a writer is clearly indicated in the story. He did quite a good job in describing the characters in his story, himself (as the narrator), Chuck and Tim. It is interesting to note in light of the discussion surrounding 'Jeff and Chris's Girl Watching Society' that
he clarified his description of Chuck as 'a little chubby, not fat just kind of rugged.' Jeff's description of Tim is particularly interesting in his use of a simile, 'his two front teeth were missing and everytime he grinned [grinned] he looked like Count Drackular (Dracula).'

In addition to character description, Jeff has also begun to show some character development in his writing. The actions of the boys from pillow fighting to sneaking a look at 'forbidden' material was a fairly accurate portrayal with which most of the children could relate. Later in the story, Tim becomes more important as he interferes with the older boys in their explorations and causes trouble for them. Again the other children could relate Jeff's writing to their own trials and tribulations dealing with younger siblings who followed them around, especially when they were trying to do things with friends.

The plot of 'The Secret Passage' was quite well developed and realistically written. The boys were not super heroes but outwitted the smugglers and aided in the criminals being apprehended. Since Jeff was an avid reader of mystery stories it is little wonder that he had internalized many of the plot devices used in this genre.

In terms of skills or conventions, Jeff has begun to use his knowledge of punctuating dialogue even in a rough first
draft. He still uses the conventions of conversation inconsistently, but he standardized these later when he published this piece. Jeff's enthusiasm while writing this story led to several situations where his mind was working faster than his pencil, hence some conjunctions were left out on this first draft. When he read the story he automatically put them in and all missing words were placed in the edited version.

Overall Jeff had honed his 'skills' as a writer focusing on the fears and foibles of pre-teens involved in realistic and fictional situations. His recurrent themes and humorous passages were greeted enthusiastically by his peers or at least sparked lively discussions. As the year progressed Jeff established his reputation as a writer the other children liked. They looked forward to his stories and often related his writing to situations in their own lives.

Jeff was quite perceptive in examining his own writing abilities and understanding the influences of peer feedback.

(Changes in writing) As you get older you write more mature pieces. In the second grade I wrote stories about things like my dog but in the fifth and sixth grade you write about different things like mysteries and adventures. You write more pieces which are more exciting and you write fiction and non-fiction...My favorite piece would be the 'Secret Passage' because it was funny. There was a lot of action in it and everyone seemed to like it and enjoy it...it was pretty well written...I've published 'The Girl Watching Society',

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'The Secret Passage' and I'm in the process of publishing 'Writer's Block'...I decided to publish them because people seemed to like them...I can usually tell if they (peers) like them. It's sort of weird but you can tell by their expressions like the number of questions they ask, if they laugh and things like that...Some (peers) ask you for more information and they are more helpful in deciding what to do in the story. The comments are more helpful in knowing what the people like...They (peers) also help you to know what to add and what to leave out. If they like certain parts then you can add more like that...

Along with his growth as a 'respected' writer, Jeff was becoming aware of himself as a social leader - someone the other children felt was popular. With this awareness, Jeff also began to develop a sense of the responsibilities this position carried. His maturing outlook enabled Jeff to occasionally stand back and look at the impact his behavior had on other children. One incident in particular stands out in my mind - the day Darlene was trying to publish her book.

Darlene was a 'chubby' child who for various reasons (home and school) was not very popular with the other children. Her typical reaction to any situation where she felt threatened was 'a good offense is the best defense.' Consequently, she was frequently at the center of minor 'tiffs' within the room. Under the umbrella of respect for others, Mary Ann had frequent talks with the children about how they interacted with their peers. Either directly or indirectly Darlene was often the focal point of these discussions. Privately Mary Ann talked with Darlene about
her difficulties and tried to help her see that she could develop friendships with her classmates, if she modified her approach.

Over the year, Darlene made progress, both academically and socially, although her gains on any one day were tenuous. Like many children with difficulties, she used writing as a way of exploring feelings which were hard to talk about (e.g., 'My Grandfather's Death') and sometimes were better expressed as fiction (e.g., 'So Fat Samantha' and 'William's New Diet'). At the same time Darlene was opening up in small ways, Jeff was becoming more insightful in his thinking and responses to issues raised during writing and sharing. From racial prejudice to valuing people for their inner qualities, the topics discussed were as varied as the stories written and the books read.

On days when things were not going well for Darlene, she demanded a great deal of individual attention from either Mary Ann or myself. Usually she tried to initiate a conference about her writing or if that failed (because we already had several conferences lined up) create an incident to get someone to pay attention to her.

On the breakthrough day, Mary Ann was busy with a conference. I was seated at the round table used for small group shares or large conferences. Several children were
seated around me and I was simultaneously helping two to edit and two to publish. With a sailing needle in hand I was attempting to bind one of the children's books which obviously needed holes punched in the spine in order to be able to sew. Into the midst of this milieu came Darlene with her final draft of a story she had edited and which now needed a cover before it could be bound.

Those children not with Mary Ann or me, one of whom was Jeff, were working on their writing or conferring with one another. At that point in time neither of us could spare our undivided attention to Darlene, particularly when the children should already have been able to do book covers because we had done them before. At my suggestion that she would have to wait her turn of ask one of the other children to help her, Darlene showed the beginnings of a sulk. I was expecting a minor eruption when from behind me I heard Jeff's voice, 'That's ok, I'll put the binding on your book.' Jeff stopped his writing, left his desk and came over to Darlene. The hesitant smile on her face gradually became a grin as Jeff explained the book binding process and helped her make the book. At the risk of jabbing my finger with the sail needle, I took surreptitious glances around the room. Gradually the other children noticed Jeff and Darlene working together. Even Mary Ann paused in her work and we exchanged a wink. From that day the other children treated Darlene with more
respect. Not that she became popular overnight, but at least she had a better relationship with more of her peers. On that day Darlene was glowing with pride and you could see her self-esteem grow almost as if it was a tangible thing.

The personal and social benefits of helping children engage in the processes of reading and writing can be as pronounced as the academic growth (if harder to measure). The supportive atmosphere in the community of readers and writers, does not come into existence overnight but gradually develops over the course of the year. In an environment where children trust or at least respect one another as individuals, interactions such as that between Jeff and Darlene are possible.

... The writing samples of all three children indicate growth in genre, stylistic devices, conventions, theme, and self-evaluation, although Jennifer and Jeff more closely followed the main class trend of writing about personal relationships and issues experienced in growing up. The one area I've neglected to address directly in relation to these stories is length of the stories.
Length

Length is an arbitrary measure and useful only as a minor indication of change. A complex story may require more 'space' in which to develop plot, character and theme. Comparisons of the personal narratives with the fiction stories for each of the children would be Jennifer: 1 page for the first and 13 for the second, Shannon: 2 pages versus 6 pages, and Jeff: 3 pages versus 15 pages. These numbers are by far rather insignificant when compared with the previous discussion of the growth in other areas of the children's writing. By their own comments, Jennifer, Jeff and Shannon demonstrate that they are aware of ways in which their writing has grown and the influence of peer feedback on this growth.

Attention to length may also have two unfortunate side-effects. By drawing the children's attention to the length of a particular story, teachers may unwittingly perpetuate the old concern expressed by many students when confronted with writing, 'How long does this have to be?' This situation is particularly evident in working with students who are unfamiliar with the processes of writing yet well acquainted with more 'traditional writing assignments' where length is an important consideration (e.g., the 500 word assignment). When Mary Ann or I encountered this question, particularly with new students who had
transferred into the class, our response was, 'as long as it takes you to say what you want to say.' However, we also followed this rather brief comment with an explanation designed to help the students begin to engage in their processes of writing.

The second side-effect of focusing on length is that it may set up an unintended 'competition' among the students as to you can write the longer story at the expense of quality writing and individual differences. Longer is not necessarily better. Some students have a more concise style and can write a tighter story. Other students prefer to write using more description which may lead to a longer story. Like all the changes we noted in writing and reading, the most significant comparisons were those made about the writer's progress compared with him/herself. In building a supportive community of writers, the last thing we wanted to do was create a competitive environment at the expense of cooperation and support.

The focus on personal growth as a writer as well as the emphasis on creating a supportive community fostered another widespread phenomena - the respect the children developed for the reading and writing abilities of others, as well as themselves. All of the children could identify who they considered to be good readers and writers in the classroom and the reasons why they held these beliefs.
Opinions varied in terms of the respective abilities of certain writers, (e.g., Danny was good at writing fantasy, Andy was good at writing mysteries, Jeff was good at writing humorous stories, etc.). However, rather than being a competitive comparison, the students looked at their peers as sources of help. They quickly learned which people could benefit them the most with a particular story and in what capacity (e.g., as a conference partner, in revision, editing, etc.).

The confidence the children gained in their own writing abilities boosted their overall confidence. The students all became more adept at understanding their own strengths and identifying areas they wanted to work on. When they looked at their peers, comparisons were viewed as a healthy recognition of the strengths of another writer. Since every student had his/her own 'specialty' in writing, peers were sources of inspiration. If Andy wrote a mystery story, then Danny could write one too, especially since he could consult Andy for advice about plotting, just as Josh consulted Danny for advice on fantasy stories. Peers were not competitors but sources of support within a cooperative learning community.
Changes in Comments and Questions

The change in the comments and questions the children used during whole and small group shares, reflected their growing awareness of the processes of writing, as well as what they considered to be good writing. Many students in responding to a peer's story, initially use fairly stock formats, (e.g., I liked the part..., I liked when you said..., Where did you get the idea for your story, etc.).

Gradually there were noticeable changes in their responses which seem to reflect the students' growing interest in different aspects of writing. Comparing the students' responses to two of Andy's stories, one of which he shared in September and the other in April demonstrates some of these changes.

Andy reads part of his untitled mystery about three boys who are starting their own detective firm. In the beginning they meet a 'brown-haired muscular man who becomes part of a case the boys try to solve. Andy stops reading at the part where the boys hear a 'horrible high-pitched scream.'

Andy: Comments or questions?
Jennifer: Are you going to write more?
Andy: Of course.
Nat: I liked how you described the guy.
Mike: How old are you in the story?
Andy: 16
Jon: I like how you said, 'oh, I wouldn't stoop that low.'
Mary Ann: I liked how you described 'the horrible high-pitched scream.' That's nice alliteration.
Andy: This is the second book I've written about the detectives (the first, 'The Case of the Sinister Spirit,' was written in grade four). I
may have put the scream in too early but I was getting bored so I put it in there but I may change it.

Nat: He did the same thing last year. He cut us off reading at the exciting parts.

For a September share, this example is already quite sophisticated because there are a lot of interesting comments being made about specific elements in Andy's writing, especially his description. Andy also makes some insightful comments about his own writing when he discusses whether he has moved to quickly in putting the scream in at this point in the story. By stopping the story at the exciting part, Andy has made good use of the suspense in his story to entice his audience to want to hear more of the next installment of the story. Nat recognizes this as a strategy Andy has used before.

Later this trend, of stopping reading before an exciting or humorous part, would catch on with other children in the class. If asked what was going to happen next they would frequently reply, 'I can't tell you. I want to keep you in suspense.'

The second example taken from a whole group share in April is quite different. The students are more interested in the particulars in Andy's story. In the time between these two situations, the trend of 'realistic fiction' had developed. The students had come to expect fiction stories
with well developed plots and realistic characters who acted the way they did because of particular motives. They became quite adept at noticing and questioning inconsistencies in plot and a character's actions.

Andy's story, 'What a Life,' focuses on Kristy, a 13 year old, her experiences with her friends and younger siblings as well as her misadventures babysitting. So far in the story (segments of which have been shared in several sessions), Kristy, who is on the decorating committee for the school prom, is also having difficulties at school—both academically and personally. She is failing geometry and Fred, an unpopular student, has developed a crush on her and embarrassed her in front of her classmates. The night before the prom Kristy is grounded, forbidden to go to the prom and forced to babysit on prom night as a punishment for her failing grades. Kirsty plans to evade her babysitting duties and go to the prom so she can get revenge on her friends for laughing at her. At this point Andy stops reading the latest installment.

Andy: That's it. Jen?
Jen: Why does Kristy only see her dad once a month?
Andy: Because he travels on business.
Mary Ann: So the parents aren't divorced or anything?
Andy: No.
Jon: I'm not going to ask what's going to happen but can you tell us about some of her schemes.
Andy: She's going to put alcohol in the punch, that's one thing.
Jen: What kind of business does Kristy's dad do?
Andy: I don't know. I never really thought about it much.
Melissa: If she pulls all these tricks, is she going to get in more trouble?
Andy: Well, most of them are going to backfire on her.
Danielle: How is she going to get out of babysitting?
Andy: I can't tell you that because it's going to be a hilarious part.
Danny: Instead of putting alcohol in the punch, they could put mace.
Andy: Mace?
Danny: Yeah, the stuff that makes you cry.
Mary Ann: Mace is something you put in a spray can.
Andy: Yes, you use it as protection.
Mary Ann: For self-defense. Besides, where would she get it.
Danny: At an army-navy store.
Mary Ann: Do you have a plan for how she's going to get there, because she's supposed to be babysitting and how old is she?
Andy: She's thirteen.
Mary Ann: And she had a plan?
Andy: Yes.
Jon: She's in grade eight, right?
Andy: Yes.
Jon: So how's she going to get there?
Andy: She's going to get there, OK.
Mary Ann: But she can't drive.
Andy: But Brian is going to help her.
Mary Ann: But he's only eleven.
Andy: Yah, he's only eleven but she needs somebody to help her make the bombs.
Mary Ann: Bombs? OK, anyone else for Andy. He's got one of those smirks on his face [Andy had a particular smile we all learned to recognize when he had plans for a humorous or exciting part he knew the other children would probably enjoy]. Ok, then we've got another reader.

Outside the context of Mary Ann's room, this intensity of questioning might seem a bit like a 'grilling'. However, it took a long time to establish such a rapport and the children enjoyed fielding questions at the same time considering points their peers raised. Notice Jon, had the good sense not to ask what was going to happen next because he knew Andy and his preference for keeping the audience in...
suspense. However he did find a way to get at least some
details out of Andy regarding his future plans. In Chapter
Six, which deals with the reading/writing relationships,
more attention will be given to comments and questions, as
well as the recognition of influences on writing.

The changes in writing in the area of genre, stylistic
devices, conventions, theme, length, self-evaluation, and
comments and questions, set the stage for some of the
changes we observed in reading, particularly with genre and
theme.
CHAPTER 5

CHANGES IN READING:

The changes in reading the first year amazed Mary Ann and me. Overall the children were more excited about reading and eager to discuss and share what they were reading with others. This was quite a turn around for some students like Jim, who had been a reluctant reader, and Darlene, who had had difficulty with reading. Even very competent readers like Jeff and Amity engaged in reading with renewed enthusiasm and became more reflective about what they read. These feelings permeated the room and created a supportive learning environment where everyone could participate in the 'reader's club.'

As the students became more engaged in their reading, we noticed changes in specific areas: (1) attitude, (2) reading outside reading time, (3) number of books read simultaneously (multiple books), (4) recommendations, (5) volume of books read and (6) reading different genres of books. Several of these areas overlap because changes in attitude, as well as the opportunity to engage in the processes of reading, influenced changes in each of the six areas.
Changes in Attitude

In general changes in attitude could be seen in the level of enthusiasm throughout the room during reading time. When reading began around 10 a.m., the students got out their books and read. There were very few distractions or children not focusing on their books. The degree of concentration could be seen just by looking around the room.

More specific indications of attitude came from the children themselves. In both spontaneous conversations and interviews, they recognized how their interest in reading had changed from the first of the year when they used the basal to second term when they were engaged in reading process.

In April and May of 1987 I interviewed all the students in the class about their reading and writing. One of the questions I asked them was (See Appendix A for the entire interview) if they had seen any changes in their reading this year. Here are their responses.

Amity: I don't see any real changes because I've been reading books since I was seven. The first book I read was Ramona and Her Mother.

Amy M and Lisa:
Lisa: Yes (sees changes in reading), it's like writing but not quite because you don't get ideas.
Amy M: You sort of get ideas like what to read.
Lisa: You get more ideas in writing over the year but in reading you get faster and it's easier. It's easier if you read several books by one author because then you know the way the author normally writes and that makes it easier to read.

Amy T: Before I had to ask Ms. Wessells about words I couldn't pronounce and now I can do it myself. I can read books faster and I'm reading more because you don't have to go with the group (groups of children do not read the same book)... I like to pick the books I read myself. I've learned more vocabulary words from the examples in the reading (getting the meaning of words from the context in reading).

Becky: I'm reading bigger and longer books.

Chris: I've been reading a lot more. Last year I read four or five books all year. Now so far this year (counts from his list of books he has read which he keeps in his folder) I've read 15 books so far. I can usually read 110 pages in 3 days. Lately I've been mostly taking my time because I can understand better. I get into easy books, like the one I just finished was only 81 pages so I read it in less than two days, that's about 45 minutes for 81 pages. I like to switch between hard and easy books because the hard gets easier from reading easy books. Now I read about 3 pages in five minutes.

Chuck: I'm more involved in what I'm reading because I'm older and I understand more. When you start reading hard books you do better in other subjects because you learn social studies words you can use in social studies or science words you can use in science. The words you learn in group share you can use these words in different subjects (referring to words the students select from their reading which they didn't understand).

Darlene: Not really, except I just read more books and I read them in a shorter time.

James: Without the workbook (from the basal reader series) I've been reading a lot more.

Jason: I read different books and I read longer books.
Jeff: I'm reading more mature things. I wouldn't read something like Garfield or Snoopy. I got James Harriott for Christmas from my parents. They thought I might not be able to read it, but I did. You can tell it's an adventure book by the way he phrased it. I found it very interesting because it told about medical things. There were a lot of miracles in it where animals should have died but didn't. Sometimes they did die which was sad.

Jennifer F: Probably I'm reading new books and learning new words. I'm reading more - a lot more.

Jennifer K: I'm not reading mysteries anymore. I'm reading different types of books.

Jessica: I'm reading more advanced books.

Kevin: I've been reading. I never used to be able to read Follow That Bus and now I can.

Jill: I read harder books. I read more things and I know more words.

Lindsey: I'm getting into bigger books. I'm understanding more and my vocabulary is getting bigger. I've got a better vocabulary now. Before I didn't know how to say a new word or figure out what it meant and now I do. I never knew about Betsy Byars' books before and now I do because Chris and Becky recommended I read them and I did.

Shannon: I see a lot of changes. My parents think so too. My mom really likes reading process. She thinks it's a good idea. It's a better thing. It's helpful because I read more books I could read and understand. I'm reading more and I'm reading different books and I'm reading better.

Tami: I used to not be able to finish a long book and now I can finish them. I read a lot more books.

William: I recommend reading harder books because you learn new words and you can make predictions and talk about things like the setting. It's better this way because you don't learn words the other way and this way you do and you can remember them.
While the students' responses reflect their observations about changes they saw as individuals, most of the students commented on reading more and reading harder books. The latter response is interesting because it points out an area many teachers are concerned about when giving children choice in what they read. 'What happens if they only choose easy books?' From the children's responses you can see that is clearly not the case. However, understanding why this happened in Mary Ann's classroom means looking at the classroom learning environment and the individual's role in the room.

In 'process' reading there are certain expectations: (1) everyone will find something they want to read (although some children take longer than others to find a true interest area) and (2) everyone will put forth a 'good faith' effort in reading and participating in discussions and shares. This is the beginning of a positive learning environment. Since Mary Ann is one of the most positive and dedicated professional teachers I have met and since she already had a very positive learning environment in her room prior to process reading, how was this new environment different from the previous one?

When Mary Ann let her students choose what they wanted to read, she simultaneously liberated and at the same time
required them to take more responsibility for their own learning. Jeff, who was a very competent reader, would not read Garfield or Snoopy or something like that because he wanted to read other books like James Herriot's Dog Stories which are of more interest to him. Choice allowed him the freedom to choose more advanced material he probably would not have had the opportunity to read as part of the 'reading curriculum' until much later in his school career. (This is a book written for an adult level reader.) This does not mean that Jeff had an easy time reading the book. It was difficult for him, but his interest provided the motivation to continue. Sometimes he set the book aside for awhile and read something which was easier for him, but he always returned to 'Dog Stories' and eventually finished it before moving on to other challenging material.

Changes in Reading from Single to Multiple Books

Switching between 'easy' and 'difficult' books was a phenomenon first articulated by Chris. He and other students in the class frequently began a 'difficult' book and then alternated reading it with an 'easy' book. As Chris remarked:

I like to switch between hard and easy books because the hard ones get easier from reading easy books.
If you think about that observation, Chris has hit upon a core concept in becoming a competent reader - fluency in reading. The time and effort required to read 'difficult' material requires more concentration and often slows the reader down. It is hard work. In workshops I frequently use a sample on quantum physics to help teachers remember what it is like to struggle with reading. 'Easy' books help the reader with fluency. The struggle is removed. The student can skim, read more quickly, and just immerse him/herself in the story as it unfolds rather than being bogged down in the text itself. This is much like what we as adults do when we choose 'escape' reading. Chris's interest and monitoring of his own speed in reading (a concept Mary Ann and I had never discussed with the children) is further indication that he has a strategy for improving his reading ability and a method for evaluating his progress.

The important point to note is that the children had the freedom to choose and beginning with that choice, the added responsibility for making decisions about their own learning. Throughout the classroom children of all different 'levels of reading ability' made these decisions. A book would catch the interest of a child and he/she would try reading it. If the child found the book was not of interest to her/him, then he/she was free to make another selection. There was no expectation that you had to finish reading a book which you didn't like. With so many options
available why should we have insisted they finish when the
idea was to allow the child to assume more responsibility.
This did not encourage 'poor' reading habits because the
students did finish most of the books they selected
especially as their skill in making choices increased. The
only thing Mary Ann or I asked was 'what didn't you like
about the book?' The students were very honest about their
answers.

Chris: I didn't like the Summer of the Swans, because
it was definitely boring. I read up to 30 or 40
pages and then I stopped. There was good
description in the story like the setting was
just like the area around my house so I could
picture it. I was about a summer vacation
and what the kids did but it was really
boring because there wasn't much of a plot.

Andrea: I picked Taking Sides because Hilary was
going to read it too. It's also by the same
author of Robbie and the Leap Year Blues.
I stopped reading it because I became
interested in another book.

Josh: I stopped the Slave Dancer because it was too
difficult. It was a combination of things like
the vocabulary was too hard and the way it was
written. (This book, about the slave trade would
be about a grade seven level book.)

Mike: I've stopped reading Joe DiMaggio. I picked it
because I wanted a change from fiction and I like
baseball but I stopped it because it's too hard.
It's more of a grown up book.

Making decisions involves taking risks for which there
should not be penalties like 'you have to finish a book
even if you don't like it.' Furthermore the imposition of
this penalty would probably have encouraged students to
stick with 'sure things' and not experiment with new genres or difficult books.

This pattern of making choices was repeated throughout the classroom with readers of all different 'levels of reading ability'. Perhaps the students who had difficulty with reading benefitted the most from this atmosphere which encouraged risk-taking without penalty. A book would catch the interest of a child and he/she would try reading it. Sometimes they were successful. Sometimes the child discovered the book was not of interest to him/her and he/she moved on to another selection. Sometimes the book was too difficult. At this point some children chose to persevere and alternated reading it with an 'easier' book. Sometimes a child chose to set the book aside for awhile and go back to it later. The latter case was another example of how some students evaluated their own progress.

Kevin commented that:

I've been reading. I never used to be able to read, Follow That Bus and now I can.

Brian: I'm reading Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing. I picked it because I'd read it before and it was wicked (very) funny. Before I didn't understand some parts, but when I re-read I see new things and I learn about parts I didn't remember.

An even deeper level of risk taking without penalty involved the suspension of judgment about other people's abilities in comparison with one's own abilities. As the
students' awareness of their own growth in reading increased they placed less emphasis on comparing themselves with their peers and paid more attention to the contributions each person was able to make to the class as a whole. The range of reading materials in the room, from very easy to quite difficult, were supplemented with library books and books from home. This variety in some ways legitimized reading books at your 'level' even if popular beliefs would consider them 'easy books for a grade five student.' The confidence of 'less competent' readers was further boosted when they could look around the room and see a 'strong' reader like Andy reading a book they had read when he was taking a break from his more challenging reading.

Andy: I've read *How to Eat Fried Worms*. It's one of those books everyone reads. I picked it as an easy book because I'd just finished *Alcatraz Island* and I wanted a break.

Shannon C.: I've read *Dirty Beasts* because other people recommended it so I put my name on the list (which the children created to keep track of who to loan a popular book to when they were finished reading). It was good because it was funny. It's a nice break because of the rhymes it's easy to read. I'd recommend it if you like poems and if you like humor and it's good for a break.

This situation is very different from reading programs where children are grouped by perceived reading 'ability.' The social stigmas associated with reading ability within such classes are demoralizing for 'less able' readers who
feel they will never catch up with the top group. In Mary Ann's room the emphasis was on individual growth. There were no reading groups based on ability. Students came together to share what they had learned. The students' interest in reading and enthusiasm in discussing books and authors supplanted petty concerns about who was a better reader. Each student had something to contribute to the discussion based on what they had read and not on whether or not it was an 'easy book.' Jeff could talk about the characters in *Dog Stories* and Darlene could talk about the characters in *Amelia Bedelia*. Characters are characters whether the book is *War and Peace* or *Cinderella*. The description, character development and motivation may be richer in the former but by reading the latter the 'less able' reader can still participate and contribute to the discussion.

**Changes in Reading at Home**

The explosion of interest in reading carried outside the classroom. Children came back to school on Monday mornings reporting they'd finished reading a book they started on Friday. Lindsay found that:

I didn't used to read much at home but now I get into a book in school and I continue reading it at home.
Some children began to frequent the bookstores when they went shopping at the malls on the weekend. Nat and Andy tried to acquire the most recent publications in the **Babysitter's Club** series. While Andrea explained how she had come to read her current book, because:

*Andrea:* I'm reading *Chain Letter* with Laura and we each read a part and then share with each other. We have two copies and now Andy wants us to let him read it. It's a murder mystery about a girl who gets a chain letter that threatens she'll be killed if she doesn't do what they say. We were at the mall at the bookstore and this one looked awesome, so we both got it and we agree to read certain parts like page 49 - 74 and then we talk talk about it and read another part.

*Ben:* I'm reading the *Rescuers* and I just got it. I was at Shaw's and they have books and it looked good so I got it. It's about these mice and they're trying to rescue someone from the Black Castle.

Mary Ann and I were not the only ones who noted the change. During parent teacher interviews Amity's mother remarked to Mary Ann that Amity used to use almost all her spending money to buy clothes and now she wanted to buy books. Becky's mother even wrote Mary Ann the following note.

**March 9, 1989**

Dear Mary Ann,

Just a note to let you know about the conversation I over-heard Becky and a friend had regarding the new Reading Process.

Becky was asking Joan (who is not in your class) if her teacher was still using the old reading book and workbook. Joan said yes, aren't you? Becky informed Joan that she hates the old reading way but our teacher lets us choose books and authors that we are interested in. Becky then began to rummage through her library.
shelves for certain books she had already read and even certain authors.

I was thrilled by this approximately 1 1/2 hour conversation because in Becky's nursery and kindergarten days, when it was time for the teacher to have reading time, she either fell asleep, told the teacher she was supposed to call her mother at this time or felt ill.

Also, when the old reading book and workbook came home at night for homework, she would tell me how much she hated school and I knew it wasn't school but the reading assignment. I recommend the 'new way' and finally I have a little reader in the house!

Sally

Changes in How Children Recommend Books to Others

Like Shannon, who commented during her interview about her parents' positive views of reading, many of the students were aware of the adults' interest in what they were learning. However, this awareness paled in comparison with their interest in the learning community within the classroom. Recommendations to other students about books and authors appeared spontaneously and soon became a commonplace occurrence during conferences, whole class shares, and small groups. The children were keenly interested in what another student thought about a book the other student was reading.

Jen: Lisa was reading Tiger Eyes about a girl, and her father dies. She shared it in book share and that gives you ideas about books you might like to read. Now I'm reading it.

Lindsay: I never knew about Betsy Byars' books before but now I'm reading them because Becky and Chris recommended them.
Becky B.: I've read *This Place Has No Atmosphere* and it was an awesome book. It was neat because it was in the future and most books aren't like that. I picked it because Laura recommended it to me.

As the school year progressed, the children began to make more informed recommendations based on the qualities of the book or the interests of the person to whom they were making the recommendation. Jessica brought, *The Black Stallion*, to class for Amy because she knew Amy liked horse books. William recommended reading 'harder books because you learn new words and you can make predictions and talk about things like the setting.'

Andy: *Someone's Hiding on Alcatraz Island* is a pretty good book because it kept you in suspense. I would recommend it because of the suspense and originality to it - who would have thought of Alcatraz Island as the plot of a fiction book.

Laura: I'm reading *Heroes of the Challenger* ... it has different chapters on each challenger pilot and now I'm on the chapter about how it happened - why it blew up. I'd recommend it kind of because most people don't like to read fact, they like fiction more but this is a good book.

Jen: I'd recommend *Just as Long as We're Together* I guess, but it's hard to tell because they're (the characters in the book) friends but they fight and then they're not friends but then they get back together. I'd probably recommend it because it's about friends and the kids could probably relate to it... I've been trying to get it since September and I finally got it.

Through recommendations and in-class discussions certain authors became popular with the children. Judy Blume, Betsy Byars, and Beverly Cleary were the most popular with both
the boys and girls during the first two years of this approach to the processes of reading. The appeal of these authors was due largely to the content of their books. Generally all three dealt with problems and situations experienced by pre- and early adolescents. The children felt they could relate to the characters and situations in the books. During shares they frequently commented on how situations or feelings experienced by the characters, reminded them of something which had happened to them in their own lives.

Shannon C.: I wanted to read Cracker Jackson because I read the flap and it sounded good. Also lots of kids recommended it even in the other class. I was on the bus and I heard them talking and I asked them about it. I loved it. I liked the topic of Cracker's old babysitter and her husband started beating on her and then Cracker helped her. I like Betsy Byars books because they are funny (some of them) and I like how she chooses her topics. I'd recommend it because it's funny how he talks to himself and for the topic.

Jon: I just finished Bridge to Terabithia and I loved it. It only took me a week to read and that's a short time. I liked how the kid likes to draw, because I like to draw. They have their own secret hiding place and that was neat. It could be a true story but I'm not sure if it's today or not in the book because they talk about milking the cow by hand and I'm not sure they still do that today. I like it even though the end was sad. I had my own picture of the stream (where one of the characters drowned) because I thought of the stream near my place until I saw a picture in the book of Maybelle sitting on the log and then I knew it must be bigger if she could fall and hit her head.

Becky: I've read Class Clown and I like it because it's funny and it could happen. You could have
someone who would be the class clown. It's a good book - one of the best. It's awesome funny and tells a lot about him being a clown. He never gets anything right and it describes the things he does.

As time went on the children became more involved in discussing these books in terms of 'realistic fiction' - fiction they felt realistically described the experiences of growing up. Reading 'realistic fiction' became a trend which most of the students followed. The appeal of these books was also strengthened by the fact that humor was an important element in many of the books.

Hillary: I'm reading Taking Sides. It's a good book like Judy Blume's but it is by Norma Kline. They both write the same kind of books - realistic fiction. I've wanted to read it for awhile ever since I read other books by her.

Molly: I'm reading Judy Blume's Story and it's biography. It's all about her growing up and how she became an author. I picked it because it looked interesting and I like Judy Blume. In the blurb it said if you like her books, you'll like this. I'd recommend it only if you like Judy Blume's books.

Danielle: I've finished Deenie (by Judy Blume) and it was awesome. It's about Deenie and her mother wants her to be a model but she didn't do it because she gets scoliosis and has to wear a brace for four years and her mother didn't understand how she felt. I'm not sure what category it is because it's kind of romantic and it's realistic fiction. I'd recommend it a lot.

Although his works could not be described as realistic fiction, Roald Dahl also became a trend because of his humor. Dahl's, The Witches, The BFG, James and the Giant
Peachy and Dirty Beasts (a humorous books of poems) were read by almost all of the students at some point in time. His popularity also provided some students with the opportunity to read their first autobiographical book, Dahl's Boy, in which he takes a humorous look at his experiences growing up.

Josh: I've re-read the Witches. I really like it and I've also heard it read before. I like it because everytime I read it it gets more interesting. I like the way he writes and how he describes the witches trying to kill the kids. I recommend it because if you like Roald Dahl, and most in here do, then you'd like it because it's neat how he writes...

Kris: I read Dirty Beasts and it was awesome, funny and cool. I could read it in half an hour and it's the kind of book I like to read. I want to read more funny books. (Kris joined the class in the spring and initially had some difficulty finding a book he liked. James and the Giant Peach, also by Dahl was the first book he read which he really enjoyed.) James and the Giant Peach is the best book in the whole world.

Jon: I'm reading The BFG and so far it's a good book. Shannon asked if I'd read it and she said it was good and Mike said it was really good.

At various times throughout the class other authors became minor trends among the students, but the four previously mentioned achieved the greatest popularity over the two years. The minor trends in reading also included particular books or series which were enjoyed by several of the students. Ann M. Martin's The Babysitter's Club was a favorite series as was Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House books. Alfred Hitchcock's The Three Investigators.
C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, Lloyd Alexander's *Taran Series*, Madeline L'Engle's *Time Traveller Trilogy* and Ann M. Martin's *Babysitter's Club* series, and companion books, *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* and *More Scary Stories* by Alvin Schwartz were read by everyone in the class.

This latter book is interesting in the role it played in bridging the gap between resource room reading and classroom reading. Andrea went to resource room along with several other children in the class. During a session there, the resource room teacher read the children excerpts from *More Scary Stories*. Andrea asked if she could take it back to class and share it with the other children. Andrea's share sparked so much interest that she soon had a line of children all asking if they could read it next. It did not matter that Andrea stumbled a few times while she read and occasionally turned to her friend Hilary for help. The other children were fascinated by the book. It also didn't matter that the book had come from the resource room around which there can be prejudice among children towards those who 'have to go to resource.' The children liked the book and that was what was important to them.

A additional benefit of Andrea's share was the creation of the book request list. In the past usually only one, two or three children at a time had requested to read a book next.
when the current reader was finished. With a small number of requests, the reader and those requesting the book could easily keep it straight who would read after whom. Andrea was slightly 'swamped.' Rather than stepping in and organizing things, Mary Ann and I suggested the children come up with a system for deciding who could have a book when a particular child was finished and who they then passed the book to when they were finished, and so on. A half hour later the listing system was arranged and posted on the board. After this, if a student received several requests for a book then they made a sign up sheet for interested readers.

As someone identified as needing resource room help, you can imagine the boost Andrea received from the interest her peers had in the book she shared. One of the great strengths of Mary Ann's approach to reading rests in the opportunities she made available for children of all reading 'levels' and interests to participate on an equal footing with their peers because they are all working as individuals to build a supportive community of readers.

Changes in the Genres the Children Read

A community of readers made up of twenty individuals all voraciously reading means that a lot of different kinds of books get read. Some children like fantasy. Some like
'realistic fiction.' Some like 'historical' fiction. The variety of genres (kinds) of books read covers quite a range. In describing the different genres, Mary Ann and I used some categories which are not strictly different 'genres' but reflect common characteristics of books within a particular genre (e.g., animal stories). Our reasons for not following the strict definition of what constitutes a genre was that we were attempting to identify even more specifically what particular types of books appealed to particular students. This liberal interpretation also enabled us to look at reading interests, based on the similarity in type of book, for the class as a whole. Some of the types of books read by the students over the two years are listed in Figure (8) below.

Figure (8) Genre of Books in the Children's Reading Fiction:

Realistic - with the dominant theme of personal relationships
- e.g. - Judy Blume, Betsy Byars, and Beverly Cleary

Historical - e.g. - Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House series,
My Brother Sam is Dead by the Collier Brothers

Mystery - e.g. - Alfred Hitchcock's, Three Investigators series

Adventure - books which were realistic portrayals of characters in adventurous situations not usually encountered in everyday life
- e.g. - My Side of the Mountain

Fantasy - e.g., Lloyd Alexander's Taran series.

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Science Fiction - e.g., Madeline L'Engle's, *Time Travel* series

Animal Stories - books in which the main character was an animal that maintained animal characteristics or was personified
- e.g., Walter Farley's, *The Black Stallion* series
- James Howe's *Runnicula* stories

Biography - e.g., *Judy Blume's Story*

Autobiography - e.g., Roald Dahl's *Boy*

Poetry - e.g. Shel Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and Roald Dahl's, *Dirty Beasts*

Short Stories - e.g., *More Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* by Alvin M. Schwartz

Fables/Myths - e.g., *The Greek Myths*

Sports Books - books dealing with statistics or sports figures

Factual or Content Area - books which presented factual material in a variety of content areas
- e.g. *Castles* and *Mills* by David McCaulay

Keeping track of which books the children read as well as what type of book enabled us to see when particular children were following trends in their own reading. Many teachers are familiar with students who lock into a particular genre and continue to read those books and only those books. This situation can be particularly distressing for teachers who feel that the merits of a given type of book are questionable (e.g., *Choose Your Own Adventure* or
**Sweet Valley Twins**. Despite our misgivings, it is important to remember that a choice means the freedom to choose to read a *Choose Your Own Adventure* story. As in writing where the child has to have something they want to write before you can help them fully experience writing, in reading the child has to have something they want to read before they can fully participate in reading. Sometimes books of 'lesser' merit in our eyes became the keys by which a child enters the world of reading.

Freedom of choice, however, does not mean 'anything goes' nor does it absolve the teacher of his/her professional responsibilities in facilitating learning by helping children engage in reading. If a student became immersed in a series or particular genre then we would gently nudge the child to try a different type of book as a break. With so many books being read and discussed there were plenty of sources for suggestions from which to choose. For some children a gentle nudge opened up new horizons, when they found that other types of books could interest them in addition to the ones they usually read. For other children like Andy and Nat they would alternate their favorite authors and genres with books they had heard about during the shares. Knowing when to nudge and when not to nudge is a judgement call based on the individual child. Most obsessions with particular books tend to run their course and the child moves on to something else, particularly when
they hear about so many different books from their peers. Often times the child makes this transition by himself before the teacher needs to nudge him/her. One of the important things to remember is that when we nudged a child to try something else, it was only for the next book they were going to read. We did not suggest 'a' particular book but suggested the child try something different for a change. The child could choose the new author or genre and was free to resume reading their preferred genre or author after the new book.

The other important consideration in nudging is discussing with the child what they are learning in their reading before deciding to suggest another genre. Andy was reading a lot of mystery stories because he was writing a mystery himself. While reading these books he was analyzing the components of a mystery story and getting ideas for the plot of his own book. Nat and Andy both enjoyed reading the Babysitter's Club series because they found that the characters grew and developed over the course of the series as they got older. Other children like Amy T. liked to read horse books because she was a horsewoman herself and could relate to the stories and characters. To nudge or not to nudge is a delicate issue because it weighs the benefits of exposing the children to new learning situations against the possible unintentional side-effect of discouraging their interest in reading because they feel pressured to
abandon an area they really like. When in doubt Mary Ann and I erred to the side of caution and continued to monitor a particular child's reading patterns. When we later nudged that child we found they willingly tried a new area if they had not already done so in the meantime.

Changes in the Amount of Reading the Children Did

In addition to helping us monitor trends, recording the books each child read had a side benefit in enabling us to look at how much the children were reading. We did not place any emphasis on this information when talking with the children because we did not want to encourage a competition as to who read the most books. Together we had all worked to create a supportive reading community and valuing volume over learning would have undone what we had worked to achieve.

The information in Figure (9) page 204 which lists the number of books each child read over a three month period is presented with several cautionary remarks. This information is merely an indication of how much the children read during those three month periods. Comparing these numbers against the former basal reading program is difficult because there was little opportunity for the children to read books other than the basal reader. In school reading of books took place during the daily twenty
minute silent reading time for which there are no records. Records of at home reading are non-existent.

However, the children unanimously reported that they were reading much more now than they had previously. Mary Ann made similar observations based on her previous seventeen years of teaching experience. A number of the parents commented on how much the children were reading at home when previously they had not read very much. Another source of information was the librarian, Betty Batchelder, who reported that the circulation in the library doubled the second year of the study when most of the classes in the school were trying some form of reading and writing outside the basal program.

Another caution in presenting this information is that it is not meant as a comparison of one child against another. Such comparisons are not valid. Shannon and Tami had difficulties with reading and each of them read eight books during that three month period. For both of them this was great progress. Jeff read ten books and was one of the most competent readers in the class, however many of the books he read were adult level books. A high or a low number does not carry much weight without understanding the individual students and how the grew through the books they read no matter what the actual volume.
Figure (9) Number of Books Read

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>February - June 1987</th>
<th>September/87 - January/88</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amity</td>
<td>Shannon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy M</td>
<td>Nat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy T</td>
<td>Danielle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>Hillary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Jon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>Molly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>Jen</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Ben</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Danny</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen F</td>
<td>Mike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen K</td>
<td>Andie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess</td>
<td>Andy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>John</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Josh</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindsay</td>
<td>Becky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>Brian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tami</td>
<td>Laura</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The changes in reading, in the areas of attitude, genre, multiple books, reading outside reading time, recommendations and volume, accompanied many of the changes in writing discussed in Chapter Four (genre, stylistic devices, comments/questions and length of story). Often changes in one area paralleled changes in the other area. The intersection of learning in both areas often took place as a result of the child or children recognizing a reading/writing relationship. The connections the children made between reading and writing were some of the most powerful findings of the study.
The changes in writing (genre, theme, stylistic devices, length of stories and recognition of reading influencing writing) and the changes in reading (genre, attitude, outside reading, multiple books, volume, and recommendations), described in chapters four and five formed the basis for looking at the ways in which the children related reading and writing. Like most of the concepts discussed thus far in this study, the relationships the children 'established' between reading and writing reflected the differences between what individual children read and wrote, although certain connections were common among the majority of children (e.g., genre, stylistic devices, theme, and recognition of reading influencing writing).

Genre, stylistic devices, theme and recognition of reading influencing writing are the key points in the discussion of reading/writing relationships in this chapter, although there is a great deal of overlap between the categories. For example, the realistic fiction stories the children wrote usually contained a theme about personal
relationships (family and peers) or age related concerns about growing up and self-image. As with Chapter Four, stylistic devices will be discussed in conjunction with the other categories.

**Genre**

**Poetry**

In September 1987, Andie (Andrea's preferred name), Danielle, Becky and Melissa began writing poetry. Andie was the first to share her poetry on September 17 during whole group share when she read her poem called 'One, Two' which she said she wrote with Becky, because Becky was writing poetry and Andie thought it was neat.

One, two
She belongs in a zoo
three, four,
Shout (shut) the door,
Five, Six,
She smells like vicks,
seven, eights
empty my plate
nine, ten
that's the end
Andie

Although not very sophisticated, this was Andie's first attempt at writing poetry which had been inspired by a pattern she had discovered in reading poetry. It is interesting to note that the girls made no distinction
between children's rhymes, which this 'poem' is based on, and more traditional forms of poetry.

During the comments and questions which followed her reading her poem, Mary Ann discovered the source for her ideas.

Mary Ann: Does reading poetry help (in writing poetry)?
Andrea: Yes, I'm reading Where the Sidewalk Ends (by Shel Silverstein).

Later I had a conference with Becky, Melissa and Andie about their poetry. Becky who had initiated this trend said:

I got the ideas from Ms. Wessells poetry book which had a lot of patterns of poetry in it like 'one, two, ___ three, four ___' and from reading Where the Sidewalk Ends.

Becky's first poem, like Andie's, also relies on a pattern she discovered in reading poetry, as well as some of the punctuation in the original.

Poetry
One, two
She lives in a zoo;
Three, Four,
Paint the door;
Five, Six,
Pick up pixie sticks
Seven, Eight,
Don't lay them straight;
nine, ten,
That's the end by Becky

Andie's second poem again uses a pattern and very closely

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When I spoke with the girls about their interest in poetry, both Andie and Becky urged me to listen to Melissa’s poem, ‘Achoo’ which they thought was really neat. Melissa had begun the poem last year in response to one she had heard read and had decided to continue working on it.

Achoo! Achoo!
It must be you!
Personally (personally) you sneeze like a cat!
Achoo! Achoo!
You do! You do!
Take a tissue when you sneeze
for your sneeze is most unpleasant.
Make (makes) you sound like a pheasant
You give quite a breeze
when you sneeze, so turn your
head please! When you sneeze you wiggle
your knees. And say 'Tissue please!'
It's been a minute. I think it's
time! It's time! It's time! You better close
your eyes, for it isn't a pleasant sight!
Ah, Ah, Ah, Ah,
you didn't sneeze or wiggle your
knees the sight was pretty pleasant. You
don't need a tissue or anything.
Choo!

Melissa felt that everyone enjoys poems and the three girls said they would like to write a poetry book which would contain poems the three of them had written. This led to a short discussion of poetry anthologies as a model for their
anthology. All three decided they would like to look for more poetry books to get more ideas for patterns of poems.

Later Andrea returned to show me a book of poems published by the Jr. High Students from the area. She also discovered that there was a book of poetry written by the grade six students but it was out on loan, so she planned to get it next.

Jon, Ben, and Nat entered the discussion because they like nonsense poems. Jon was also writing poetry, but he found he got most of his ideas from listening to Nat and Andy who had a habit of responding to one another in rhymes.

In the midst of the search for poetry patterns, it is interesting to note that Danielle used a form she knew to express emotions which could be conveyed more succinctly in poetry.

friends
friends
to play
to count on
friend a special person
someone to trust
talk with
special

Poetry was one genre which was predominately inspired by the books the children were reading.
Fantasy/Science Fiction:

John was an avid fantasy and science fiction reader. He had read most of J. R. Tolkien's, Lloyd Alexander's and C.S. Lewis's books, as well as H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine*. An excerpt from his reading calendar for the month of January indicates how dominant this genre was in his reading. Although interspersed with reading in other genres (e.g., *Where the Red Fern Grows*), the January calendar is representative of his reading patterns over the year.

**Week one:** Monday, *The Grey King*, pages 53-87
Tuesday, *Grey King* continued, pages 87-103
Wednesday, *Grey King* continued, pages 103-122
Thursday, *Grey King* continued, pages 122-130
Friday, *Grey King* continued, 130-156
Sat/Sun finished *Grey King*

**Week Two:** Monday, *Marrow of the World*, pages 1-10
Tuesday, *Marrow* continued, pages 10-35
Wednesday, *Marrow* continued, pages 35-56
Thursday, absent
Friday, *Marrow* continued, pages 56-147
Sat/Sun *War of the Worlds* begun

**Week Three:** Monday, *Marrow* finished, pages 147-165
Tuesday, *War of Worlds*, pages 1-158 to date
Wednesday, *War of Worlds* continued, pages 158-248
Thursday, *Time Machine*, pages 251-293 (in same book as *War of the Worlds* hence begins on page 251)
Friday, *Time Machine* cont. pages 293-302

**Week Four:** Monday, *Time Machine* finished, pages 302-379
selected *Where the Red Fern Grows* as new book
Tuesday, snow day
Wednesday, *Red Fern*, pages 1-29
Thursday, *Red Fern* continued pages, 29-56
Friday, no school

**Week Five:** Monday, *Red Fern* continued, pages 56-111
Tuesday, *Red Fern*, finished pages 111-205
Wednesday, *Adventures in Granada*, pages 1-27
John's comments on his three favorite authors indicate that he not only enjoyed their books, but has begun to reflect on their relative merits:

I'm reading the Two Towers, which is the second in the Fellowship of the Ring. All three (Tolkein, Lewis, and Alexander) are very good authors... I would recommend them because they are exciting and if you like fantasy then those are the one to read. I really like all three. All three are good authors, but Tolkein is better because he thinks of a lot more ideas which he put in his books and he makes you feel like you're really there more (involved in the story).

In writing, his two major pieces during 1987/88 were 'The Temples of Kruge' and 'The Land of Zymn' which he published. Both of these stories were fantasies which clearly reflect the influences of the fantasies he was reading (see excerpts below), particularly in tone, style, and theme. 'Zymn,' in addition, relies on a carefully drawn map of the land of Zymn as a plot outline for the story. Maps of an invented land are common features of many fantasy and science fiction books.

The Temples of Kruge
Chapter 1
Thunder

It was a mild day in early March. The snow was melting and flowing into streams. Children were yelling and shouting and throwing rocks into the silver colored Crane River running through Kruege. Kruege was a beautiful town. With little stores in the main squares. Warm cozy houses and cottages in the suburbs. They also had a temple. Not the kind of temple you see nowadays. It was a long brown colored building. Inside it is a long hall and two rooms. One room is a meeting place. The other rooms is very big. It has chairs you can sit
in and a bible.

The old fort was now rebuilt and twice the size. It had three towers and under the mountain they had their meeting place. There were only a few mgorks left in all of Zym.

Dantar, Kebbo, and Besson were still alive but old. Slyne died of sickness shortly after the war. Clar and Gimbel were the sons of Besson. There were strongly built and in their twenty's...

The same characters are featured in 'Land of Zym,' and 'Krue.' Both stories contain classic components of a fantasy story with secret codes, quests, battles, archaic weapons and numerous incidents of danger encountered by the heroes on their quest. Even 'minor' details like the characters' names (which tend to be tongue-twisters) are inspired by the unusual names in fantasy books.

When asked about the changes in his reading and writing this year, John was very cognizant of his growth in both areas and the connections he found between the two.

I learned that a lot of authors write good because last year I didn't read many books. When we could read what we wanted, I only read Narnia. A lot of things opened up this year like I read Tolkein and Alexander...In writing I mostly learned because of the reading. Last year I wrote one page stories and now that I read I write 30 page stories, so I've really improved. Last year I only wrote true stories and this year I write fantasy...Reading very much helps my writing. Tolkein gives me ideas, names, battles and things like that. From him I got the idea of the map (for 'Land of Zymn') and I used it as a guide (to write 'Land of Zymn').
Mystery/Adventure

With the class as a whole, mysteries were one of the more popular genres. At some point during the year almost all the children read at least one mystery, although not all attempted to write a mystery.

Becky was reading Mystery on Skeleton Island when she stopped because she 'thought it would be neat to write my own mystery story and see if anyone else liked it.' On February second she began her story, 'Mystery on Cobra Island.'

'Mystery on Cobra Island'

'How are you lads doing at scuba diving,' Asked Alfred Johnson. 'I want to meet you three tomorrow at 3:15 sharp. Now be there.' He said walking off. Pete, Jon, and Clark were pondering what Mr. Johnson was talking about.

It was almost noon when the three boy's were getting out of their scuba gear on the dock. 'I wonder what Mr. Johnson wants us for,' Asked Pete.

Then three gorgeous girls walked by in their skimpy bikinis. The boy's stared as they walked towards the three girls. The boy's kept on following them.

Then one of the girls turned around and the boy's quickly stopped and pretending to look out at the ocean.

It was three o'clock, 15 minutes more until the boy's have to go to Mr. Johnson's office. 'It's 3:10. Come on. We have to get to Mr. Johnson's place before 3:15. Hurry!' Pete said. Then Clark asked, 'Who had money for the bus fair.' 'I do,' said Jon. Everyone sighed in relief and ran to one of the bus stops.

Just our luck, when we were on the bus it stalled in the middle of now where. (point of view Jon) (Becky's
Becky's story shows clear influences from Alfred Hitchcock's, *The Three Investigators* series. Not only has she used three boys as her main characters, but she has also captured some of the interests of teenage boys (looking at the girls in bathing suits).

It is interesting to note that Becky's story contains a comment to herself (point of view Jon) to help guide her writing. Adopting different points of view and maintaining consistency is a difficult task for emerging fiction writers. Already in the first part of her story she has switched from third person to first person. Mary Ann covered point of view as one of the response group topics and the children seemed to become more aware of the concept particularly in their writing.

Becky was also aware of her own growth in reading and writing:

In reading I learned I can read bigger books because I'm more interested in reading. At my old school there wasn't much time to read. You could only read when you were done with your work. Last year I transferred here...I writing, I now know how to write better.
stories. At the old school the teacher never taught us how to do stuff. Ms. Wessells does. She takes the time out to help us. If I don't know a word, she helps us sound it out. They didn't do that at the old school...Reading helps your writing because I get more influence from reading on writing because reading influences writing, like Shel Silverstein. I'm starting to write poems like that because he got me into it (she was reading Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends*). Writing helps your reading because what you write is sometimes what you want to read, because if you write adventure stories then you want to read adventure. If I write biographies about me then I want to read biographies about other people.

Becky had just recently finished reading *Alex the Life of a Child* about a child with a terminal illness, as well as *Judy Blume's Story* which is an autobiography. Around the same time she was writing, 'Big Mouth' about herself as a child who wouldn't keep quiet. For this story she had also interviewed her parents to get more information for her story about incidents she had forgotten or was too young to remember. For Becky, reading and writing were becoming inter-related processes.

*Alex the Life of a Child*, had a profound influence on Jen, the first person in the class to read the book. When asked about what she had learned in reading and writing, she said:

Mostly I learned about Alex's life in *Alex the Life of a Child*. I learned what happens to you if you have cystic fibrosis. I learned I can read hard books... I think I'm at a sixth grade level (in reading). In writing I learned that I can write, well that I can write stories about me or someone else and about adventures...Reading helps your writing sort of sometimes. It depends on the type of book because...
Mitch and Amy helped me with the story I'm writing now ('Tommy and the Terrible Twos'). I got the idea for the twins in my story from it.

Jen's reading was fairly diverse from traditional stories like *Black Beauty* to books dealing with contemporary issues like *Still Missing* which described the real life incidents behind a child's abduction. She liked adventure stories and books with a supernatural or mysterious twist like *Behind the Attic Wall*. Several of these reading interests seem to be influences on her story 'Dead or Alive' about a girl, Emily, who is nearly killed in a car accident only to recover and be plagued by the ghost of a long dead classmate, Pamela, who believes Emily's family and another person are responsible for the deaths of Pamela and her father. The story describes Emily's stay in the hospital and an incident when the heart monitor seems to indicate that Emily has died.

An even closer parallel between Jen's reading and writing can be found in her story, 'The Girl in the Window' about a child who disappears on her way home from school and the subsequent search for her.
Factual Writing

Ben was the first student to show a keen interest in factual writing. In the fall he wanted to write a history of Stratham, so he began reading books on New Hampshire and the town. His first attempt at writing his history, was basically an outline of the facts he had gleaned from his reading.

New Hampshire

New Hampshire is known as the granit state because that is what most of the rock is.
The state bird is the purple finch and the flower is the purple lilac and the tree is the white birch.
The pop. of New Hampshire is 920,610.

Stratham

In the history of Stratham there were a lot of old schools then and the roads were dirt (dirt) instead (instead) of tar and instead of cars there were horses and buggy (buggy).
In Stratham there was a brick yard and the owner was Tommy ____ and he made most of the chimneys and fireplaces and most of the brick was plastic.
The first family here was the Wiggins.
Most of the town was built before (before) the church and library.
Stratham was established in 1716 by Governor Samuel Shute of Mass.
One of the oldest mills was in Stratham at the time of the revolution of 1777...

Ben's draft continues with more facts. While Ben was pursuing his factual writing, Mrs. Batchelder, the librarian recommended he read, Mill by David MacAulay. He enjoyed this book about the history and construction of the mills in the New England area. Later he was to read Castle and Cathedral, two other books by the same author which followed a similar format to discuss medieval castles and
cathedrals. Although Ben read all three, Mill remained his favorite.

Ben felt that writing helped his reading because, 'when I write something, I read a book I think might help me.' In some areas, Ben, although aware of some of the influences of reading on writing, felt that what he wrote was not as strongly related to his reading in comparison with his peers:

In reading I learned that you can read different things. Sometimes reading can help with writing but it hasn't helped me but it has helped other people because they take ideas from books, but don't copy them and use them in their own stories. In reading I learned that kids take death different from others (reference to the theme of death and recovery which is found in some of the books the children were reading, particularly Bridge to Terabithia and On My Honor). I learned about friendship and that animals can be used as live people in a story (personification). I learned that when somebody dies people don't believe they're dead, like Jess in Bridge to Terabithia.

In writing you can write whatever you want. You can make up your own topics and write the way you want, cursive or print. I like to publish books because I like to know I can write stories and put them in book form and I can even enter the Young Author's Contest and at least participate. This year I want to enter 'The Day I Got Killed.'

Reading doesn't really help me with my writing and I wish it did. Some people read mysteries and that helps them write mysteries but I don't read comedies or mysteries, I read realistic fiction, but I just read Briar Rabbit and I think I might write a story with animals as the main characters. Sometimes reading helps with vocabulary but I mostly use words I know. Sometimes it helps with dialogue but I find the things in my life more helpful.
Although Ben's comments indicate that he sees few connections between his reading and writing, he did experience a lot of growth in both areas. His story with the animal characters indicates that he may have internalized more from his reading than he was aware.

This story is about a family of rats that live in the garage of the Barker family. The rat names are George, Kathy, Ben, Brian and Josh and they go on an adventure in the garage and car.

'Hey Kathy' said George as he came through the door.
'What dear'
'I got laed off today.'
'Oh George you didn't'
'Yes id did honey' George said.
'Hi dady' said Josh as he approached his father with open arms.
then they heard a yell from Ben shut up you invader get out you littel runt Ben exclaimed as he hit his littel brother Brian in the stomach.

Despite Ben's interest in factual writing, he seems to have experienced more success in writing fiction. Part of his difficulty in writing the factual pieces may have been due to the books he was reading. Although well written, these were difficult models for a young writer to duplicate. Ben also seemed to focus on reading as a source of information for writing, although his fiction story indicates that he has picked up on stylistic devices he may not be really aware of in his reading.

The relationships some children established between reading and writing varied according to their particular purposes.
and interests. Ben's early factual writing followed the more 'traditional' model of report style writing. Laura's 'My Life as a Sailor' reveals an interesting variation on 'factual writing' as well as a connection between reading factual material and adapting it to a different writing genre.

In the spring of the year, Mary Ann had assigned the children reports for science and social studies. She had explained the 'traditional' report form but she also allowed them to use another genre if they wanted. Some of the children requested time during reading/writing to work on their reports. Mary Ann allowed them to do so provided they still spent the majority of their time on their own reading and writing. This precaution was to ensure that the reports for the other subjects did not take over the language arts time to the exclusion of the choice reading and writing.

Laura's social studies report was on Samuel de Champlain and she had been doing a lot of reading in this area. Books of historical fiction were common in the classroom (e.g., Johnny Tremaine, The Slave Dancer, Winter Hero, etc.), so the children were familiar with the genre, even if they had not all read an example of this type of book. Although Laura, according to her reading calendar, had not read any historical fiction, she decided to use this genre to write
her social studies report. In the story, she wrote about Champlain's voyage through the eyes of a cabin boy on the ship. Factually the story was very accurate. The fictional elements enabled Laura to use the writing skills she had developed through writing straight fiction stories (e.g., her description of the main character below).

He was wearing a hat with a red feather on the side, a black cape with white checkers, a pair of black pants that only went down to his knees, white knee socks, and a pair of black shoes with little buckles in the front.

Laura was so pleased with this story that she later refined it and published it as a book. Historical fiction allowed Laura the flexibility to write a report which still capitalized on her skills as a writer. 'On the Banks of Mill Creek Pond,' another of her stories, shows similar attention to character description and detail which marked 'My Life as a Sailor.'

Billy Jean was out by the shore gathering shells for her collection (collection).

She was short for her age, blue-eyed and had long blond hair which she always wore in braids. She wore a blue dress, that went down to her ankles, it had little white flowers on it, puffy short sleeves, and a little white apron. She was wearing white pantin (patten) leather shoes without buckles.

This story Laura describes as, 'a friendship story about two little kids about seven at Mill Creek Pond and the little girl finds a boy and he's crying.' Friendship and inter-personal relationships, often with humorous twists
were common themes in many of her stories which often fell into the category of realistic fiction.

**Realistic Fiction**

Laura:

Reading helps your writing because if you understand the way good books are written it gives you ideas, like if you don't know how to write realistic fiction it shows you. Sometimes *Sweet Dreams* books give me ideas like for my story 'Robin and Bret' I got ideas for the plot.

In reading when you read things like fiction you learn things and you don't even realize it. I read faster and I understand books more. I enjoy reading more and it's easier to picture what's happening when I read.

In writing I learned how to publish, revise and be a better writer. I have better plots and ideas for my stories. You can start writing a story and you don't say it's going to be realistic fiction, it just ends up being what it is.

Laura's realistic fiction story 'Steamed Turnips and Rice' which was also an example of humorous writing, illustrates the individual nature of reading/writing connections. The original source for the story was Molly who was reading *Who Wants a Turnip for President* when she was struck by the idea of a story about a family where the father was on a restricted diet consisting mainly of turnips and the family supported his endeavors by eating the same things he did. Molly tired of the story and Laura liked it and thought it had possibilities to be realistic and humorous at the same
time. So Molly gave the story to Laura who took it and made it her own.

What's for dinner mom?' Cindy Barker asked her mother.
Fish.'
Yuck. What else?'
Steamed turnips.'
Yuck. What else?'
Wild rice.'
Yuck. What else?'
Milk.'
Yuck. Is that all?'
Yes dear.'
Mr. Barker is on a strict (strict) diet and he thinks his family should share it. Mrs. Barker, Mr. Barker, Cindy Barker and Christian, all live in a small apartment, in the country. Mr. Barker works in the city and his wife doesn't work. Cindy is four and Christian is nine.

Honey, I'm home!' Mr. Barker called to his wife.
Page two
I'm in the kitchen, dear!' she called back to him.
He walked in the kitchen.
Hi, what's for dinner?' Mr. Barker asked his wife.
Fish, steamed turnips, wild rice and milk,' Mrs. Barker told her husband.
Honey, fish is out of the questions.'
But, I thought meat wasn't part of your diet either.'
It's not.'
Then what am I going to serve for dinner every night? Steamed turnips and rice?' Mrs. Barker asked.
'You got it.'

The story continues as the family attempts to adapt to the rigors of Mr. Barker's diet. Through the dialogue, Laura creates a very realistic feeling for the family and their interactions with one another. This story was so well received that she wrote a sequel called 'Pepperoni Pizza' which was a variation on the theme of this first story.
The characteristics of realistic fiction the children seemed to key in on were, contemporary situations involving realistic characters and their inter-actions with one another. Laura's reading certainly influenced her style and expertise with realistic fiction.

**THEME:**

Realistic fiction involving themes of relationships and age related concerns was most dominant with the students during the first year of the study, when Judy Blume, Betsy Byars and Beverly Cleary were the most popular authors with both boys and girls. By the end of the year almost all the children had read at least one if not a number of the books by these authors. The following examples of three of the children's writing indicate they incorporated themes centered around friendships and family interactions into their stories. Even the titles of the stories suggest the content of their pieces.

The Boy Who Didn't Like His Name by Chris

'Hello is Lisa there?'
'Who is calling?'
'Rutie.'
'Ok, Just a minute I'll get her.'
My real name is Rutabaga Frederick Cranlihimer, but they call be Rutie for short.
'Hi, rutie' Lisa said in a mad voice.
'Who are you mad at?'
'You of course.'
'Me?'
'Yes, you! You have been lying all this time.'
'About what?' Rutie said.
'You changed your whole name and said you last name was Sherman and I actually believed you. So what is your name?'
'I can't tell you.'
'Why not?'
'Because you'll hate me.'
'Oh, is this what this is about? You think because you have a weird name that I'll hate you. I'll hate you even more if you lie to me.'
Page two
'Ok this is my real name Rutabaga Fredrick Cranthimer. See I told you it was a stupid name and I want to change it.'
'Ok, it is a little bazaar (bizarre), Lisa said.
'But there is no need to change your name.'
'Well I want to and nobody is going to talk me out of it.'
'Rutabaga Dear its supper.'
'I'll be right there. Lisa after school meet me at the park.'
'Ok.'
'bye Lisa.' Click.
'Mom what are we having for supper?'
'We're (we're) having steak, potatoes, and rubarb and for desert (dessert) were having rootpie.'
'Mom knows I hate all this.' I muttered to myself.
'At the Dinner table I was just building forts with the potatoes, steak for armor and the rubarb as weapons.'
'Rutabaga honey pie aren't you going to eat your supper?'
'Mom you know I hate this supper.'
'Well then starve.'
Page three
'I'd rather eat frogs legs then eat this supper.' I muttered to myself.
Hear (here) I am a boy at age 16 who is going to bed at 9:00 and I can't take my dad's GTS (car).
Honey dear your father and I have decided that you can take the old corvette anywhere you want wo youdan considre (consider) it as yours.'
'All right mom, thanks you guys are great.'
'But now you have to go to bed.'
'Ok mom.'
Beep, beep, beep. 'Oh, shut up you dumb alarm clock I'm trying to sleep.'
I opened my eyes a tad and my alarm clock said 5:40 so I jumped out of bed threw on my clothes and tied up my reeboks. I grabbed (grabbed) my knap sack, went downstairs grabbed some orange juice and a piece of toast. I ran out the door jumped into the corvette, started it, backed out of the driveway. I proceeded to drive over to 57th street, house five, I ran up to the
door and knocked. Lisa came to the door.

'Lisa are you ready to go to school.'
'Sure I am but the bus doesn't come for another hour.'

Page four
'I have the corvette my parents let me use it.'
'Ok, just let me get my coat and sunglasses. Ok, let's go.
'My parents are easing up for some reason.' 'Ok here we are what do you have first?'
'SS (social studies)
'Oh, I have math.'
'We'll meet here at 2:00 and we'll get pizza and a soda.'
'Ok' said Lisa.
'See you at 2:00.' Rutie said.
'I was just watching the clock all day long finally it was 2:00.
ing, ding everyone was cramming into the hall pushing, shoving and nagging.
I finally got out to the parking lot. I went over to the car and Lisa was waiting there we got in and went over to Joe's Bar and Grill. We went inside.'
'1 large pizza, 2 large cokes and 2 apple pies to go. oh, yah make that pizza Supreme Deluxe.'

Page five
'That will be 15.95.'
'Ok, there you go,' said Rutie.
'That will be about 10 to 15 minutes for the Pizza,' said the clerk who worked at Joes.
'Yum that smells good.'
'thanks said the clerk.
'We opened the door of the car and got in I put the keys in the ignition (ignition) turned it and the car started right up.'
'We went to the park we ate right in front of the water.'
Lisa asked me
'If I still wanted to change my name.'
I said 'Not really.'
'I learned that its not what your name is its your self that counts.'
We finished eating and got in the car and I asked Lisa on a date.
she said 'yes'
'I'll pick you up around 7:00 and we'll eat and then go to a movie.' 'Ok' said Lisa.
'See you then I'll call you tomorrow.'

Chris's story revolves around the friendship between Rutie and Lisa. By going out with Rutie and accepting him for
himself Lisa helps Rutie overcome his embarrassment over his name. He finally realizes that inner qualities are more important than external features.

Throughout his story, Chris employs stylistic devices which are common in realistic fiction. The frequent use of dialogue, although not consistently punctuated, still demonstrates his understanding of its use to advance the plot. The attention to details, like playing with the food on the dinner plate, lacing up his Reeboks, a Supreme Deluxe pizza, all serve to give the story a contemporary feel and involve the reader in the action.

From the opening of her story, Amity demonstrates a similar ability to engage the reader by placing him/her in the middle of the action. This beginning is a common technique used by authors of contemporary realistic fiction.

My So Called Friend Karen

I walked to school that day without karen walking with me. We had gotten into a huge fight and now we do not play with each other at recess. 'Oh, great,' I exclaimed as karen came up to me. 'So marie did you go crying to mommy about the fight!' 'Shut up,' I said.

Page two 'Well sorry,' she snapped. 'Look karen, I really don't need your big mouth today,' I said. 'I can see that,' she laughed and walked to the schoolground. 'I really think it is the end for me and karen,' I said to Lilly.

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As the story unfolds, Karen gets Marie in trouble during school by causing her to miss answering the teacher's questions. At the end of the day there is a physical confrontation and Marie ends up with a bloody nose.

...The teacher noticed right away. She came over and said, 'What in heavens name is going on.'

Page 10

'Veil, ah, ah,' I stuttered. 'Karen punched me.'

'Go see the nurse.'

'I can handle it myself,' I said.

'Go see the nurse anyways. Lilly you may go with her if you like.'

We walked to the bathroom and I saw someone come in the door. It was Karen.

She asked, 'Can we try again.'

'Try what again?' I asked.

Page 11

'Being friends.'

'I'll have to think about it.'

'Ok,' she said.

'Well maybe we can try being friends again.'

They both said, 'sorry' just at the same time.

Marie thought, I guess friends do stick together after all.

The END

Like Chris, Amity has used many of the stylistic devices the children have encountered in their reading. She has tried to vary her expressions as well as conveying some of the characters' feelings through her use of words, like 'stuttered' and 'snapped.' The dialogue is very contemporary and captures some of the interchanges you commonly hear when friends fight in a real life situation at this age. Although the reconciliation between Marie and Karen seems to be unmotivated, it is still an attempt at presenting a conflict and trying to resolve it. Friendship as a theme in writing paralleled the children's reading
which in turn was an area most children could relate to their own experiences. At this age level, friends broke up and made up quite frequently in real life, so consequently books about friends in similar situations were appealing to the children.

Family relationships, especially sibling interactions, were also popular with the children. Amy M.'s story deals with the this theme from the point of view of a younger sibling dealing with an older sister. Many of the children, like Chuck in his thirty page story, 'Pet City,' wrote about younger siblings (Bucket, the younger child in his story was inspired by Fudge in the book, Superfudge, which Chuck was reading). Amy M felt that this story about an older sister offered a slightly different perspective on the theme.

Life With an Older Sister

Between my mother's driving and my dad's swearing, I knew this was going to be a long trip home. As I reached to get my sister's True Blue Madonna tape out of her box, I felt her vicious Lee Press on Nails go into my hand. 'Ouch!' I yelled. 'Finally!' Liz my sister said, 'I got to use my nails for something else than beauty.' I grabbed for my squirt gun but it wasn't there. All of a sudden I felt the wetness of my gun all over my legs and my face. Right then I knew It wasn't my day. 'What's going on girls?' my Dad asked Liz and me. 'Amy is squirting me with her gun and she took my press on nails and dug them into my hand,' lied Liz. I couldn't say a word. Finally I said, 'I did not!'
'Look me straight in my eyes and say you didn't do anything,' Liz said knowing I can't keep a straight face.

So I looked in Liz's eyes and said, 'I didn't do anything.' I kept a straight face until Liz started making faces at me and then I started cracking up.

'See!' Liz said, 'See! She's laughing!'

'Amy,' Dad said, 'you are grounded from your bike for two weeks.'

Amy continues to suffer from the behavior of her older sister until finally her mother confesses that she realizes that Liz is causing the trouble and Amy feels vindicated as the story ends with the implication that mom will tell dad that Liz is not as angelic as she seems.

Classifying the books all three children were reading from February to April (when realistic fiction was a dominant trend) according to theme/genre illustrates the parallel between reading and writing realistic fiction with themes of peer and/or family relationships (Figure (10) Categories of Books Read by Genre/Theme).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book categories</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pf</td>
<td>peer and/or family relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>general interest</td>
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<td>ma</td>
<td>mystery/adventure</td>
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Amity
pf - Starting with Melodie

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The three areas of genre, stylistic devices and theme are intertwined throughout the children's writing and reflect the connections they have made between reading and writing. As I stated earlier, sometimes these connections are as individualistic as the children themselves. For Andie, one line from a book she was reading provided the spark for a story which began with that line.
Untitled by Andie

The best day of school is the last day of school. At noon Janet Walden and William Buckner, ran out of the school yard together, shouting good bye to their friends. They ran until they had to stop for a red light. Then they grabbed a signpost and swung around and around until the light turned green. They swung off and ran across the street...

Andie's story certainly illustrates something she feels she has learned in her reading:

In reading I learned how I could write things in the middle instead of stating at breakfast, I could start at school. I read better because I pronounce things better. I used to be slow and now I read faster.

In writing I learned how to expand thing and use different terms for dialogue, like 'exclaimed' or 'chimed in.'

...reading helps my writing because as I told you about reading I get a lot of different topics I can use in writing, like boy and girl friendships. It gives me dialogue and stuff...I read before I write to get ideas and new words.

Recognition of Reading/Writing Relationships

No matter what they were writing or reading, the children recognized their growth in both areas as well as ways in which they related reading and writing.

Brian: In reading I learned about airplanes. I learned about Dan Marino's and Joe Montana's lives. I improved. Last year, I could hardly read. I only read a page a day but I've improved so I understand stories more. Last year I used to get confused.

In writing I learned that I developed because I developed more vocabulary, better plots and my...
cursive writing is getting better. As a writer I'm not that good yet. Just listen to some of the stories Danny and Andy put together. They are good with humor and I don't have that yet but I have gotten better. I'd kind of like to work on humor and I'd like to ask Danny if he would conference with me to help me with humor.

Reading helps your writing because you get ideas from reading. It helps me develop plot and vocabulary. I could take a plot idea that happens like the characters like Fudge and you could have a little brother like that and what happens between the two.

Melissa: In reading I learned about different types of books I like to read. I like realistic fiction. I learned that it helps me in my writing because it gives me ideas. Before I just wrote stories but now I take a small part of what I read and change it and make it into my own story. The 'Fuses' which I wrote is like the Babysitter's Club books because I wanted it to be about different members of the Fuse family and the Babysitter's, each book is about different members of the club.

In writing I learned that I can take real ideas and make them into fiction, like the story about Andrea and me babysitting which was part real and part fiction. I learned more about dialogue and reading helps me with dialogue.

Reading helps your writing because of the description, dialogue and point of view. Like, Claudia and the Phantom Phone Calls (one in the series of Babysitter's Club books) was from Claudia's point of view and I used ideas like that in 'Spinach Pizza.'

Writing helps your reading a little bit because reading helps your writing and now when I write I know what kind of book I want to read. Yours Till Niagara Falls. Abby gave me ideas for the 'Fuses' and it helped me choose that book because I was looking for a book about realistic fiction.

Molly: In reading I learned that it doesn't matter how much you read but how good you read (what you
understand) and how you like it. I'm getting better at reading and I'm learning new words.

In writing this year I had a lot more time to write and I learned a lot about publishing books, categorizing (different genres), and I got better ideas for writing. I have more time to write.

Reading helps your writing because you get good ideas from reading you can put into your writing. Like I read *Who Wants a Turnip for President* and that gave me the idea for 'Steamed Turnips and Rice.' I started that one but Laura picked it up.

Hilary: In reading I learned new things like I can read more challenging books. I can read more than one book at a time and I wasn't allowed to do that last year. I learned that Judy Blume writes different stories from the other books of hers I read and I like her. This year is the first time I read mysteries. I used to hate them but I gave it a try because people encouraged me and I read Carol Beech York and I really liked her mystery and her book encouraged me to read more mysteries.

In writing I learned that I can write other kinds of books. I used to write realistic books. Now I'm a better writer and I conference and then I know what other people like. It's easier to get the plot and put it together. This year it was harder to do dialogue because there were more people talking in my stories.

Reading helps your writing because in reading real things you mostly get ideas on plot, people and the story. I read realistic books and I write realistic books. I got ideas from books I read so I thought I would write one of my own. My stories are a little different from the books I read. It's an overall feeling. The things that happen in my stories are a little different. In some books there is a twist at the end and I like to put that in my writing.
A CLOSER LOOK

The majority of this study is based on ways in which many of the children related reading and writing. Overall patterns of relationships emerged in the areas of genre, stylistic devices, theme and recognition of reading influencing writing. Throughout the discussion, representative samples of the children's writing and comments have been used to illustrate relationships.

Within these general patterns, there were individual responses to reading/writing. Sometimes children followed the general patterns of relationships and at other times the connections they made reflected their own individual perspectives. A closer look at two children, Danny and Andy, provides an opportunity to see the relationships they 'established' between reading and writing over time (from September 87 to April 88).

Since the learning environment is a critical component in reading/writing growth, it is difficult to fully understand individuals outside of the context in which these relationships occurred. To try to compensate for this situation, I've given a brief synopsis of discussion topics
in the class for each month, as well as comments about interesting responses of other students to their reading/writing.

September

The first month of school there is a restriction on non-fiction writing. Mary Ann also takes time to introduce the students to the new schedule and begin the response groups. Topics for discussion include memory triggers and prediction.

Danny

In the first month with the restriction on non-fiction writing, Danny began his first story, 'Out on Limbs' which was a personal narrative about his adventures climbing trees with his friends. On September third he shared his first installment of the story during whole group share.

Out on Limbs!
Chapter 1
One day Jeff C. and I were outside down at his house with nothing to do Jeff was a big guy in the 6th grade. I said, 'Hey Jeff, you want to climb a tree?' 'Sure,' he said. 'Let's find a hard one to climb!' 'How about that huge one out where we burried (buried) that big bee's nest? I said. So we went to check out the tree with the bee's nest under it. He said it looked hard enough. So we tried to climb it, but it was just too hard so we went to get a ladder. We got a ladder and put it up against the tree and climbed. It took about
half an hour to climb the tree because the ladder was a 3 foot ladder that was barely long enough to reach the second branch, but, after that half an hour the second branch was all we needed: we climbed the tree with only 1 difficulty: crossing a limb! With only a skinny branch to stand on and only the tree to hold on to we made it. It was difficult but we did it, we had crossed a limb to another tree.

Page two
Luckily for me I only succeeded in spraining my ankle in the other tree of ours. I'll tell you how it happened. I jumped too hard and fell into a small notch in the tree and twisted my ankle. Then next I climbed it and we made a regular tree fort.

When Danny shared his story, the children commented that they liked his title and Mary Ann asked if he understood the idiom 'out on a limb,' Danny replied that the title indicated the physical risk and also the fact that they were literally on limbs.

Sept. 3/87
Whole Group Share Reading
Danny shares his reading in The Book of Three by Lloyd Alexander which is one in a series by the author. He classifies it as fantasy adventure.

Sept. 8/87
Whole Group Share
Danny has finished The Book of Three and reads a section in chapter 24 which describes the banquet scene and the characters. He describes it as fantasy because 'they are going after an oracular pig.' This led to a discussion
about oracles. Danny has already started the second book in the series, *The Black Cauldron*.

Sept. 10/87
Whole Group Share
Danny reads a section from *Cauldron* which describes the main characters setting out on their quest. He's thinking about stopping the book because it's getting boring.

Sept. 17/87
Whole Group Share
Danny has continued to read *Cauldron* and is now at a more exciting part where Aidon gives Taran a necklace which enables him to have precognitive dreams.

Sept. 22/87
Whole Group Share
Danny has begun a new story, 'The Monster Returns,' (in addition to 'Limbs') which is a sequel to a story he began in grade three.

**The Monster Returns**

It was a dark night and I was reading a Stephen King novel when I heard a scream from over at Paul's house. I threw on a flanel shirt and grabbed a lead pipe and then I thought that Paul could be playing a trick on me...
Andy

Sept. 10/87
Response Group
Andy is reading the Mystery of the Whispering Mummy which is part of the Three Investigators series. He likes the series but his brother and he don't like the same books within the series. Andy feels part of the differences in the books, is the fact that they were written by different authors.

Sept. 17/87
Response Group
Andy comments further on differences between his and his brother's preferences in mystery reading. He also relates an incident in Mystery of the Invisible Dog to his own experience getting accidentally locked in a closet.

Sept. 24/87
Whole Group Share
Andy reads part of his untitled mystery about three boys who start a detective firm. Already he is using some stylistic devices like alliteration with, 'a horrible high-pitched scream.' The story bears a striking resemblance to The Three Investigators.
Chapter 1
An Exciting Letter

'Wow' screamed Andy as he examined the letter. 'What is it?'
'Tell us!' badgered Matt and Nick. 'I won a contest! I get a vacation to the Caribbean and I get to bring someone with me!' The three boys lounged in an old shed that they had rebuilt and decided to start a detective firm. They had already solved two mysteries they liked to call (The Mystery of the Sinister Spirit) and (The Mystery of the Bottomless Swamp). And because they solved a case they had the publicity to become actual detectives. The take cases the cops don't believe and a professional detective would cost too much. Their base if behind an electronics store. When the owner throws electrical components away they fizzle them up and use them as detective equipment.

'Who are you going to take? I'll do anything you want.' hounded Nick...

Sept. 24/87
Response Group

Andy is reading the Black Cauldron and comments that Lloyd Alexander, the author must have 'an inflated ego because his name is much bigger than the title of the book.'

Other Students

Sept. 16/87
Mike:
During response group he shares part of Roald Dahl's Danny Champion of the World which he finds is different from other Dahl books he has read because it is more serious.
Sept. 17/87
Andie

Is the first student to clearly articulate the influence of reading poetry on her poetry writing.

October

Character motivation is one of the major topics for discussion this month. The children have begun writing in their journals and participating in response groups.

Danny

Oct. 1/87
Whole Group Share
Danny has finished Cauldron and has started Taran Wanderer, the third book in the series. In response to Nat's question, he says he likes Lloyd Alexander and how he writes because he uses very descriptive words. He has today's passage because it shows the violence in the book.

Danny has finished his story 'Out on Limbs' which he reads to the class.

Chapter two
The next day we went up to my house and found another tree to climb.
'Hey Jeff,' I said from high above Jeff's head. I think
this is going to be a very dangerous one. We have to
cross this branch into this other tree!' At that, Jeff
shot up the tree every hand reaching up and clutching
each branch as though it was a ladder. In no time at
all he was up the tree and crossing the branch toward
me. I started up the tree then I heard Jeff yell. I
spun around and almost fell as I saw Jeff hanging on
for dear life to the branch below me! I had to help him
so I took my life into my hands and I jumped toward the
branch across. I missed, But luckily I jumped hard
enough to grab the branch under it. I grabbed that one
and swung to Jeff's aid. I yanked him up with a load of
difficulties, but I saved him. After that little
incident we got down for the rest of the day. The next
day we went out back again and this
time we did not slip once. Jeff brought a saw this
time. He slang (slung) it over his shoulder and started
to climb (slower this time just in case). We crossed
the branch easily and started to climb. We climbed not
4 feet before I found another branch to cross. I told
Jeff to keep going and crossed the branch. It was a
long skinny branch that went into the other tree, I had
taken the saw from Jeff and started making my little
place in the tree. I caught up with Jeff and make
myself another little place and so did Jeff.

Chapter 3
The very next day we were up in the tree again making
more little perches. We even made 'The Lookout Nest.'
It is the highest place in the tree, about 40 feet up
and you can actually see over the tree! After Jeff made
it, he climbed down to look for another branch to
cross. With Luck I found one. You probably don't know
how I did it so I will tell you. I climbed down and
found a little V in the tree that Jeff hadn't found
yet, so I broke off the little branches that blocked
the opening and stepped into it and found another limb
across from it. It looked like I had to cross over thin
air but I made it and on the next limb over I saw a
branch not half way before I fell. I fell from 5 feet
and I hit the ground and blacked out. When I finally
woke up Jeff was beside me. I told him not to tell his
mom and I wouldn't tell my mom. He said, 'Sure I won't
but she's been calling you for the last 10 minutes! So
I jumped up and still groggy, ran toward the house.
When I finally came to completely I had supper and went
to bed.

The children's responses to the story centered on Danny
blacking out and how he kept it a secret from his
mother.
Oct. 8/87
Whole Group Share
Danny reads the first part of his new story, 'Land of Murewhere.' Jon whose view of Danny is blocked by another student, asks if Danny is reading from a book or his own writing.

The Land of Murewhere
Chapter 1 Attack from the air

It was dusk and the only sound was the soft bleating of the sheep in their pens, all was quiet, too quiet. The night watchman scanned the yard outside the fort from the tower. The slight whisper of an arrow leaving it's bow was heard in he ears. The arrow hit it's mark and the watchman fell with hardly a dull thud to the ground...

Oct. 15/87
Whole Group Share
Danny reads another installment of 'Murewhere' in which the Kamnoids attack. He states that he has gotten some of his ideas from John and his story, 'The Land of Zymn' as well as the fantasy books he continues to read.

Oct. 26/87
Whole Group Share
Danny has begun reading Johnny Tremaine which is the first discussion of historical fiction. He is enjoying the book because, 'it is very descriptive and really neat.'
Andy

Oct. 8/87
Whole Group Share
Andy reads an excerpt from the book he is reading *Trapped in Death Cave* by Bill Wallace, which he finds 'wicked cool because it is scary and exciting. Danny has also read the book and enjoyed it.

Oct. 21/87
Whole Group Share
Andy shares another installment of his untitled mystery story. The children respond favorably particularly to Matt's disguise as a woman.

Oct. 26/87
Whole Group Share
Andy shares part of his new mystery story titled 'Trapped in Killer Cave' which focuses on the same three characters as in his first mystery. This time the boys investigate a mystery at the polar caves.

Other Students

Oct. 28/87
Whole Group Share

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Andie shares her story 'The Witch School' which Andy has helped her write by assisting her with description.

November

A major topic discussed this month is mood. The children are becoming more familiar with their journal writing and with the interactions among class members.

Danny

Nov. 4/87
Whole Group Share
Danny continues to read *Johnny Tremaine* and work on 'Murewhere.' With his reading he is beginning to find Tremaine harder to read, 'because of the way they talk.'

Nov. 17/87
Whole Group Share
Danny again shares another segment of 'Murewhere' in which Rayla and Hilcrest escape the Kamnoid attack.

Nov. 18/87
Whole Group Share
Chapter six of *Johnny Tremaine*. Danny recommends the book because, 'it tells about Boston before the revolution and
how it looks through one person's eyes. Danny has also begun reading *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* because, 'I read about Mark Twain and so I wanted to read this because it's the only one on the shelf besides *Tom Sawyer* and I've seen the movie of that one.'

Andy

Nov. 5/87

Whole Group Share

Andy shares his mystery story, 'The Mystery of the Blood Red Ruby' with the class, since it is 34 pages long, he only reads from page 25-34. He credits the *Three Investigators* with influencing his writing and says that he has read half the books in the series.

Nov. 25/87

Whole Group Share

Andy reads another part of his mystery 'Trapped in Killer Cave.' He says he was 'inspired by *Trapped in Death Cave*. Andy also likes the description in his story.

Nov. 25/87

Response Group

Andy is reading *Sheila the Great* which is a sequel to *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. He considers the main character a wimp and an all round snob.
December

During December, character development is a focus for discussion. The children seem to be confused with development and description. Later Mary Ann attempts to rectify the situation by doing description and then development.

Danny

Dec. 1/87
Continues with previous reading and writing.

Dec. 14/87
Whole Group Share
Shares Chapter 3 of 'Murewhere' where one of the warriors is poisoned and the magical staff is introduced into the story.

Dec. 15/87
Whole Group Share
Danny shares part of his untitled new story about kidnappers who abduct some children who eventually escape.
Andy

Dec. 10/87
Response Group
Andy has found a new mystery writer, Carol Beech York and is reading her book Where Evil Is which he is enjoying.

Dec. 14
Whole Group Share
Andy shares part of Where Evil Is. He likes the book because of all the suspense in it.

January

In the response groups this month, Mary Ann focused on character description and development in an attempt to straighten out the confusion over these two concepts which arose in the first term.

Danny

Jan. 11/88
Interview
Danny is on page 73 of Connecticut Yankee and continues to work on 'Murewhere,' and plans to ask his father to help him with ideas for the story.
Jan. 11/88
Response Group
Reads a part and talks about Connecticut Yankee particularly the puns made by the character of Clarence.

Jan. 12/88
Whole Group Share
Danny reads his latest 2 1/2 pages of 'Murewhere' and Brian offers some suggestions that he slow the pace down as the characters enter the forest and then pick up the pace. Danny refers to his map of the land of Murewhere to see if this fits in with his plot.

Jan. 18/88
Response Group
Danny reads his journal entry to Mary Ann and explains why he has stopped reading Connecticut Yankee because it was boring. He shared his character description from The Hobbit about Bilbo Boggins.

Jan. 18/88
Interview
In writing, he has stopped 'Murewhere' so he could publish 'Out on Limbs.'
Jan. 19/88

Conference

Danny asks for help planning his new story, 'The Twin Towers of Drexel' which is the sequel to 'Murewhere' even though the latter is not completed. He wanted to take a break because he was having difficulties with the plot of the first story and had more ideas for the sequel. Finally he settles on using the same characters and having the first story become a legend in the second story. Later that same morning he returns with the beginnings of a new draft in which he has established some of the plot details.

The Twin Towers of Drexel
Chapter 1

It was a cold day in November, Dangward was cuddled on the couch as Dantrud threw a fresh log on the warm fire that was burning low in the chimneyspace.

Dangward was visiting Drexel, his homeland, he was nearing the end of a long life and had come home to visit his family. The fire sparked into new life and burned higher. The little cottage was again filled with the warm waning glow of the fire.

Dangward pulled the covers warmed by the fire down to his stomach and turned to Dantrud.

'Dantrud,' he started, 'Back in my younger days we had a watchman, at the fort, he was a fine watchman at that.' Dangward chuckled to himself, 'He was out watching one night and he was shot in the chest with an arrow.'

'He gave me his sword when he died and I swore to get revenge for him but I never got it. I am going to give you, Dantrud, my secret grandson, the sword I was given long ago.'

Dantrud protested, 'But grandfather, I am a wizard. I have no use for a sword.'

'Use the sword if you get a chance, to kill the high master.'...
Jan. 21/88

Whole Group Share

Danny has begun reading *The Hobbit* and read part of the book to the class. He chose his selection because of the chapter title, 'From the Frying Pan into the Fire.'

Jan. 25/88

Interview

Danny discussed Tolkien versus Alexander and he thinks Tolkien is better because he provides better reasons for his characters to go adventures. Both Danny's stories in writing are on hold while he publishes 'Out on Limbs.'

Andy:

Jan. 19/88

Interview

Andy discussed *Choose Your Own Adventure Stories* and how some were better written than others, because they had more interesting choices. He was also reading *Deenie* which had been recommended by the other students. Andy finds recommendations are good but he doesn't always take other people's opinions especially his brother's because he recommended the *Mystery of the Singing Serpent*, a *Three Investigators* book, which he didn't like. Discussions about his brother Jeff's recommendations also appear later in the
notes. He is also reading, _Creep Show Crook_ by Robert Arthur.

In writing he was working on an untitled story about three kids who start a riot and get arrested, which he had started last term and began working on again.

Jan. 25/88
Interview
Andy discussed the different authors of the _Three Investigators Series_ and two books in the _MacDonald Hall_ series. He likes the plots of the _MacDonald Hall_ books because they are set in a boarding school. In writing he continues to work on his long story about Kristy, the 13 year old and her adventures babysitting, tentatively titled 'One Crazy Night.' He intends to end it soon because he wants it to 'wind down.'

Jan. 28/88
Interview
Very interesting discussion about his writing processes and how he has a difficult time ending stories. 'Anyone can write. It's a matter of thinking about it. If people (authors) publish than anyone can. If you're bored with it (writing) then others will be bored too. Writing, it's like a self-image of your story.'

Other Students:
Jan. 11/88

Melissa:
In whole group share, was the first student to talk about point of view in relation to her writing. In response to a question about an event in her story she explained that the story was from Sam, the main character's point of view.

Jan. 13/88

Josh:
Initiated the expression 'I'm reading 'title of writing' by me,' which later became 'I'm reading my writing.' This language marked some of the blurring of distinctions between sharing writing by published authors and the student's own writing. Mary Ann commented on this new expression.

Josh became the first student to discuss composing on the computer instead of using it to recopy a handwritten draft.

Jan. 28/88

Jen:
Shared her story 'Dead or Alive' which seems to be influenced by her reading books about children and death, like Alex, the Life of a Child. The plot in her story is hard to follow and the students raise a lot of questions concerning plot consistency. This is a recurring problem
with Jen and she seems to avoid revising a piece as long as she is able to verbally explain away any inconsistencies.

**FEBRUARY:**

After three selections from *More Scary Stories* are shared in Whole Group Share, Mary Ann tries to initiate a discussion about the appeal of these stories (Whole Group Shares on Tues. Feb. 2, Thurs. Feb. 4, and Mon. Feb. 8). These discussions are not as successful as the one we had last year about violence in books and movies.

Hilary's reading of *Good-bye Tomorrow* (Response Group, Thurs. Feb. 4), becomes a springboard for a discussion of AIDS and the students express their feelings that it is easier to talk with Mary Ann about sensitive issues than their parents.

In WGS on Thurs. Feb. 11, Mary Ann shares part of Mary Comstock's (a research assistant from the University of New Hampshire) story about Darfield which the children thoroughly enjoy and which she will share other installments of when they are written. Mary Ann also shared some poetry with the children to encourage them to try to read and write poetry (WGS, Mon. Feb. 15).
Topics covered in response groups this month are setting, point of view (which had been appearing in journal entries and discussions), and theme, (which leads to discussions of death, friendship and prejudice which are common themes in the books the children are reading as well as Mary Ann's book *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

Danny:

Feb. 1/88
Interview:
The *Hobbit* is getting really exciting because of the adventure and attacks by the giant spiders. The Hobbits have a purpose for going on the adventure - to reclaim the dwarfs' gold. This is how Tolkien differs from Alexander whose characters go on adventures 'for the heck of it.' In writing, Danny is still recopying 'Out on Limbs' into book form so his two fantasies are on hold.

Feb. 1/88
Whole Group Share
In introducing his writing he uses Josh's format of, 'I'm reading 'The Twin Towers of Drexel' by me'. Symbols are used in the story which is an idea suggested by John which he also used in his own story, 'Temples of Kruge.' Danny cites John as his source for ideas in the story.
Feb. 2/88

Whole Group Share

Shares part of the *Hobbit* which he thinks is neat and tells he plans to read the entire trilogy. In response to Mary Ann's question he states that he doesn't get tired of reading fantasy.

Feb. 8/88

Interview:

Discusses the *Hobbit* and how the action is picking up. He still feels that Tolkein is a better writer than Alexander and more difficult to read because of the vocabulary. In writing his two fantasies are on hold while he is recopying 'Out on Limbs' in book form. He revised 'Murewhere' with his father and plans to recopy it to generate new ideas.

Feb. 8/88

Response Group

Danny reads journal entry about setting which he has also illustrated in his journal from the book *Danger on Panther Peak*.

Feb. 9/88

Whole Group Share

Shared the *Hobbit* which Nat interested him in reading. Mentions how it gave him ideas for his writing and discussed how the movie differed from the book.

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Feb. 10/88
Whole Group Share
Shares next part of the *Hobbit* because of all the parenthesis in that section. Likes these asides in the story. In response to Mary Ann's question if he's learned anything, he says no because he knew all about the realistic words in the story. When asked if it is a challenge he says yes but he expected it to be more difficult.

Feb. 10/88
Whole Group Share
Shared his writing, 'Twin Towers of Drexel' in which he is changing the characters who are the villains because he is tired of them. Danny is working on 'Drexel' the sequel to 'Murewhere' because it is easier to write than the point at which he is on in the first book. Story centers on revenge and this is an original idea of his own and not one he got from John.

Feb. 15/88
Whole Group Share
Shared 'Twin Towers' in its latest version. John asks why he hasn't revised the characters and Andy asks about future plans for the story. When asked about finishing 'Murewhere' he says he has run out of ideas and that this story takes place 25 years later than the first book. Brian asks to
conference with him because he thinks he has some ideas for Danny.

Feb. 17/88
Whole Group Share
Shared an installment from his new book *Danger on Panther Peak* by Bill Wallace. Discusses why he likes the book because of the adventure and how he would classify the book as well as the point of view from which the book is written. Compares this book with the other one he has read by the same author and finds this one better. Finished the book today and is ready to start, *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Andy:

Feb. 3/88
Whole Group Share
Final installment of untitled story about Kristy. When asked about a sequel, he responded, 'no, it's a story that could only happen once.'

Feb. 4/88
Response Group
Discusses another book in the *MacDonald Hall* series where he describes the plot of the book and why he enjoys the series.
Feb. 18/88
Response Group
Discusses the point of view in his book, *Mary Ann Saves the Day* which is part of the *Babysitter's Club* series in which each book is written from the point of view of one of the girls who belongs to the club.

Other Students:

Feb. 1/88
Hilary and Andrea:
Share with the class, two short stories from *More Scary Stories* by Alvin Schwartz which they got from Mrs. Litman, a Chapter One teacher. This book, along with its sequel, will later be read by everyone in the class. Most of the comments in this first share center around similar stories the class has heard at camp, stories they have read, or personal experiences when playing hide and seek, which is a central plot device in the second story.

Feb. 2/88
Andrea:
Shares another selection from *More Scary Stories* and Mary Ann tries to initiate a discussion as to the appeal of stories like these.
Feb. 2/88

Shannon:

Shares her revised version of 'The Opposites' which she rewrote in response to the comments she received in earlier Whole Group Share.

Feb. 3 and 4/88

Mel:

Picks up on the trend of reading *More Scary Stories*. Mary Ann initiates brief discussion on reading short stories with reference to other books of short stories the students have read.

Feb. 9/89

Mel:

Began writing short stories with scary themes, because she had been reading short stories in *More Scary Stories*. Finds short stories easier to write because you can stop them if you run out of ideas.

Feb. 15/88

Laura:

'My Life as a Sailor,' a report written for Social Studies is rewritten to be published in writing. This is the first carry over from another subject into the reading/writing section.
Feb. 16/88

Brian:
Conference at Brian's request about writing book reviews for class newspaper started by some of the students in the class. Referred to newspaper columns in the Boston Globe.

Feb. 18/88

Hilary:
Compares the two Scary Stories books she has read. She finds the sequel better than the original which is unusual because the sequel is usually not as good as the first book.

Feb. 29/88

John:
Discussion of fiction versus fantasy writing and the difficulty of writing realistic fiction. Discussion of Judy Blume, a fiction author he likes, her books and how she writes realistic situations.

MARCH:

In connection with themes, Mary Ann discusses racism and prejudice with the students in the response groups as well as the theme of friendship, especially boy/girl friendships (Response Group, Mon. Mar. 7 with Danny). On
Thurs. Mar. 10 she makes an interesting comparison between how much easier it is to talk about theme in reading process versus when her students were reading basals. Other topics covered in response group were similes and metaphors (Mon. Mar. 21), where Mary Ann described the usefulness of these in reading and writing to make the description more interesting.

Mary Ann continues to share poetry with the children as a way of encouraging them to read and write poetry (Whole Group Share, Tues. Mar. 8).

Bridget from Sue Frame's grade one class comes into Mary Ann's room to share a book she can read, called Inside, Outside, Upside Down.

Danny:

Mar. 2/88
Interview

In reading Danny has finished the first of the Hobbit trilogy and has started the second. In between the two he is reading Danger on Panther Peak as a break from the more difficult Hobbit books.

In writing he has decided to put his two fantasy stories on hold and write fiction because 'everyone is bugging me about the fantasy. I'd be just as happy writing fantasy and I may go back to it before I finish the fiction.' His new story is called 'The Outlaw of Colorado'
and will involve getting captured by an outlaw in olden times and escaping.

Mar. 3/88
Whole Group Share
Shared his book, Fellowship of the Ring and made predictions about the plot and the characters.

Mar. 7/88
Response Group
Danny and Mary Ann discuss his journal entry on the theme of Fellowship of the Ring.

Mar. 9/88
Interview
In reading he is still on Fellowship of the Ring. In writing, he has abandoned 'Outlaw of Colorado' to collaborate with Andy. Danny describes the process as, 'he has good vocabulary and I'm a good speller. Both of us are funny and we want the story to be funny, Andy is handwriting it and we both come up with ideas. When Andy goes to Type Three, I write and check it over. I can spell out things and see how it sounds. I also help out in sticky parts. I'm gaining some insights into how to write fiction. Since both of us are funny we can think of funny situations.'
Mar. 10/88
Whole Group Share
Shares another section of Fellowship of the Ring which he picked because the story was boring up to this point although he still enjoys reading the book.

Mar. 14/88
Whole Group Share
Shares from his book The Genius Thieves by Franklin W Dixon (Hardy Boys series) which he picked because he forgot the Fellowship over the weekend. He has read others in the series before.

Mar. 14/88
Response Group
Discusses the themes in Fellowship and expresses concern that next week's journal entries will be all free choice because he gets stuck when he has to select his own.

Mar. 17/88
Whole Group Share
Danny reads the next part of Fellowship and talks about the plot of the story. He picked this part to read because of the description in it.
Mar. 21/88
Response Group
Reads his journal entries about the *Genius Thieves* and *Fellowship* which he compares with the *Hobbit*.

Mar. 24/88
Whole Group Share
Shares *Dirty Beasts* by Roald Dahl which the students really enjoy. This starts a minor reading trend as a lot of students later read this book.

Mar. 28/88
Response Group
Discusses the metaphors and similes he has found in *Fellowship of the Ring*. He also remarks that he has begun listing the topics covered in response group inside his journal.

Mar. 29/88
Interview
In reading he finds *Fellowship* is at a dull part where nothing much is happening. In writing he is still collaborating with Andy. 'It's hard to describe my insights into fiction, for example you don't have to write with old time words like 'ye''. The plot of the story is kind of an adventure and most fiction I read was about adventures. The story also has humor which you could put in fantasy but I
don't clearly see it. I know it's there (in fantasy) but I can't picture it.' Danny also describes changes in his reading and writing and the influence of reading on writing.

Andy:

Mar. 2/88
Interview

In reading Andy discusses and compares books in the Babysitter's Club series, MacDonald Hall series and the Three Investigator's series. In his discussion he refers to the themes of the books, his expectations for the books, as well as the the point of view in the stories he prefers. He also compares, More Scary Stories with it's prequel Scary Stories and he prefers the original book. The Not Just Anybody Family by Betsy Byars he describes as bizarre because the family didn't seem like a real family since each chapter described a different character and each went their own way until the end of the book.

In writing he has finished the story about Kristy and despite his earlier statement that there wouldn't be a sequel he is writing another story about the same characters. He chose to write a 'before sequel' because the characters would be too old if the new story took place after the first one. The story will involve Kristy's
problems with home, brothers and sisters, school, social life, part-time jobs and friends.

Andy discusses how he feels reading has influenced his writing, especially the Babysitter's Club books which helped him with ideas for the stories about Kristy.

Mar. 3/88
Response Group
Mary Ann asks Andy to read an earlier journal entry about the themes in Superfudge which he had written about before the topic was raised in response group.

Mar. 10/88
Response Group
Discusses the next book in the MacDonald Hall series which he says is better than its title, Don't Jump In the Pool. He describes the plot and characters as well as the point of view in the story.

Mar. 17/88
Response Group
Andy discusses theme in the book Genius Thieves by F.W. Dixon. Relates the relationship of the brothers in the book to his own relationship with his brother Jeff.
Interview

Andy discussed his reactions to a number of books he had read. In particular he refers to *The Blossoms Meet the Vulture Lady* as a 'fair book which was just good enough to read. It didn't focus on one thing and was kind of a shadow of *The Not Just Anybody Family*. The reviews in the book mentioned *Anybody Family* but they didn't say much about this book.' *A Fine White Dust* he didn't expect to like because it didn't sound like it had a plot. Listening to Mary Ann talk about the book he knew that relationship between the boy and the preacher would build up to a downfall, 'like Hilter building his power to a downfall.' He read two other *Hardy Boys* books, one of which, *The Night of the Werewolves* he felt could be written as two different books. 'The thing I didn't like was it had two concepts which I knew linked in some way but it was confusing because they would introduce characters and when I got used to them, then they were dumped and different characters and different things were introduced. It could be written as two different books.'

In writing he is still working on the collaborative story with Danny and he described the principal's reaction to hearing it as 'she loved it.' 'It's coming along really well and the babysitting disaster came off really well.'
Mar. 24/88
Response Group
Andy discusses The Great Gilly Hopkins which he describes as predictable because you can figure out what's going to happen in the book. He's not sure what genre to call it because it is different from the other books he usually reads.

Mar. 28/88
Whole Group Share
Andy shares his reading Trapped on Alcatraz Island. Mary Ann remarks that he hasn't shared reading in awhile and she's glad he sharing today. After hearing about the book, she suggests he might be interested in reading The Outsiders or Rumblefish. Andy really likes the book because it is filled with action and there is not one dull part. Several of the boys will later read this book and Mike credits it with helping him write his mystery.

Mar. 31/88
Response Group
Andy talks about the metaphors and similes he has taken from his own writing. In reading, he is reading How to Eat Fried Worms from which he has also taken similes and metaphors.
Andy and Danny: Collaborative Writing

Mar. 9/88
Whole Group Share
Danny has decided to collaborate with Andy on the story Andy started about Kristy and her adventure before the events described in his other story. Danny describes the collaboration as 'Andy writes it and I get him out of sticky spots.'

Mar. 15/88
Whole Group Share
Andy reads the next part of the untitled Kristy story. Describes sources of ideas for the story from the Babysitter's Club books and the movie 'Three Men and a Baby.' Danny suggests typing it on the computer when it is finished. Andy wonders which one to enter in Young Author's Contest.

Mar. 17/88
Whole Group Share
Andy reads the previous section of the Kristy story because Chris, the new student hasn't heard it yet. He stops reading after page 27 because page 28 is missing. Andy briefly tells about future plans for the story and Kristy's revenge at the dance. Mary Ann asks them about when they shared the story with Ms. Kramer (the principal) yesterday.
Danny suggests that if they had 200 more pages, they could make a 'grown-up book'.

Mar. 23/88

Whole Group Share

Share the next installment of Kristy and for the first time Danny reads the story. They have also added a copyright to the story and book reviews which they collected from the class put at the beginning of the story. The story now includes a song which Andy is persuaded to sing and a balcony scene Mary Ann compares to Romeo and Juliet.

Other Students:

Mar. 2/88

Mike:

Begins to read historical fiction by the Collier brothers, called Winter Hero focusing on the revolutionary war. Later (Wed. Mar. 9) he begins to read, My Brother Sam Is Dead which is also historical fiction by the same authors.

Mar. 3/88

Jen:

Continues the scary story trend by reading a story from Scary Stories which she likes because of the twist ending.
Mar. 8/88

Jen:

Another conference with Jen about the inconsistencies in the plot of her story about Pamela (Dead or Alive). She still thinks that verbally explaining things is sufficient and that no revision is necessary. Mary Ann has noticed the same tendency and we are unsure how to handle this, except to give her more help and more time to figure out what she needs to revise so her peers understand the story.

Mar. 7/88

Hilary:

Mary Ann asks her to share her book about Martin Luther King Jr. about which she has written an interesting journal entry. This share initiates another discussion of racism and prejudice.

Mar. 8/88

John:

Is reading the fifth of the C.S. Lewis books about Narnia. He is looking for the sixth and seventh books which are not in the school library so he can read the entire series.

Mar. 10/88

Brian:

Interesting discussion of the differences between books and movies and how movies are more scary because you can't stop
the picture but in books you can picture it as scary as you want or not as scary.

Mar. 22/88
Brian and Chris:
Conference about consistency in point of view in the story they are collaborating on called 'Two Hockey Lovers.' Since they are writing it by alternating pages, they had two different 'I's' as narrators.

Mar. 23/88
John and Josh:
Conference about the use of maps as part of the process of writing fantasy stories and Choose Your Own Adventure Stories.

Mar. 24/88
Melissa:
Shares her letter from her penpal in Ireland and Mary Ann notes that the penpal makes the same spelling errors as her students.

Mar. 28/88
Becky:
In discussing Judy Blume's Story she describes how the book could be improved by using more things like she puts in her fiction stories - more funny parts.
In the same interview she talks about changes in her reading and writing and how she finds reading helps her writing.

Mar. 28/88
Brian:
Has begun reading informational books on combat aircraft. In writing he talks about his collaboration with Chris being like Danny and Andy's collaborative writing. He also discusses changes in reading and writing and the influence of reading on writing (begun on Mon. Mar. 28 and finished on Tues. Mar. 29).

Mar. 29
Jon:
Describes changes in reading and writing and the influence of reading on writing.

Mar. 30/88
Jon:
Shares his writing, 'Horrid Happenings' which is the first really violent piece of writing we have had this year.
Mar. 30/88 and Mar. 31/88

Shannon, Melissa, Nat, Molly, and John:
Respond to interview questions about changes in their reading and writing and how reading influences their writing.

Mar. 31/88

Danielle:
Describes *The Computer Nut* as a book which is 'original' because there are hardly any books like it. A lot of authors try to be like other authors, but this book isn't.' Responds to interview questions about changes in reading and writing and how reading influences writing.

Mar. 31/88

Mike:
In writing credits Danny and Andy with sharing the book *Trapped on Alcatraz Island* which gave him the ideas for the main part of the mystery he is writing. Responds to questions about changes in his reading and writing and how reading influences writing.

**APRIL:**
(Up to Mon. April 25)
Topics in the response groups center around simile, metaphor, and plot. Mary Ann uses the simile of plot being like the framework of a house around which the author builds the story.

Katy and Erin (Thurs. Apr. 7) from Sue Frame's grade one class share their story about Blacky the Rabbit in which they have incorporated factual material about rabbits and their living habits into a narrative format. After they leave Mary Ann discusses this as an option for the grade five students in writing their Social Studies reports.

Danny:

Apr. 4/88
Response Group
Shares more similes and metaphors he has found as well as some he has written himself. In reading he is still reading Fellowship of the Ring and he reads his journal response to the questions Mary Ann has asked him about the book.

Apr. 6/88
Whole Group Share
Danny is reading Fellowship as well as Trapped on Alcatraz Island which he got from Andy. He reads a part of the latter book about a chase sequence which he finds exciting
and descriptive and which also contains a metaphor and a simile.

Apr. 11/88

Whole Group Share
Danny returns to writing fantasy and shares the beginning of his new story which features animals as the main characters. Ben asks him about the source of the idea for the story and if he got it from *Rats of NIMH* which Danny denies. However he later admits that he got the idea for the owl from there, but that's all, the rest came from a dream he had in which he was Davenger, the main character.

Apr. 11/88

Response Group
Discusses the plot of the book he is reading, *Trapped on Alcatraz Island*. Danny also shares a journal entry about simile and metaphor from the same book, one of which is quite sophisticated.

Apr. 14/88

Whole Group Share
Shares his reading in *Shadow Castle* by Mary Ann Cochrel which is a book that belonged to his mother when she was his age. He has finished *Alcatraz Island* and decided to try this book.
Apr. 25/88

Interview:

Discusses the books he is reading and the new fantasy he is writing. He is working from a map in writing this new stories and has scrapped his two earlier fantasies because one fantasy a year is enough. He thinks part of the source for the new story is books like The Celery Stalks at Midnight because they deal with personified characters. He also discusses his collaboration with Andy.

Andy:

Apr. 4/88

Whole Group Share

Shares his writing and now has a title, 'Oh What a Life.'

The students respond enthusiastically to the story which tells the further adventures of Kristy.

Apr. 7/88

Response Group

Andy shares his similes and metaphors from How to Eat Fried Worms which he considers dumb because the author used the same comparison twice. This raises the issue that it is fine to criticize published authors.
Andy and Danny: Collaborative Writing:

Apr. 12/88

Special Whole Group Share

Special whole group share so Andy and Danny can share the conclusion to the collaborative story they are writing about Kristy. Andy prefers this one to the first story because it is more realistic. He also describes the collaboration process with he and Danny.

Apr. 25/88

Whole Group Share

Both have begun collaborating on a new story about Kristy going to college. Again this is favorably received by the students who enjoy the stories and the characters.

Other Students:

Apr. 6/88

Shannon:

Shares her untitled story about three children being kidnapped. The day before she had a conference with Mary Ann about the plot of the story and some inconsistencies in the plot. The students are concerned with the motivation of the kidnapper and plot details.
Apr. 11/88
Shannon:
Shares her revised version of the story in which she tries to respond to the questions raised the last time she shared.

Apr. 14/88
Shannon:
Again shares revisions to her story as well as pictures of the characters she has added to the story.

Apr. 6/88
Josh:
Josh has begun reading historical fiction with *The Slave Dancer* by Paula Fox, which starts a discussion of the slave trade.

Apr. 7/88
Josh:
Responds to interview questions about reading and writing as well as the influence of reading on writing.

Apr. 6/88
Chris:
the new student who joined the class a couple of weeks ago has found a book he considers absolutely 'awesome', *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl. He is still learning how
to respond in response group and tends to tell the entire story with extensive detail.

Apr. 12/88
Chris:
The first interview with Chris since he joined the class. He is enjoying the class and learning to find books he enjoys reading.

Apr. 7/88
Jen:
Discusses the influence of reading *Mitch and Amy* on her writing of 'Tommy and the Terrible Twos.' She responds to the interview questions about changes in reading and writing and how reading influences writing.

Apr. 13/88
Andrea:
Responds to questions about reading and writing as well as how reading influences writing and vice versa.

Apr. 13/88
Ben:
Talks about changes in reading and writing and how reading influences writing which he can see in other students' work but not his own. He also talks about how writing influences his reading.
Apr. 13/88 and April 14/88
Laura and Hilary:
Talk about reading and writing as well as how reading influences writing and vice versa.

Apr. 25/88
Becky:
Describes how reading Shel Silverstein encouraged her to write her own book of poetry.

**Summary:**

Both Danny and Andy show clear preferences for what they like to read and write, as well as they relate the two areas. Andy enjoys reading and writing mysteries in addition to reading and writing realistic fiction (e.g., *Babysitter's Club* series which inspired his two stories about Kristy). During the year Andy switched from mystery writing to realistic fiction and his reading reflected his choices.

Danny was the acknowledged fantasy writer, although John was also very good as well. Danny read and wrote fantasy stories. Later he tried his hand at a mystery/adventure story, but returned to fantasy prior to collaborating with Andy. Danny wanted to write realistic fiction and
'apprenticed' himself to Andy for the second installment of
the Kristy stories.

Both boys were very aware of their growth as readers and
writers and how reading influenced their writing.

Danny: I learned that books can be really neat. I used
to read books only when I had nothing else to
do. Now I'm a reader. I learned I can really
read long books without getting lots and lots of
help. I still get help, but not as much as usual
(considering Danny often reads Jr. High level
books, it is not suprising he found these books
a challenge).

In writing I learned how to write fantasy. I
used to never know how to write fantasy but
thanks to John, now I do. John helped me by
getting me started. I conferenced with him and
he read fantasy and wrote it. I thought that was
neat, so I did it too. Before I wrote fiction
and true stories. As a writer, I learned that I
am a very good writer when I put my mind to it.
I write more description than I used to and I
just write longer stories.

Reading helps my writing because I read books
like the Black Cauldron and at that time I was
writing fantasy and I got ideas from them for
things like the plot. The books help me with
what I'm going to do in the story. Like Taran
(a character in Cauldron) searched for his
parents and I used that for Dangward going to
look for his grandchild. I read fantasy and I
think I'm going to go back to writing it because
Fellowship has given me some ideas.

Andy: Reading is a lot more fun because I like to read.
I didn't care for it before because you had to do
reports and check with the teacher. Now you can
choose what to read. I'm a quicker reader now.

I can write all different sorts of books and I've
improved as a writer. I write more realistic,
more indepth, and more description. My goal was
to develop my characters and I feel I've done
this. The other kids seem to like mysteries but
comedies are even more entertaining.
Reading helps my writing because I stopped reading mysteries and I couldn't write them. If I stop reading a certain kind of book then I can't write it...

Danny and Andy, have both recognized the value of reading and writing as related processes on their growth and development as readers and writers.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This study was carried out over a two year period in Mary Ann Wessells' classroom where I was a participant-observer investigating the relationships children establish between reading and writing.

In both years of the study, the children demonstrated that they could relate reading and writing in a variety of ways, particularly in the areas of genre, theme, and stylistic devices. While some children can spontaneously relate learning in one area to another, the classroom environment in Mary Ann's room encouraged the children to engage fully in both processes. The learning atmosphere in the classroom supported risk-taking and enabled the children to choose what they read and wrote which in turn enabled them to take more responsibility for and control over their own learning. Hence, the children were free to make connections between what they read and what they wrote. The more they read, wrote and related reading and writing, the more they grew as readers and writers.
Creating an environment which encourages children to engage in the processes of reading and writing, does not occur over night. The creation itself is a process. By observing, reflecting, and discussing what was happening in the room, both with myself and the children, Mary Ann gradually changed the environment to support the children and their learning in reading and writing.

The findings in this study are based on the experiences of one teacher and the children she had in her grade five classroom from 1986 to 1988. To understand the children's growth, you must understand the context in which it occurred. Learning and environment are interwoven in the fabric of the room.

Although the findings in this study are dependent on the context of the room in which they occurred, it is possible to generalize some basic principles to other classroom situations. (1) Children can engage in reading and writing as meaningful processes if the classroom environment supports such endeavors. (2) The role of the teacher as the transmitter of knowledge and the children as passive receivers needs to be re-defined if you want to empower children to take more control over their own learning. (3) Observing, listening to the children, reflecting and responding to their needs can guide a teacher in facilitating engagement in reading and writing.
Beyond general principles, a direct translation of Mary Ann's room into another classroom, is a difficult proposition. Each teacher, student and class is different. Each teacher has to find his/her own way to open the doors to reading and writing in response to the needs of individual children. Engagement in the processes of reading and writing empowers the teacher as well as the children to take more responsibility for the learning which occurs in the classroom. Learning to take control takes time. Gradually as a teacher becomes more experienced with a 'process' philosophy, he/she comes to reflect not only the basic principles of 'process' learning but also the individual stamp of that particular teacher's personality.

This study shows one teacher's way. Understanding what and why we did the things we did offers some insights into creating your own learning environment. Looking at the general responses of the students to reading, writing and relating the two areas offers some insights into the possible areas of growth. The discussion of specific children and their personal journeys demonstrates the diversity of individual growth. This study has merely scratched the surface of what is possible when children are actively engaged in learning.

As I conclude this dissertation, the journey to understanding continues. Mary Ann has further refined her
'approach' to meet the needs of this year's class. The children from the original study are now in middle school where some of them continue in 'process' classrooms while others are in more 'traditional' rooms. In either case they have had experiences with reading and writing which they can use throughout their lives. For myself, soon, I'll return 'from away' to the Island where I will continue to work and learn with teachers and children. The trip across the channel separating the Island from the mainland is not the end of a journey but the beginning of a new one. Shannon, one of the children in the first year of the study, perhaps said it best, when she advised me that, 'you'll learn a lot if you keep talking to us kids.'
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