Writing

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Five-year-old Sharon had been standing a few feet from the classroom writing center, observing her friends at work. Anxious to involve Sharon in the writing, the adult observer inquired, “You gonna write today too, Sharon?”

“Well” said Sharon, “how do you do it?” (Dyson, 1981, p.16)

Although few students are as straightforward as Sharon, most expect their teachers to help them answer the ‘how do you do it?’ question. Despite the deceptively simple nature of the question, providing supportive answers is a complex challenge. Some of the complexity of teaching writing comes from the nature of writing itself. As we illustrate in this chapter, writing can be an avenue for individual expression and, at the same time, it can serve to construct or proclaim the individual author’s membership in a social group. Furthermore, writing is conceived of as a skill—and yet, at the same time, that skill is itself a process dependent on a range of other skills and, moreover, a process that is kaleidoscopic, shaped by the author’s changing purposes for writing.

Some of the complexity of teaching writing comes from the nature of classrooms as educational settings. Teachers negotiate between the class as a social group and individual students in that group, a challenging task when individuals number in the 20s and 30s or more and when social membership is diverse. Moreover, teachers often negotiate between their desires to teach writing as a purposeful process and to teach the varied “skills” conceived of as integral to that process. Skills differentially controlled by their students. This negotiating is more urgent in a political climate of high-stakes tests that may determine individuals’ access to future educational opportunities (Steckland, Bodino, Buchan, Jones, Nelson, & Rosen, in press).

To manage this complex teaching act, teachers of all levels must become comfortable with and careful observers of writers and of writing, seeking the sort of information about children that helps them respond to the questions—the challenges— inherent in students’ efforts. In the following three sections of this chapter, we review the kinds of interrelated research knowledge about writing that may inform teachers’ observations of their students and their decisions about how to best support their students’ efforts.

First, because ways of using written language vary with different social situations, we review research on how literacy functions in varied communities, including both the classroom itself and the larger communities students inhabit outside the classroom. This research may support teachers’ efforts to broaden and deepen their literacy curricula, allowing individuals to build on the foundation of their literacy experiences and allowing the classroom community to experience new forms of agency through writing.

Second, because writing is a complex process, one involving the orchestration of many kinds of skills, we review research on the composing process. Such knowledge may support teachers’ efforts to observe individual writers’ ways of composing, including their successes and challenges. On the basis of such observations, teachers may help writers overcome difficulties that cannot be seen on the page, ward off problems before they occur in print, and ease students’ ways into writing.

Finally, because writing is a developmental process, one in which today’s ways of composing change in complex ways into tomorrow’s, we review research on the development of writing. Such knowledge may help teachers appreciate the diversity of students’ resources for composing and, further, to note the signs of future growth that may be hidden in students’ tangled texts and scratch-outs. Too, such knowledge may support teachers’ efforts to understand the questions students cannot articulate and to appreciate the answers they figure out for themselves.

Finally, knowledge about developmental processes may guide teachers to see and to provide the kinds of support individual students might find most helpful.

The research we review can provide support for teachers, but it can not provide prescriptions to follow: techniques proven to “work” for all learners. Rather, it can provide information that might help focus teacher observations, deepen insights, and, in the end, inform the crucial decision making that is the
daily work of all teachers—when to push a student for more, when to praise what may seem to be “errors,” when to encourage students to write collaboratively, when to call a parent in.

As suggested by our review, this decision making is informed by observations of both the classroom community and individual class members. Each student has a unique rhythm, a particular pitch, but that individual quality is a part of, and is shaped by, the rhythm and pitch—the communal quality—of the classroom as a whole. Just as musical notes play differently in varied compositions, so do our students reveal themselves differently in different combinations of others. We, then, aim through this review to contribute to educators’ understanding of writing’s compositional possibilities, of each student’s challenges and promise, and of their own potential as teachers to further literacy growth in their classrooms.

**THE USES OF WRITING**

Five-year-old Sharon’s “How do you do it?” question is difficult to answer, in part, because the hows are shaped by the whys, whos, and what’s; who wants to write, to or for whom, about what, and why? Indeed, in the lives of children, as in the lives of whole communities, literacy prospers if and when compelling reasons exist for writing and when the information conveyed through that writing is a valued part of the social network—when it helps people mediate relationships with other people and reflect on their own lives (Farr, 1994; Heath, 1986; B. J. Moss, 1994; Scheffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984; Street, 1995; Taylor & Dorsev-Gaines, 1988).

In fact, children like Sharon are usually introduced to literacy within their homes and communities and within the social and emotional context of relationships. For example, in their families, list making may be at the center of family planning for a shopping trip; an illegible phone message or returned check may be surrounded by a family argument; a note from a teacher may elicit parental confusion, pride, or anger. Whereas an “I love you” note from a child might evoke an oral response and a hug. Within the context of familial occasions, things happen around and through particular kinds of print (Heath, 1983; McNaughton, 1995; Taylor, 1983).

Writing, then, like speech, is a communicative tool that members of a society use to carry on their lives together and that they pass on to their children (Scribner & Cole, 1981). Unlike speech, however, writing is a cultural invention and consciously learned, and its learning is inextricably linked not only to individuals’ efforts but also to relational contexts and broader social and institutional structures (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Luke, 1995).

Variation in Writing’s Functions and Forms

The tool of writing is viewed by many scholars as contributing to human cultures in unique ways (Goody, 1968; Goody & Watt, 1963; Olson, 1977; Ong, 1982). For example, Goody (1968) argued:

The importance of writing lies in its creating a new medium of communication between [people]. Its essential service is to objectify speech, to provide language with a material correlate, a set of visible signs. In this material form, speech can be transmitted over space and preserved over time. What people say and think can be rescued from the transitoriness of oral communication. (1968, pp. 1–2)

In the last 2 decades anthropologists, linguists, and psychologists have tried to specify writing’s varied functions and forms—its usefulness—in a range of situations. Some scholars have worked to characterize the features of written language that make it such a potentially powerful medium of communication in particular situations. In this work, written language is contrasted with oral language. Written language, researchers and theorists argue, can be constructed so that it is ultimately less dependent upon a specific context. Authors can pack much meaning onto the printed page, weaving words together tightly through such linguistic features as subordinate clauses, prepositional phrases, and adverbial phrases (Chafe, 1982, 1985; Johnston, 1979; Tannen, 1982, 1984a, 1984b). By tightly structuring words, meanings are made explicit: that is, the connections between ideas and the qualifications of those ideas are deliberately put into words. “On the other hand,” “however,” “despite this” are the sorts of phrases that weave together written essays. Some scholars argue that the development of writing had intellectual consequences in the history of humankind, leading to the development of abstract, logical reasoning (Goody & Watt, 1963; Olson, 1977).

However, this vision of writing as explicit—as able to exist on its own, meaningful for anyone in any situation—contrasts sharply with the sorts of cozy home literacy scenes just discussed. Clearly there are varied styles of written language, just as there are varied styles of oral language (Chafe & Danielewicz, 1987). Moreover, activities involving oral language provide the context for most instances of written language use. “Even in the most seemingly literate of environments, such as the law court, a schoolroom, or a university office, most of the conventional procedures of how to act and what to do (with and through texts) are passed on orally” (Barton, 1994, p. 90). Ways of using both oral and written language are interrelated with each other and with ways of living—historical and geographical conditions, social and economic resources and opportunities, religious beliefs, values, and motivations (Farr, 1994; Finneghan, 1986; Hamilton, Barton, & Ivanic, 1994; Heath, 1983; Philips, 1975; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1995). In this sense, written language is always “embedded”; it always figures into particular kinds of communicative events. Its form varies depending on its uses.

Many scholars have investigated how writing varies from situation to situation. For example, the study of literature and rhetoric has produced taxonomies of textual types (e.g., Kinneavy, 1971; Lundsford & Ede, 1984; Winterowd, 1975). And authors concerned with the teaching of writing have produced other categories (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975; Emig, 1971). They distinguish kinds of writing according to the purpose for writing (e.g., to persuade or to inform) and the features associated with those purposes. (For a review of ways of categorizing writing in educational research, see Applebee, 2000.)
Another way to investigate how writing varies across situations is to consider how the activity of writing is socially organized within the ongoing life of particular groups (Basso, 1974; B. J. Moss, 1994; Szew, 1981). Researchers working within this tradition are called "ethnographers of communication" (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Hymes, 1962). They study social activities that are centered around reading or writing activities often termed "literacy events" (Heath, 1982; Teale, Estrada, & Anderson, 1981). Like "speech events" (Hymes, 1972), literacy events are characterized by varied components, including setting, participants (e.g., senders, recipients), purposes and goals, message form, content, channel, key or tone, and rules governing the sort of writing and talking that should occur (Basso, 1974). For example, informal letter-writing events differ from joint committee-report writing events, which differ from list-making events.

Both the social and the cognitive "consequences" of written language, then, depend on the specific nature of the written language event within which that language is used, including the goals and the cognitive processes those events entail. In other words, it is not writing per se but the sorts of social situations in which writing is embedded that determines its ultimate human effects. For example, writing to memorize texts may influence individuals' rote memory, but such literacy use would not affect performance on a logical reasoning task (Scribner & Cole, 1981). From a sociocultural point of view, a person who finds writing a letter to a relative a comfortable use of literacy may not also be socially comfortable writing an academic essay—such impersonal writing for an unknown audience may be contrary to that individual's sense of self in relationship to other people (Scollon & Scollon, 1981).

Furthermore, even within what may be considered one kind of genre or literacy event, individuals' comfort and expertise may vary. For example, in many cultural contexts, children may collaborate orally to compose a written letter with their parents. However, across letter writing events, literacy expertise may be distributed quite differently among child and adult participants because of their respective knowledge of written graphics, genre conventions, audience expectations, and/or linguistic code (e.g., control over a standard English). These differences may engender nontraditional family dynamics (e.g., children guiding adults) and thus may have ramifications for both social and language learning (e.g., Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984; Vasquez Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994).

Even within the negotiation of a single literacy event, expertise may be differentially negotiated. Kalman (1996) provided a vivid illustration through her study of the work world of Mexican scribes. The scribes earn their livelihood composing letters for clients, who come to them for assistance in varied legal, workplace, and family matters. Because the distribution of relevant expertise varies between scribes and clients, the scribes' composing events entail complex oral negotiating. In Kalman's words, "Any use of writing and written texts implies understanding how convention, purpose, knowledge, and power are negotiated to produce a particular piece of writing" (p. 215). Moreover, given new social circumstances for writing (e.g., new institutional contexts, new relationships), any "expert" can become a "novice."

Heath (1983) provided a seminal study of the complex oral and written configurations of literacy use in American communities. She studied oral and written language use in two working class communities and in the homes of middle-class teachers in the Piedmont Carolinas. Individuals in all three settings were literate, in that all made some use of written language, but only the middle-class community used written language—and talked about written language—in ways compatible with the literacy models used in school. For example, people in all communities made lists and wrote notes, but only those in the middle-class neighborhood would bring home expository sorts of writing tasks, such as writing summaries or reports.

Heath (1980) worked with teachers to develop strategies for making school ways of using and talking about written language sensible to students from the working-class communities (one of African American heritage, the other, European American) as well as to those from the middle-class community (which included both heritages). For example, a primary grade teacher incorporated environmental print (e.g., labels on cans and boxes, street signs, store advertisements and price tags) into her classroom. Heath (1980) described the philosophy of this teacher.

Reading and writing are things you do all the time—at home, on the bus, riding your bike, at the barber shop. You can read, and you do everyday before you ever come to school. You can also play baseball and football at home, at the park, wherever you want to. But when you come to school or go to a summer program at the Neighborhood Center, you get help on techniques, the gloves to buy, the way to throw, and the way to slide. School does that for reading and writing. We all read and write a lot of the time. Lots of places. School isn't much different except that here we work on techniques, and we practice a lot—under a coach. I'm the coach. (pp. 120-121)

An intermediate grade teacher helped her students become ethnographers, who talked, read, and wrote about the folk concepts about agriculture in their local community and the relationship of those concepts to "scientific" concepts. A high school teacher encouraged students to create documents and videos explaining to senior citizen groups the meanings of complex written forms, like housing regulations and warranties. At all levels, students talked about differences in how people used oral and written language, thereby developing their comfort with the talk about oral and written language so prevalent in schools as well as developing their capacity to deliberately manipulate language to suit different social occasions.

Studies, like Heath's (1980, 1983), of literacy in varied cultural groups are helpful, sensitizing us to the rich diversity of literacy use in our society. However, teachers cannot do extensive studies in the homes of students. Still, teachers can provide curricular time and space for students to talk about their out of school lives. And, given adequate institutional support, they can build positive relationships with children's families and communities: in these ways they can gain insight into possible ways of building bridges, making connections (Dyson, 1997a; Edwards, 1999; Hymes, 1980; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Moreover, teachers can learn a great deal about the breadth of students' literacy experiences beyond the school walls by
observing and discussing with students the kinds of textual knowledge that inform their actions within those walls. For writing (and reading) may be a key tool in students' construction of their own unofficial or student-controlled school spaces, from the very beginning of schooling. In these spaces, students may use a repertoire of genres or familiar ways of using language learned in varied institutions, including homes, churches, the popular media, and local peer cultures themselves (e.g., Blake, 1997; Camutta, 1993; Dyson, 1993, 1997; Fiering, 1981; Finders, 1996; Gilmore, 1983; Sola & Bennett, 1985). These diverse genres too, often involving varied semiotic tools, can potentially broaden the scope of concern of traditional language arts classrooms (for theoretical discussion, see the New London Group, 1996; for an elementary-focused discussion of incorporating media into the literacy curriculum, see Kavanagh, 1997; for secondary-focused discussions, see Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994).

In sum, the variability of writing's forms and functions suggests that the formal school curriculum recognize variable functions and forms (Comber, Thomson, & Wells, in press; Dyson, 1993; Florio & Clark, 1982; Moll & Whitmore, 1993; Newkirk, 1993). Defining writing more broadly might allow more children to see themselves officially as writers and would allow teachers more footholds from which to build—more ways of engaging children in classroom literacy events.

Literacy in the Classroom Community

A "literacy community" is not synonymous with a "cultural community" (Teale et al., 1981). In just as speech communities (Gumperz, 1971), may be occupational or interest specific, so may literacy communities. The classroom itself can be considered a literacy community, one with special ways of using and talking about written language. Thus, the classroom can create or restrict the sorts of opportunities students have to become literate. In this section, we look closely at the nature of the classroom as a context for writing.

In trying to understand how literacy functions in the classroom community, a basic question is, what is the nature of the kinds of literacy activities that occur there? This kind of question can allow teachers insight into the sorts of supportive linkages they are allowing children to make between school literacy and literacy use in homes, communities, and workplaces (Gundlach, Farr & Cook-Gumperz, 1989). In addition, it can allow teachers to evaluate the ways in which literacy becomes meaningful inside classrooms.

For example, Applebee (1981), at the secondary school level, and Florio and Clark (1982; Clark & Florio, 1981), at the elementary school level, documented how many school writing opportunities restrict children from intellectually and socially engaging in the writing process. Writing's format and much of its content might be provided by a commercial publisher on a worksheet or by the teacher, as in boardwork; in such cases, students do not have to formulate their own thoughts. As Hudson (1998) illustrated, the more students control the form and content of their writing, the more likely they may be to perceive even assigned writing as their own.

To look in more fine-grained ways at classroom writing events—to begin to understand exactly how teachers and students interactively construct them, we must step back and consider how teachers and students interactively construct schooling itself. The concept of the classroom as a social system jointly constructed by teachers and students has been dramatized by studies that began in the 1960s (Henry, 1955; Jackson, 1968; Leacock, 1969; Rist, 1970, 1973).

In the 1970s, researchers began to focus specifically on the language of the classroom, arguing that it was, after all, through language that teaching and learning occurred and thus through language that insight could be gained into the social context of learning (for a review, see Cazden, 1988). This research, much of which has been conducted in elementary classrooms, has revealed the varied demands made by classroom activities. It is not enough for students to know in an academic sense—they must know how to display what they know through appropriate talk (e.g., Bremme & Erickson, 1977; Greene & Wallat, 1979; Mehan, 1979; Merritt, 1982; Phillips, 1972). That is, they must be familiar and comfortable with the kinds of questions that teachers ask, with the ways people take turns speaking, or with the sorts of relationships expected among the children themselves (relationships that are often competitive rather than cooperative).

In the schools, writing is taught as teachers and students talk about writing. Thus, the literature on classroom language can inform teachers' efforts to take advantage of the rich inter-transactional potential of the classroom. During the 1980s, researchers interested in talk and writing were inspired by a newly available book of Vygotskyian theory (Vygotsky, 1934/1978) and by research on parent-child interaction in language learning (e.g., Cross, 1975). They focused heavily on dyadic encounters between students and teachers about their texts. From this perspective, experts "loan" children their consciousness about language and language use (Bruner, 1986, p. 175); they then negotiate the developmental gap—the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1934/1978, p. 84)—between what children can do on their own and with help. That is, they help children to choose, encode, and reflect on their written choices. In these "scaffolding" interactions, teachers, like their caregiver counterparts (Ninio & Bruner, 1978), orally support children's language.

Consistent with this viewpoint, Wells (1986) discussed the instructional implications of his study of parent-child interaction during first language acquisition; he stressed the importance of teachers, like parents, responding to students' written initiatives, helping them develop their ideas. An emphasis compatible with a pedagogical emphasis on dialogue journals (Stanton, Shuy, Peyton, & Reed, 1988) and on teacher-student writing conferences (e.g., Applebee, 1984; Calkins, 1983, 1986; Graves, 1983, S. Freedman, 1987b), discussed in a later section.

Despite the usefulness of the scaffolding metaphor, it is not adequate for capturing the complexity of learning in classroom communities. Unlike the middle-class caregivers and their singular charges studied in language development research, classroom teachers have 20 to 30 children or more, and those children do not necessarily share similar sociocultural backgrounds with each other or with their teachers. More
recently, researchers have focused on the network of oral and written events that constitute the official learning community (for a review, see Langer & Filan 2000). As Moll and Whitmore (1993) suggested, this network is not a dyadic zone of proximal development but rather a "collective" zone, formulated by diverse events in varied units of study. Children's talk about and use of text is guided, then, not only by scaffolding interactions but also by their evolving understanding of event purposes, social relations, and textual expectations—understanding gained from, and negotiated by, oral participation. Over the school years, as the curriculum differentiates into disciplines, children's participation in literacy events and their associated genres becomes a means for participation in, and development of, both disciplinary and literacy knowledge and skill (Applebee 1996; A. Freedman & Niedway 1994).

Some researchers have focused specific attention on the interplay between classroom discourse and student writing (e.g., Applebee 1996; Gutierrez 1992; Larson & Maier 2000; Losey 1993; Nystrand 1997; Sperling & Woodlief 1997). A consistent finding of such work is the "default" teacher-student interaction pattern, to use Cazden's term (1988, p. 55), pre-dominates in our classrooms and, moreover, that that pattern provides minimal support for student composing. As Cazden discussed, to enact this familiar interactional rhythm, teachers ask testing questions, students provide minimal responses, and teachers evaluate those responses. Thus interactional mode is very well suited to "assembling factual information" that can be provided in "short answers" (p. 50) but not well suited at all to interactively guided composing, in which ideas are exchanged, elaborated, and integrated.

Moreover, it is not just the kind of talk during composing instruction that shapes learning but the way in which classroom discourse throughout all curricular activities helps shape a classroom epistemology and the literacy practices through which it is enacted (May, Yfr, Lewis, & Mitchell 1996; Nystrand & Graff, in press). For example, Nystrand and Graff (in press) analyzed middle school teacher's efforts to teach argumentative writing through state-of-the-art writing process pedagogy; they argued that a rhetorical emphasis on reporting information couched all literacy activities and thus worked against the teacher's efforts to promote sophisticated written interpretations and analyses.

Even given the best laid teacher plans for productive writing activities and the most thoughtfully enacted curricular context, students inevitably have their own interpretations of those activities, shaped by complex social, developmental, and cultural factors. Students may differ in their social interpretations of the events (e.g., who in fact the audience is, what the actual purpose of the event is, what the evaluative standards are) (Clark & Florio 1981; Dyson 1985; 1993; S. Freedman 1987b; Reves 1991; Sperling & S. Freedman 1987). They may also have differing conceptions about writing and written language than those underlying an activity planned by the teacher. For example, they may not assume the analytic approach to language that underlies and is taken for granted by many beginning literacy programs (Dyson 1999b). They may have differing notions of how narratives are structured or even what stories are (Cazden 1988; Heath 1983; Michaels & Cook-Gumperz 1979). Indeed, they may question whether or not a teacher is actually teaching, particularly given the emphasis on teachers responding conversationally (rather than prescriptively) to students' efforts (Deeplit 1995; Newkirk 1995; Walker 1992).

One particularly potent source of tension between teachers and students is the relationship among students themselves that is expected in the classroom. Although teachers organize and guide communicative activities, students' actions and interactions are inevitably influenced by the social concerns, relationships, and energy among the students themselves. Peer relationships are not necessarily always positive or productive (Lensmire 1993) and, as experienced teachers attest, they too require active monitoring and guidance (Dyson 1997a). Moreover, if peer group values conflict with classroom values, children may reject academic demands: among those aspects of school life most often cited as divisive are those that touch on children's relationships with each other—children having to work silently to value adult more than self and peer approval, to compete with friends for that adult approval (Gilbert & Gay 1985; Gilmore 1983; Labov 1982; Philips 1972; Tharp et al. 1984). In writing classrooms in particular, students having to evaluate each other's work can generate tension (S. Freedman 1987a).

Nonetheless, students' peer relationships do have the potential, even when conflict-ridden, to support student's writing. Peers have the potential to be effective teachers and collaborative learners (Cooper Marquis & Ayers-Lopez 1982; Daithe 1989, 1993; Gere 1987). Through their informal talk during writing times, young children may learn how it is that writing figures into human relationships, as peers respond both critically and playfully to their efforts (Dyson 1989). Through co-constructed writing in collaboratively enacted whole class events (Larson & Maier 2000) and through peer conferences in dyads and small-group sessions (Bruce 1987; Gere 1987; Graves 1983; Nystrand 1986; Sowers 1985), students across the grades may be guided to attend to each other's writing in particular ways. Tensions among students in their preferences for varied kinds of genres and text content, for kinds of social spaces for writing response, and for particular kinds of feedback can become the focus of critical classroom reflection (Dyson 1993, 1997b; Finders 1996; for a review of related issues, see Dahl & Farnan 1998). Students also can use written language to establish relationships with students in other grade levels, other schools, cities, or states, or even other countries (e.g., S. Freedman 1994; S. Freedman & McLeod 1988; Greene 1985; Heath & Branscombe 1985), relationships that can provide them with engaging but potentially demanding audiences.

No doubt we have much to learn about how particular kinds of relationships between teachers and students and among students themselves—and the sorts of talk that enact those relationships—influence students' learning in our very diverse society. As we explore the characteristics of varied classrooms serving students from varied backgrounds we may be able to articulate better the sorts of experiences that are critical for writing growth (e.g., opportunity to talk about, reflect on writing in particular ways) from the particular shapes that critical experience can take (the variety of ways such opportunities can be provided).
Writing and the Transformation of Community

The emphasis of most research on writing and the classroom community is on how the social organization and enacted relations of that community socialize students as writers. Building especially on the critical pedagogy of Freire (1970), there has been some research interest in examining the nature of classroom conditions and processes through which children and youth can use writing to transform or reconstruct community relations themselves, both within the classroom and in the wider community. This research tends to foreground the phrase writing practice. In contrast to the phrase writing event: unlike the latter, the former phrase highlights the ideological aspects of literacy use (see, especially, Luke, 1995, Street, 1995). Critical literacy practices, then, involve talk that helps participate reflect on given words—and potentially change their ways of acting on and with those words in given social worlds.

In the classroom, interactions for critical transformation of the community itself are meant to articulate and examine not just experiential gaps in writing skill or interactional gaps in author intention and audience comprehension, but sociopolitical gaps that are existent in any human community. For example, Dyson (1997b) examined a writing class in an urban primary classroom organized around an “author’s theater” in which children dramatized compositions, many of which were based on the popular media. Ideologies of gender, class, and race were visible in children’s decisions to write (or not write) certain kinds of stories (e.g., superhero ones), in their selection of child actors for varied character roles, and in audience response to the social worth and textual clarity of stories and to the sensibilities of choice of actors. By helping the children articulate the views behind their giggles, sour faces, scrunches noses, and cries of “That’s not fair,” the teacher helped the children link authorial decisions about character and plot to social and ideological issues in their relations to each other (Volosinov, 1973, provided a clear theoretical link between language use and ideological awareness.)

To provide an example from a secondary school, G. Moss (1989) described her efforts to help secondary students articulate their pleasures in and reservations about, what she terms the “un/popular” fiction of teenage romance stories and comic book adventures. In so doing, she revealed the complex authorial processes—decisions about the portrayal of love, power gender roles—that lie behind a seemingly simplistic text. (For further discussions of gender-related issues, see Gilbert, 1989, 1994.) And, in a powerful piece, poet June Jordan (1988) described her African American college students’ talk about writing—especially their talk about the kind of talk in writing—as she helped them (to use Freire’s words) “separate themselves from their own activity [their own speech]” and to reflect on the “historical dimensions” of the negative evaluations they had appropriated uncritically about African American vernaculars (Freire, 1970, p. 80). (For a moving analysis of critical literacy as enacted in an adult women’s writing group, see Heller, 1997.)

Underlying studies of in-classroom interactions is a desire to help students realize their authoring possibilities not only in texts, but in their communities. There have been efforts to document and analyze the kinds of teacher actions and classroom practices that further children’s and youth’s efforts to enact such agency. For example, in a series of papers, Comber and colleagues, especially Comber, 1999; Comber et al., in press. Comber & Nixon, 1999) illustrate that critical literacy is not a gloomy imposition of world problems on innocent children (a common myth). At its best, critical literacy entails teacher attentiveness to issues embedded in students’ everyday talk. Issues that teachers may help link to larger societal issues. Moreover, it can be engaging and, indeed, fun, to take action to be a participant in the larger world. In enacting critical literacy practices, teachers may need to begin with students’ familiar symbolic tools and practices (e.g., drawing pictures, audiotaping interviews), introducing new tools and practices into student repertoires, particularly those involving research strategies and informational and persuasive writing. Finally, teacher intentions may have unintended consequences, realized in resistant or resentful students: critical literacy practices not only are new for teachers; they are new for students. And, moreover, as already noted, classroom communities are not ideologically homogeneous. Any more than they are academically so. As Blake (1997) noted in her ethnography of writing among fifth grade urban girls, private writing contexts may be necessary for exploring sensitive topics, especially if the larger classroom public is itself viewed as unsafe.

In this technologically shrinking world, critical literacy practices can affect change in and out of the classroom, when teachers in different geographic areas collaborate through electronic media, like e-mail, to exchange information about, and explore, local ways of living and to jointly address global concerns (e.g., conditions for children in refugee camps, conservation projects, for documentation and analyses of many such examples, see Cummins & Sayers, 1995). Still, it is important to remember, as Sahni (1994) noted, that an act as simple as writing a letter to one’s teacher can transform power relationships in many classrooms; although Sahni was discussing an authoritarian school in rural India, her appreciation for children’s desires for transforming their relational worlds is relevant for many classrooms.

THE EVALUATION OF WRITTEN LANGUAGE

In any classroom community, a learner’s query like Sharon’s “How do you do it?” may soon be overshadowed by a teacher’s inquiry, “How well can you do it?” For a major educational issue is determining how well the writing of individual students, whole classes, whole school districts, indeed whole countries is progressing. How can student progress be measured? How can successful instruction be identified? An even more basic question is: What is “good” writing? As is discussed later in the section The Development of Writing, there is no one description of what writing progress looks like throughout the school years. Still, there are ways to document progress, ways which we discuss here.

Inside classrooms. The most common classroom practices for evaluating student writing have proven problematic: writing comments on student papers and, particularly for intermediate and secondary school students, grading (Searle & Dillon, 1980,
Tchudi, 1997). Comments on mechanics (spelling, handwriting, grammar) may overshadow any comment on students’ ideas (Perry & Finn, 1981). In addition, when papers are graded, comments may serve primarily to justify the grade rather than to help students learn; furthermore, written comments tend to be phrased so generally that they carry little meaning (Butler, 1980; Hahn, 1981; Sommers, 1982; Sperling & S. Freedman, 1987). When every page of writing is commented on by the teacher, students have little opportunity to practice evaluating their own progress, an activity critical to student growth (Graves, 1983; Hugers, 1986; Hullocks, 1986; Wolf, 1988). To become reflective writers, students must take communication, not grades, as their end goal (Applebee, 1984; Britton et al., 1975; S. Freedman, 1984b; Tchudi, 1997).

An alternative to comments and grades, one applicable across all levels of schooling, is informal assessment based on teacher observation and careful record keeping (e.g., anecdotal records, folders of children’s work samples, portfolios). Through such techniques, student progress is revealed by patterns in behaviors over time (British National Writing Project, 1988; Calfee & Perfumo, 1996; Dixon & Stratta, 1986; Ganeshi & Dyson, 1984; Graves, 1983; Jaggar & Smith-Burke, 1985; Murphy & Underwood, 2000; M. W. Nelson, 1997; Newkirk & Arwell, 1988; Valdes & Sanders, 1999). These patterns are not likely to display smooth forward motion but rather will be characterized by ups and downs. Some kinds of writing activities pose more difficulties than others, and, too, students themselves sometimes take on more challenges when they write than they do at other times (Flower, 1988; Lucas, 1988a, 1988b; Ruth & Murphy, 1988). Finally, the challenges students take on vary depending on the language experience students bring (Cooper & Odell, 1999).

As teachers move toward keeping folders or portfolios of their students’ writing, perhaps giving a grade to the entire portfolio or to selected pieces, they may involve students in the evaluation process. Teachers can ask students to discuss their ways of writing and their products, articulating changes in processes and products over time and across kinds of writing activities. Students are thus helped to formulate concepts about “good” writing, including the variability of “good” writing across situations and audiences (Camp, 1992; Gere & Stevens, 1985; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984; Murphy & Underwood, 2000). As part of their portfolio evaluation, students can select for evaluation pieces they feel most proud of and explain specifically why they like those pieces better than others (Burnham, 1986; Calfee & Freedman, 1996; Camp, 1992; Graves, 1983; Murphy & Underwood, 2000).

In schools, districts, and states. Outside the classroom, writing evaluation plays a major role in the educational decision making of the school, the school district, and the state. For example, writing programs within a school or a district must be evaluated, and students must be assessed for placement in courses or schools or even for promotion and certificiation. Moreover, through an evaluation procedure, teachers may be brought together to develop community standards for “good” writing.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the most popular large-scale assessments of writing were modeled after the evaluations developed and commonly used by the Educational Testing Service (Davis, Scriven, & Thomas, 1987; Diederich, 1974; Myers, 1980; White, 1985). In these evaluation procedures, students wrote on an assigned topic, in a relatively short time, and in a testing situation. Teachers were then brought together to rate the papers, giving a single score to each paper. The teachers discussed their rating standards, and more than one teacher rated each paper, to be certain that raters agreed. When the goal is to make judgments about individuals, evaluators advise that more than one writing sample be gathered from each writer.

These “holistic” evaluation procedures were a major advance over older methods of judging writing that were based on multiple-choice grammar tests, and they were also very useful for helping communities of teachers develop standards together. However, there are serious problems with holistic assessments (Brown, Palincsar, & Purcell, 1986; Lucas, 1988a, 1988b). Writing for a test has little function for the student writers other than for them to be evaluated. Students also must write on topics they have not selected and may not be interested in. Furthermore, they are not given sufficient time to engage in the elaborated processes that, as is soon discussed, are fundamental to how good writers write.

In the mid-1980s an alternative emerged that built on the in-classroom portfolio evaluation just discussed. This alternative moved portfolios into the realm of more standardized, large-scale testing (Calfee & Perfumo, 1996; S. W. Freedman, 1993; Murphy & Underwood, 2000). In most of these early large-scale portfolio assessments, students and their teachers submitted a folder of student work, created as part of normal instructional activity, to be evaluated in a formal evaluation setting (Camp, 1985; Camp & Belanoff, 1987; Elbow, 1986; Elbow & Belanoff, 1986). This alternative, although less controlled and standardized than a single writing sample produced under timed conditions, can provide a more accurate picture of individual writers and writing programs than the timed, single sample assessments. Also, as teachers work together to analyze portfolios, they may develop analytic tools that may prove useful in their teaching.

By the early 1990s, 20 states were considering, if not implementing, some kind of portfolio assessment (Aschbacher, 1991; Calfee & Perfumo, 1992; Gentile, Martin-Rehmann, & Kennedy, 1995). At the close of the decade, Vermont and Kentucky had implemented systems that still continue in some form today. The other states either never got past the experimentation stage or went back to more traditional forms of testing. Underwood (1999) chronicled the story of California’s return to multiple choice testing. Murphy and Underwood (2000) pointed out that “although accountability issues continue to dominate the discourse of policymakers as we end the decade of the 1990s, political interest in mandating portfolio assessment for large-scale programmatic purposes has clearly diminished” (p. 2).

At the district and school level, portfolio implementation has taken a number of forms. Murphy and Underwood (2000) provided detailed descriptions of the most interesting of these. Although many policymakers and educators (e.g., Cooper, 1981; Cooper & Odell, 1977; Diederich, 1974; Mellon, 1975; Myers, 1980; Resnick & Resnick, 1990) expect assessment systems to affect classroom practices, at the state level the trend is toward a
greater disjunction between large-scale assessment systems and what is known about how students write best and how they learn to write. Even the remaining state-level portfolio systems have become less sensitive to classroom issues as they have bent to the demands of testers for increased standardization. As Underwood (1999) showed, what happens at the state level affects what happens at the district and school levels.

In the nation. In the United States, there are two ongoing national assessments of writing: the writing portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), for 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds (Ballato, Farnum, & Kaplan, 1999; Greenwald, Persky, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999; NAEP 1990), and the College Entrance Examination Board’s Achievement Test in English Composition given to a select population of high school seniors. In addition, in the early 1980s, the International Writing Assessment collected writing samples in 14 countries from students in elementary school at the end of compulsory secondary education and at the end of academic secondary education (Gorman, Purves & Degenhart, 1988; Gubb, Gorman, & Price, 1987; Purves, 1988).

These national writing assessments all evaluate relatively short samples of writing collected under formal testing conditions. Thus, the samples present the same validity problems as the impromptu writing scored for school district and state assessments. Only the NAEP has published claims about the status of writing in our nation, and these claims must be interpreted with great caution, given that their conclusions are based on students’ performance on impromptu writing completed in 15 minutes (S. W. Freedman, 1993; Mellon, 1974; Noll, 1981; Silberman, 1989).

The NAEP, responding to complaints about the validity of their conclusions, experimented with a national portfolio study (Gentile, 1992; Gentile et al., 1995). Although national portfolios have never been used for national evaluation purposes in the United States, they were used in England in the 1980s (Dixon & Stratta, 1986). As is the case in the United States, trends in England have also moved away from portfolios or what the British called “coursework-only assessment” toward more tightly constrained testing systems.

The concerns discussed in this opening section of our review—the use of literacy, will be echoed in our succeeding sections. The Process of Writing and The Development of Writing, respectively. Even as we focus in to look at how individual students engage with writing—and how their engagement changes over time—we must bear in mind the purposes and situations that are crouching their efforts, including the people among whom and for whom they are writing. As we have argued, the meaning of writing for individual students, like that of individual notes, is best revealed in composition with others.

**THE PROCESSES OF WRITING**

Sharon’s “How do you do it?” question is central to research on writing processes, not just for 5-year-olds but also for older writers, their teachers, and researchers. All involved want to know how writers write—what problems writers face, how they solve their problems, and what support they need along their journey from first idea to final version.

In the past 2 decades researchers shifted their attention from studies of pieces of writing, the written products, to studies of “how you do it.” of writers composing processes. They investigate what writers think about and the decisions they make, in essence how they manage the complex task of putting thoughts on paper. This shift from studying writing itself to studying how writers write has been accompanied by a similar shift in the orientation of many classroom teachers (Applebee, 2000; Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1986a, 1986b; S. Freedman, 1987b; Greenwald et al., 1999; Hairston, 1982). Still, process approaches in actual classroom practice have not been universally successful (Applebee, 1981, 1984; S. Freedman, 1987b; Hallocks, 1986; Langer & Applebee, 1987; Swanson-Owens, 1986). One difficulty is that there is no “writing process,” but a flexible process, influenced by the kind of writing being attempted, the writer’s purpose and the situational conditions—by, in other words, the complex dimensions of literacy events discussed in our first section. Thus, process research, like all research, does not offer any simple prescriptions for practice, but it can offer a vocabulary for talking about the nature of writing—planning, revising, editing—and insight into how these processes work for particular writers in particular situations.

**Describing Writers at Work**

Research on how writers write began with Emig’s (1971) case studies of 12th-graders. She pioneered the think-aloud protocol as a way of studying how writers compose. These protocols consist of what writers say they are thinking about while they are actually in the process of writing. Protocols, then, give researchers some access to the thinking processes of teenage and adult writers who do not naturally talk as they write. Emig, though, not only used protocols: she used many sources of data, of information, to understand her students’ writing, including, in addition to the think-aloud protocols, extensive interviews with the students about their experiences with school writing and analysis of their written products.

Emig (1971) learned that the highly successful, middle-class, 12th-grade students she studied found school-assigned writing generally unengaging; they spent little time planning what they would say and less time revising it. In essence, school writing was a well-routinized, mechanical activity: its purpose for the students was not to communicate to someone about something or to help them grapple with difficult new material. By contrast, the story and poetry writing these students did for themselves, outside of school, engaged their interest; on such writing, they spent substantial amounts of time writing, planning, and revising.

Since Emig (1971), many researchers have studied student writing processes. Some have used Emig’s case study methods (Perl, 1979; Piasko, 1979; Stallard, 1979). Others have used protocols but from a somewhat different research tradition, most notably Flower and Hayes (1981a, 1981b, 1981c, 1983) from rhetoric and cognitive psychology. Others have observed
writers' behaviors while they write, most notably examining when writers pause and when they write fluently (Chafe, 1982, 1985; Matsuhashi, 1981).

A Model of Adult Composing

While trying to understand how writers compose, some researchers have worked toward a model of a prototypical expert adult's composing process (de Beaugrande, 1984; Bracwell, Fredericksen, & Fredericksen, 1982; Cooper & Matsuhashi, 1983; Hayes, 2000; Hayes & Flower, 1980; Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978; Nold, 1981; Witte, 1985, 1987). This model construction has involved much research on the composing processes of adults, usually mainstream college students and sometimes high school students and has suggested widely accepted characteristics of the adult model.

First, writing is viewed as consisting of several main processes—planning, transcribing text, reviewing—that do not occur in any fixed order. Thought in writing is not linear but jumps from process to process in an organized way which is largely determined by the individual writer's goals. Britton et al. (19-5) and Emig (1971) fully described these processes, although their descriptions are more linear than more recent researchers. Flower and Hayes (1980, 1981a), along with many other researchers (de Beaugrande, 1984; Bridwell, 1980; Daute, 1981; Failey & Witte, 1981; Matsuhashi, 1981; Perl, 1979; Sommers, 1980; Witte, 1983, 1985, 1987), defined these processes recursively, showing how the subprocesses interrupt each other.

If the subprocesses of writing are recursive, any classroom structures that demand that all students plan, write, and revise on cue or in that order are likely to run into difficulty. Writers need flexibility, and they need time to allow the subprocesses to cycle back on each other.

A second characteristic of the adult model describes writing as a hierarchically organized, goal-directed, problem-solving process. Whatever one writes poses an intellectual problem to be solved on multiple levels, with some goals overarching others (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1980; Collins & Gentner, 1980; Flower & Hayes, 1981b; Hayes & Flower, 1980). For many kinds of school writing, writers try to achieve the more global goal of communicating an intended message to a reader by setting up that goal as the overriding problem to be solved. To solve that problem, the writer sets up subgoals and solves subproblems. For example, when writing an essay in school, the writer must solve the subprocesses of how to form letters, how to punctuate and spell, how to construct felicitous written sentences, how to get ideas, how to order those ideas, and so on. Some of these processes become quite automatic and unconscious as the writer matures, whereas others take time, attention, and skill, even for experienced adults.

Thinking about writing as problem solving can be helpful for teachers, guiding them to attend to the particular problems their student writers are grappling with. As is further discussed in a later section, teachers' help is more likely to be effective if it is directed toward specific difficulties students are facing.

Novice-Expert Differences

Another key strand of research on composing shows that "experts" and "novices" solve the problems posed by the task of writing differently. The concept of the novice has been used to include (a) students at all levels whose skills are developing, (b) basic writers who are behind their peers or age group, and (c) young writers or children. Each group, however, is distinctive, having differing characteristics and needs. Moreover, all writers, even the "experts," may continually develop, as they pose new problems and thus meet new challenges.

When college-age experts write essays, they write what Flower (1979) called "reader-based prose." Their less-skilled peers, on the other hand, often create what Flower called "writer-based prose." They are described as not consciously attending to, and Flower and Hayes (1977) concluded they do not think about, their reader while they are writing; instead, they are most concerned with the text. Thinking about the reader seems to help the experts plan their essays and generate ideas.

Findings from other expert-novice studies show that secondary, college-age, and adult experts who are given the same task as novices make global revisions while novices revise mostly on the word level (Bridwell, 1980; Sommers, 1980). Sommers compared the changes adult student and expert writers made as they revised their written work. In analyzing interviews with the writers about their revision process, she found that expert writers revised on the discourse level and made changes in meaning, whereas student writers revised mostly on the word level and made changes in form. Bridwell came to similar conclusions on the basis of her comparisons of the revision process of more and less competent 12th-graders.

Differences in what writers revise are related to how they detect and diagnose problems. Hayes, Flower, Schriver, Stratman, and Carey (1987), in describing the cognitive processes of revision, found that professionals detected more problems than did instructors, who detected more than students. Similarly, professionals displayed a larger repertory of revision strategies than instructors, who displayed more strategies than students for solving local and global problems. Students attempted to solve problems simply by rewriting, without analyzing them.

Witte's (1987) studies, however, suggested caution in drawing conclusions about the extensiveness and meaning of writers' revisions by only looking at the marks made on the page. His work has allowed insight into the words in adult writers' heads before the words appear on the page, what he calls "pre-text," and thus demonstrates that much revision may occur mentally, before anything is written on the page.

The ability to revise demands flexibility as a writer, a willingness to reconsider, to try again. Rose (1980) discovered that writers who suffer from writer's block may follow rigid rules and have inflexible plans. Students who have this type of writing difficulty are stymied because they apply rules rigidly to situations where the rules do not apply. Unblocked writers work with flexible plans rather than rigid rules.

Basic college-age writers may have difficulty following through on their plans; they may lose their train of thought because they spend much of their energy during composing attending to mechanical concerns (Perl, 1979). Too, basic
writers may have a different grammar of written language, an intermediate grammar between speech and writing (Bartholomae, 1980. de Beaugrande, 1982; Shaughnessy, 1977): thus, they may be less able than more expert writers to attune to the "flow" of their text, that is, to detect errors by relying on their sense of the sounds of written text (Hull, 1987).

Relating What One Writes to How One Writes

Another line of research on composing examines how the nature of the writing task affects the writer's strategies. Researchers have demonstrated the effects of different modes of discourse or types of writing on parts of the composing process, be it the amount of attention to audience or engagement with the task itself (Applebee et al., 1984; Britton et al., 1975; Chafe, 1982; Durst, 1982; Emig, 1971; Hidi & Hildyard, 1984; Kroll, 1978; Langer, 1986; Marshall, 1987; Perron, 1974; Tannen, 1982). For example, as writers see their topics as more abstract, they spend more time planning. Writers tend to pause more when writing pieces that require generalizations than when writing reports: furthermore, writers tend to pause more before abstract than concrete sentences (Matsushashi, 1981).

Even given the same writing assignment, different college students will interpret it differently and thus will pose qualitatively different writing problems to themselves (Flower, 1987; J. Nelson & Hayes, 1988). Flower found that students show only minimal awareness that they and others in their class may be solving very different writing problems. J. Nelson and Hayes demonstrated that college students expend significantly more effort and tackle more difficult tasks when their teachers monitor and support them throughout their writing processes, giving them guidance on references and asking them questions along the way. College students also stretch themselves more when they must present their work orally to the class as well as in written form to the teacher.

The Writing Process in the Classroom

We began this review of process research by pointing out that many teachers use "the process approach," an approach to teaching writing that recognizes the many kinds of activities writers may engage in, including planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Although there is at least some indication from the latest NAEP results that drafting processes are correlated with higher test scores for middle and secondary students (Greenwald et al., 1999), it is difficult to evaluate the degree to which the approach in the country as a whole has improved students' writing. Indeed, there seems to be confusion about what a process approach is. In his meta-analysis of the effects of different classroom approaches, Hillocks (1984, 1986) equated the process approach with "the natural process approach." As he described it, teachers following this tack are concerned with having their students "go through a process" as essentially follow a set of procedures that include planning and revising, something more than just transcribing words onto paper. This approach, outlined in some detail in the California

Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program (1986), may yield a set of unconnected "process" activities that fit well into the usual organizational structure of the school—and that do not require teacher decision making to put into place.

Thus, many instructional leaders have expressed concern that the writing process may become a rigid set of activities in the school week: "Monday we plan; Tuesday we draft; Wednesday we respond to drafts; Thursday we revise;" and so on (for an example of such concern, see introduction to Newkirk & Atwell, 1988). Viewing writing as a problem-solving process demands flexibility and room for a recycling through its various subprocesses. Students may not always need to revise, for example, or they may not benefit from response on the day response is scheduled (DiPardo & S. Freedman, 1988; S. Freedman, 1987b).

Furthermore, Australian educators in particular have raised concerns that the process approach took for granted a knowledge of structural features of varied genre forms. to the detriment particularly of nonmainstream students (e.g., Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; for a thoughtful review, see Hicks, 1997). Researchers in the United States have stressed a more fluid sense of genre as kinds of social actions, not set forms (see, e.g., Miller, 1984), but there is evidence that, in the context of process writing activities, middle and secondary school students in particular may benefit from explicit teaching of heuristics for composing genre forms (e.g., Hillocks, 1995; Yeh, 1998).

Moreover, there has been relatively little attention to the varied language situations of writers in our classrooms. For example, nonnative speakers of English and bilinguals may use more than one language as they compose, with their oral and written language development intertwined in patterned ways, influenced in part by their levels of proficiency in the language in which they are writing (Valdes, 1988, who suggested needed future research). Indeed, as Moll, Saez, and Dworin (in press) illustrated, given certain classroom conditions, writing events may support children's growth as bilingual and bicultural people, as they may draw differentially on their languages as tools for talking, reading, notetaking, and composing across the curriculum: in a dialectic fashion, children's resources as bilingual and bicultural people may support their growth as writers and as participants in the intellectual life of the classroom.

In summary, taken alone, knowledge about how adult writers compose provides an inadequate theoretical base for reforming instruction. Because the research on writing processes reveals something about how individuals write, its best use seems to be to help individual teachers better understand the writing processes of their individual students. This teacher knowledge, coupled with an understanding of how writing functions for and is used by writers, can lead to suggestions for reforming the teaching and learning of writing.

Needed as well, though, is an understanding of how writing develops, for the writing process varies, not only across contexts, but also over time. Children do not develop as writers by simply imitating "experts." Many educators have offered insight into the potential of child writers when not stymied by overemphasis on handwriting and spelling (e.g., Ashton-Warner, 1963; Britton, 1970; Burrows, 1959; Evertts, 1970; Rosen & Rosen, 1973). Beginning most notably during the mid-1970s, though,
formal studies of young writers began to yield visions of writing that looked very different from those of adults. In her research, Clay (1975) introduced 3-year-olds who clearly did not plan in any adult-like way, hence the title of her book, *What Did I Write?* Graves (1975) described second-graders whose processes involved much talk to themselves and much drawing as well—neither critical variables in the adult writing literature. Development then, takes its own course and must be examined as it unfolds, from children's points of view and within the contexts of children's lives, not from the viewpoints and literacy contexts of adult lives. For this reason, we now turn to a discussion of children's writing development.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING

When kindergartner Sharon finally decided to have a go at writing, she filled her paper with letters and letterlike shapes, hoping that indeed she had succeeded in “doing” writing but not at all sure of what exactly she had done. Over the last 25 years, language arts educators have gained an appreciation of both young children's ability to “explore with a pencil,” to use Marie Clay's (1975) words, and of the ways students' writing may change over time. As they do in learning other symbol systems (Werner, 1948), children experiment and approximate, gradually becoming aware of the specific features of written language and the relationships between meanings and symbols and between symbol makers and symbol receivers in the recurrent literacy practices of their daily lives in and out of school.

Written language learning, like oral language learning, is complex. For written language too is a “complex of interconnecting systems,” including phonological (more accurately for writing orthographic), syntactic, semantic, and discourse rule systems (K. E. Nelson & K. Nelson, 1978, p. 225). The complexity of the written language system is reflected in the diverse perspectives of the literature on writing development. Some researchers have focused on children's exploration of the visual features of print, for example, its directionality and arrangement on a page (e.g., Clay, 1975). Others have studied how both monolingual (e.g., Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Read, 1975; Treiman, 1993) and bilingual children (e.g., Edelsky, 1986; Silva, 1998) come to understand the orthographic encoding system and the intricacies of graphic segmentation and punctuation (e.g., Cazden, Cordeiro, & Giaocco, 1985; Edelsky, 1983), tracing the evolution from early forms, like a 4-year-old's “ILLVS” to the more conventional “I love (IV) spaghetti” (pronounced “basghetti,” hence “BS”).

Still others have examined such text-level features as the changing structural organization of children's stories or reports (e.g., Applebee, 1978; Kamberelis, 1999; King & Reltel, 1981; Langer, 1986; Newkirk, 1987), the expanding genre repertoire evident in their efforts in classroom contexts (e.g., Chapman, 1995; Dyson, 1999a), or changes in children's control of the varied processes involved in forming texts (e.g., Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Graves, 1975, 1983; Perl, 1979).

Within each area or strand of written language, general patterns in how children perform particular sorts of writing tasks can be identified. Often researchers and educators talk about what “developmental stage” of writing particular children are in by “stage,” they have in mind one aspect of written language use. For example, in the literature on young children's writing, “stage” is most often used in reference to spelling. When we look at a child like Sharon, however, with consideration for the whole of her development as a symbol maker, commenting on what “stage” she is in is quite a different matter.

Although writing can be logically analyzed into its varied aspects, a learner comes as a whole, not displaying knowledge of these aspects in neat sequential order, but in clumps that the researcher and the teacher (not the learner) must separate into neatly organized categories. Furthermore, written language, like oral, is an independent entity but is subject to the demands of the situation. Like a kaleidoscope, its parts are ever newly arranged, newly revealed. Finally, the person controlling the kaleidoscope has his or her own intentions and style, his or her own sense of what's interesting; thus individuals who share similar knowledge about written language may have different stylistic preferences for organizing and using that knowledge for acting, thinking, and expressing meaning (Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, & Klausner, 1985). In brief, the nature of the individual learner, the nature of the situational context, and the complex nature of the writing system itself all interact in written language growth, just as they do in oral language growth (Clay, 1998, Dyson, 1987).

The interplay of these factors suggests that we cannot offer a one-dimensional description of writing development that can serve as a template for all learners. However, educators can ask varied kinds of broad questions that will inform our decisions about the challenges facing and the potential sources of support for students. For example, they can ask how young children as symbolizers—ones virtually blooming with symbolic capacity in the preschool and early school years—approach this relatively more difficult form of symbolization (e.g., Ballenger, 1999; Donaldson, 1984; Dyson, 1989, in press; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Genishi, Stires, & Yung-Chan, 2001; Gundlach, 1982). How do other symbol systems, like those of drawing or of talk, support written language growth? How do they pose tensions, challenges to be resolved?

Educators can also ask, within a developing strand of the system, what sorts of patterns of change have been observed. How do those developmental patterns relate to broader patterns of cognitive, linguistic, and social development (e.g., Bartlett, 1981; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982; Edelsky, 1986; Graves, 1975)? Educators can offer insight into the varied ways these developmental strands may be interwoven as individual learners grow and change: What qualities (of individual styles, linguistic resources, and situational contexts) influence the ways in which students orchestrate these varied dimensions of writing (Bussis et al., 1985; Dyson, 1987; Edelsky, 1986; Moll et al., in press; Perez, 1998; Smitherman, 1994)?

More broadly, educators can ask how students' participation in their everyday communicative practices outside of school function as meaningful frames and as sources of cultural material for their literacy learning in school. As already noted, for children, school exists in a configuration of other social worlds, including those of family, neighborhood, and peers. In those social worlds too, children are active participants in varied kinds
of communicative events through the use of a range of symbolic tools, including, potentially, different languages. In many recent studies of learning of varied kinds, not just writing, researchers have turned to these familiar, everyday cultural practices as the basis for development, providing resources and the social agency and guidance to strategically use those resources (for discussion, see Goodnow, 2000). Thus, in research on writing development, educators can ask how children recontextualize their communicative resources in school, and they can ask about the developmental challenges they face in negotiating boundaries of symbol systems and social practices (Dyson, 1999b, 2001; Moll et al., in press. Perez, 1998). Ideally, children reconfigure, rearrange, and rearticulate their resources, as they collaboratively construct and participate in new communicative practices (Dyson, 2000).

In the following sections, we selectively review the developmental literature, intending to capture a sense of development, as children’s writing possibilities evolve and expand into new practices. We aim too to illustrate the kinds of social and symbolic resources that support development. Because other chapters in this volume discuss students’ developing control of conventions, we emphasize here changes in their ways of composing text worlds. For example, in a Vygotskian sense, what sorts of collaborations with others guide children’s learning? In a Piagetian sense, how do productive tensions, between self and others, between meaning intended and meaning formed, get set into motion? To harrow back to an earlier theme, in a sociocological sense, what qualities of classroom cultures allow students’ sociocultural and linguistic resources to be made visible and relevant to school learning? We join here with the work of the many teachers who have shared their insight into the workings and unfoldings of writing in their particular environments (e.g., S. Freedman, Simons, & Kalnin, 1999; Hillocks, 1995; Newkirk & Atwell, 1988; for a review of instructional practices and students writing, with an emphasis on teacher inquiry, see Dahl & Farnan, 1998).

The Nature of Writing Development

**Children’s early ways of writing.** Although children may be initiated into the use of written symbols during infancy, they control first-order symbol systems, like speech and drawing, before they control second-order systems like written language (systems in which one symbol stands for another, as the written graphics stand for the spoken word). Researchers have pointed out that children use drawing, talk, and other symbolic forms to support their early exploration of and use of print (Dyson, 1982, 1989; Genishi et al., in press. Graves, 1981; Gundlach, 1981).

Children themselves make clear this linking, as they declare their interest in “writing houses and stuff.” They understand that writing, like drawing, is a way of representing experiences. Children may, in fact, initially view writing as similar to drawing in the way that meaning is encoded in both. That is, they may view writing as direct symbolism: Children may not form letters to represent speech but to directly represent known people or objects or the names of those figures (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982). In their view, readers may then elaborate on, talk about, the written names (Dyson, 1983).

For example, 5-year-old Sance’s piece, produced in an open-ended writing center, is similar to many products by young children in which they inventory some of their important symbols (Fig. 70.1).

**FIGURE 70.1. Sance’s writing and drawing.**

In their view, readers may then elaborate on, talk about, the written names (Dyson, 1983).

For example, 5-year-old Sance’s piece, produced in an open-ended writing center, is similar to many products by young children in which they inventory some of their important symbols (Fig. 70.1).

Following are Sance’s comments on her graphics:

That’s my Mama’s name [Patry]. That’s my phone number [1626]. That’s my house. That’s a whale. That’s grass.

This is my name: HBO. That’s my neighbor. That’s my brother’s name [Troy]. That’s love. And that’s my dog.

Sance graphically depicted figures with letters or with drawings, and then she talked about these important people and things. As her piece suggests, children’s first conventionally written words are usually their own names, and, from those names, they reach out to learn more about written language. For example, 5-year-old Mark commented, “That’s me,” pointing to the letter M. His peer Rachel remarks, “That goes in Brian’s name,” when she spots a B.

Children’s early behavior reflects the complex and hierarchical nature of the symbol system, for they seem to initially explore all aspects of written language (Clay, 1975; Hiebert, 1981). In addition to finding personally meaningful connections with these new symbol systems, they often explore the medium itself, with no concern for a specific message: in their exploring, they play with print’s basic graphic features, for example, its linearity and the arrangement of print lines on the page (Clay, 1975). Children also repeat for pragmatic or exploratory purposes familiar sentence or phrase routines (“I love you”), and they may even write whole texts (stories); these extended texts may be written with children’s least sophisticated encoding procedures (e.g., cursive writing) (Dyson, 1981; Sulzby, 1985). Their efforts to write for immediate audiences, as in letters and cards, may result in more conventional words than their writing for less specific audiences (as in book writing) (Lamme & Childers, 1985).
Once children gain some initial understanding of the unique nature of the symbol system, including its alphabetic nature—that precisely what is read depends on precisely what letters are written and that particular oral/written relationships define the precise letters—writing may become more difficult. Children may be less willing to randomly put down well-known letters, or to simply trust that a reader will find a message in their printed graphics (Clay. 1975). They must work hard to orchestrate the complex message creating and encoding process of writing. In so doing, they lean on other people, other symbol systems, and their understanding of the sort of activity they are participating in (i.e., their knowledge of the kind of writing expected in any particular situation).

**Patterns in structural development.** Children’s early writing often consists of well-known words, simple statements, or repetitive sentence structures (Clay: 1975; Edelsky. 1986; McKeag. 1981; Sowers. 1981). The text is often just a reference point for an experience, which may well have been recorded more fully elsewhere, in talk or in an ephemeral, in-drawn, Depending on the child’s intentions, a label could be the written up of an imaginary world (Dyson. 1983, 1989) or the seedling of an essay on a topic of interest (Newkirk. 1987). Thus, to gain insight into children’s efforts— and to help them reflect on what exactly they have done—their teachers may have to listen to children’s talk during the drawing and writing as well as ‘read’ both their pictures and their text.

Children’s early written texts, like their spelling (Henderson. 1981: Read. 1975) and syntax (Loban. 1976; O’Donnell, Grifin. & Norris. 1967) undergo transformations during the school years (Gundlach. 1981). They not only become longer. they also become more coherent and internally cohesive. For example, children become less likely to make references outside the texts themselves (e.g., to begin texts with “This is”) or to use pronouns without references (e.g., to use “He is” when who “he” actually “is” is not clear). Still, even middle school children have difficulties making clear these internal connections in particular situations, for example in disambiguating two ‘he’s’ when a text involves two same-sex characters (Bartlett. 1981).

In addition to changes in length and internal connectedness, the global structure of children’s texts becomes more complex over time. Even preschoolers are aware of differences in text structures or genres. Through their experiences with the print world surrounding them, they come to realize that surface forms of letters, maps, and stories. for example, may all vary (Harste, Woodward, & Burke. 1984). Yet, as just discussed, children’s initial authoring, their stories and reports in school, may consist of statements and labels.

A number of researchers have traced the increasing complexity and structural integrity of children’s texts, particularly their written stories. By the time they begin formal schooling, young children generally display an understanding of many underlying features of narratives, that is, of their culture’s way of storytelling (Applebee. 1978; Leondar. 1977; Stein & Glenn. 1979; Wolf. 1985). Children can often tell stories with recognizable characters engaged in simple plots, with beginnings, middles, and ends. They know the conventional “once upon a time” beginning and, less often, the “happily ever after” ending, and they place intervening events in the past tense.

King and Rentel (1981, 1982) illustrated how, over the course of the first 2 years of schooling, children’s written stories acquired the structural complexity evident from the very beginning of school in their orally told stories. This progress in writing was less evident for non-middle class than middle class children in their study; the former children began with less knowledge of written languagelike story structures, but, in addition, they had fewer opportunities in their school to hear, produce, and talk about stories.

Although basic narrative knowledge is evident quite early, it does continue to develop throughout the school years. For example, it is not until the middle school years that detailed information about characters’ motivations and reactions is regularly included in students’ stories. Similarly, elaborate accounts of how events unfolded are not consistently given until the middle and junior high years (Bartlett. 1981). Indeed, even fluent adolescent writers may be far from skilled in embedding the quality of an experience in textual description and narration of actors and their actions (Dixon & Stratta. 1986); secondary students, like elementary ones. may discover that, in visualizing and dramatizing their stories (in making use of other media), characters’ unarticulated emotions emerge in facial expressions, gestures, movement and dialogue—all aspects of the living ‘text’ that may be translated into words (Wagner. 1998) or, perhaps, remain fully realizable only in alternative symbolic forms (Smagorinsky. 1995).

There is less information available on the development of expository prose, but what is available suggests a more gradual development. Young children do use exposition (Bissex. 1980; Kamberelis. 1999; Langer. 1986; Newkirk.1984; Taylor. 1985). but research has emphasized how even middle and junior high school students grapple with nonfictional forms (e.g., Bereiter. 1980; Nystrand & Graff. 2001; Scardamalia. 1981). Bereiter and Scardamalia suggested that students’ difficulty with these forms has to do with their general cognitive development: that is, students have difficulty integrating the multiple ideas contained in exposition into an orderly whole. However, students may simply have less exposure to models of expositions and, in the primary grades, fewer opportunities for practice (Langer. 1985).

From the work of Newkirk (1987) with primary grade children and Langer (1986) with intermediate and middle school children comes a sense of how children’s expository writing may be gradually transformed. Without claiming that there is a rigid developmental sequence, Newkirk presents a general progression of structural complexity in children’s texts. Simple written labels for pictures may evolve into a series of labels or linked information statements, attributes, or reasons. For example, an early label like bird or a simple listing of figure names (bird, dog, house, flower) may appear before two-unit clauses—‘couplets’—which can link the ‘litany-like repetition’ for example:

This is my knife My knife is sharp (one couplet)
This is a bowy knife Bowie knives are sharp [another couplet]

(Newkirk, 1987, pp. 131, 133)
Still more complex are texts containing paragraphs in which the statements are in some kind of logical order, even though paragraphs themselves may not yet be ordered.

Like Newkirk's. Langer's (1986) findings also suggested that students gradually transform structures they already control. For example, as late as ninth grade, students did not regularly use such complex expository forms as problem/solution, causality, or comparison of alternatives to globally organize their texts. However. when they examined lower level. more circumscribed structures. Langer found that indeed more complex expository structures did gradually appear across the school years (see also Durst. 1984).

As just illustrated, text structures, like children's drawing schemata (Goodnow. 1977) and grammatical structures (Slabbin. 1979). undergo gradual transformations. Rather than adopting wholly new structures, students seem to solve new text-forming problems by gradually adapting forms already controlled. This transformation process is conservative: text features are added on before internal restructuring occurs (Bartlett. 1981).

Similarly, the very process of rereading—revising—texts develops conservatively. With Sowers (1985) and Calkins (1980). Graves (1983) studied 16 elementary school children (Grades 1 through 4) in a middle class community school over a 2-year period. One of the researchers' major means for studying the children—which became a major means for teaching them as well—was the "workshop" conference in which researchers and teachers talked to individual children about their writing processes and products. The children's responses to these conferences illustrated a gradual development of an awareness of text malleability and of the means to deliberately act on that awareness.

For example, children seemed willing to change spelling and handwriting earlier than they did structure and content. Indeed, they might find abandoning drafts easier than reworking them (Calkins. 1980). Children may find little use for revision unless they are grappling with ordering ideas (Graves. 1983)—a list of names or statements makes sense in any arrangement—or unless they are actively working toward some social end requiring a heightened attention to chosen words (e.g., a rhyme, a horror story: Dyson. 1993, 2000). In the latter case, revision may not occur in a formal phase of the writing curriculum (i.e., after a conference) but in the course of composing itself. Working collaboratively and playfully, a peer may increase such attention to writing decisions (Daiute. 1995).

The research reviewed on discourse forms and the insight it offers into students' ways of structuring texts may help teachers respond in helpful ways to possibilities present in individuals' work. That is, by looking analytically at students' efforts, teachers may find new structures in their products. structures that can be talked about and built upon (e.g., "You know how you arranged the sentences in that paragraph? I wonder if the paragraphs themselves should be rearranged.")

As argued throughout this section, developmental changes in students' writing processes and products are linked not only to changes in writing itself but also to changes in how students use writing vis a vis other symbol systems. particularly drawing and speech. For example, Dyson (1989) examined the changing role of writing in the symbol making of eight primary children through Grade 3) children in an urban magnet school. In the observed classrooms, children wrote but in the very same composing event, also wove their symbolic productions by drawing, singing, playing, and above all, talking. Indeed, the social functions of composing time were accomplished primarily through talking and drawing; through those media, children not only represented imaginative worlds, but they also connected with their friends as peers talked about, critiqued, and at times playfully dramatized each others' texts.

The children's multimedia texts, however, were unstable. generative of potentially productive tensions. For example, the space-time frames of drawn pictures, enacted dramas, and written texts did not fit neatly together nor did the dull black-and-white print hold the same semiotic capacities as other, more accessible and, in one child's words, "prettier" media. Moreover, the social events themselves were unstable. The overlapping symbolic worlds of text, talk, and pictures: the ongoing social world; and the wider world of experiences all exist in different space-time structures: tensions among these structures were evident in the children's talk during writing and also in their texts (e.g., in shifts of tense and of person). That is, children's often awkward texts, with their unstable time frames and points of view, result not only from children's grappling with discourse forms—with textual worlds—but from their grappling with multiple worlds. For example, consider second-grader Jake's piece, written as he played inside—and outside—his text with his friend Manuel:

Once there was a boy that is named Manuel. Manuel is going to fly the fastest jet and I am going to fly the the jet too. But Manuel's headquarters is going to blow up But I am OK. But I don't know about Manuel but I am going to find Manuel and on the story goes as Jake finds Manuel assures himself of his safety (Manuel are you OK? Yes I am OK.) and then saves him by shootung the bad guys 'out of the universe'."

"Simple" narrations, then, are not so simple (cf. Perera. 1984), considering the different media and different "worlds" writers move among. Nonetheless, the tensions between intentional composers and curious if confused audience members, between an imagined world and the symbolically fragmented product others may experience, may become the focus of productive talk among students and teachers. Indeed, students may be able to support the development of more coherent written forms by deliberately supplementing their efforts with, or examining them from the standpoint of, other media forms and other participants (e.g., drawings, dramatic play, Dyson. 1989: 1997b; Palev. 1980; Smagorinsky. 1995; Wagner. 1998). Thus, with guidance and experience, students may manipulate straightforward chronologies into time expansions and condensations, foreshadowing and remembering (Dixon & Stratta. 1986; Graves. 1983), as they develop new ways of structuring experiences—and connecting with readers.

Recontextualization: development as repertoire expansion. Recently, researchers have called attention to the narrow scope of genre forms considered in school, relative both to the expanding and increasingly multimodal genres used in contemporary times and to the predominant role of popular genres in
children's and youth cultures (e.g., Alvermann. Moon. Hagood, 1999; Buckingham & Setton-Green. 1994; Dyson. 1997b, 1999a; Luke. 1995; Marsh. 1999; New London Group, 1996). In this literature, genre is viewed not as a typified text form but instead as a kind of social participation (Bakhtin, 1986) or communicative practice (Hanks, 1996).

Most relevant to this subsection of the review is, first, the realization that students' ways of structuring texts may differ from those expected, not because of some general developmental difficulty but because, in fact, the students are participating in a different kind of practice, and producing a different genre form than that assumed by the school. These differences may be attributable not only to ethnic cultures but to students' participation in local forms of popular culture (e.g., Dyson, 1993, 1997b; G. Moss, 1989; Newkirk, in press). For example, children may be informed by visually driven media forms, like superhero or action-adventure movies, or by relationship-driven narratives, like romances.

Second, the diversity of students' potential communicative practices suggests the social and political complexity of classrooms themselves. As earlier discussed, students' social orientations to goals and audience, and their sense of rhetorical effectiveness (or ineffectiveness), are informed and guided by relations, tastes, and values that mark their membership or distance from complex peer worlds.

Finally, children's strikingly varied communicative experiences in families, communities, and peer groups situates literacy learning within a diversity of developmental pathways (Clay, 1998). The developmental cliche that children build from what they know has been central to the literature on writing since the 1970s, but children themselves have been treated generically and the developmental pathway imagined as a singular route.

Seminal research emphasizing children's dependence on communicative experience, and the gradual expansion of their communicative repertoire, was done by Britton (1970) and Britton et al. (1975). For example, in a study of the written products produced in school by secondary students, Britton et al. found a predominance of "transactional" writing, writing to accomplish some practical aim in the world (e.g., giving information). They argued that students may become more comfortable and fluent as writers—and be better able to reflect on their experiences—when initially allowed to write "expressively," that is, in a relaxed, conversational way. To illustrate, the authors presented a number of student texts, including the following text by a young girl:

It is quite easy to make oxygen if you have the right equipment necessary. You will need a test tube (a large one), a stand with some acid in it. You will need also a bunston burner. Of course you must not forget a glass tank too. A thin test tube should fit neatly in its place. When you have done that fill the glass tank and put the curved end upwards. Put the glass tank on the table and fill with water. Very soon you will find that you have made oxygen and glad of it. (Britton et al., 1975, p. 196)

Moffett (1968: Moffett & Wagner, 1983) also wrote persuasively about the importance of writing that is infused, like the above science report, with the writer him or herself. Indeed, many successful writing programs have followed this dictate: students begin by writing about familiar subjects for known others (for example, see earlier discussion on 1ests's (1980) work with teachers), gradually expanding their textual repertoire, that is, their understanding of how text forms and functions position authors in particular stances toward the experienced world and toward anticipated readers (Bakhtin, 1986).

It is developmentally sensible that control of formal discourse forms will happen gradually and that many students will build from more comfortable conversational forms. Indeed, it is this concept that underlies "dialogue journal" programs, which have been used to help students from varied backgrounds learn to write (Staton et al., 1988, see also Fulwiler, 1987). However, the emphasis on conversational writing predated the more recent emphasis on young children's early writing, which is decidedly unlike speech. Moreover, the research underestimated students' interest in, and experience with, varied kinds of writing, just as it underestimated the tremendously diverse roles writing may play in the lives of individuals as members of diverse discourse communities (Luke, 1995). Students' familiarity with particular genres, and thus their "comfort" with them, varies. They may use genre forms inappropriately (e.g., a personally expressive piece for a task requiring an informative stance, a summary for one requesting a persuasive piece) not because they are at some earlier developmental stage in discourse production but because they do not understand the particular disciplinary conversation they are entering (Applebee, 1996).

Therefore, there is not a singular developmental pathway through which students progress on their way to a textual pinnacle. Students must make sense of school literacy tasks, and the written medium itself, in the context of their experiences with other texts, some of which are not and undoubtedly will not be central to school literacy curricula. For example, Dyson (1999a, 2000, in press a, in press b) focused on urban primary school children's appropriations from out-of-school cultural and textual practices, particularly the materials of popular culture. Analysis of ethnographic data revealed that children drew deeply on nonacademic social worlds to negotiate their entry into school literacy; those worlds provided them with agency and meaningful symbols, including those from popular music, films, animated shows, and sports media. The children's use of this material was developmentally useful in part because it provided them with conceptual content, functional genres, models of textual structures and elements, and a pool of potential characters, plots, and themes.

Moreover, the use of media material also posed useful developmental challenges in differentiating symbol systems and social practices. For example, information about games results is arranged differently on a television screen during a sports news show than it would be in a prose report; popular music themes are "too fast" for children and may best be written supreptitiously; and animated characters' interactive style is more visual, more physical than the dialogue that provides the substance of young children's early reading books. Thus, at the very same time that children were differentiating the elements of the written symbol system, they were also differentiating the new social practices of school and their underlying ideological values. Indeed, becoming socioculturally and politically astute in
the use of written language is a potential and important developmental outcome in contemporary times.

This section closes with a return to the earlier introduced concept of orchestration (Busis et al. 1985). Students cannot control all aspects of the written system at once (Graves. 1982; Jacobs. 1985; Weaver. 1982). There are individual differences, stylistic differences, in how students get a handle on the process, that is, in which aspects of the process they do or do not attend to at any given writing moment. Moreover, to this orchestration, students bring varied resources—different understandings of the encoding system, of text structure, and of literacy’s purposes—and they bring diverse ways of interacting with other people and with other symbolic media (Dyson. 1987).

The task of supporting students—the task of teaching—is therefore also very complex. In Applebee’s (1996) words, classroom “literacy events will be shaped by... [diverse] discourses, not just by that of the academic tradition. And the teacher’s ability to mediate among these traditions, drawing from rather than fighting against them, will have a substantial impact on the learning that occurs” (p. 101). Teachers are supported in their efforts by their understandings of the nature of writing and of the developmental challenges inherent in writing. They are supported as well by their ability to observe in students’ processes and products signs of what students are grappling with and by their understanding and ability to make use of the resources available to them in the classroom environment. The most important of those resources are the human ones—themselves and their students.

The Support System for Writing Development

Understandings of the social support for learning to write have been influenced by the theoretical ideas of Vygotsky and, more specifically, by research on children’s acquisition of language. Vygotsky (1934/1978) argued that learning is a social process: children are initiated into the use of their culture’s signs and tools, such as written language, by their interactions with other people.

From the very first days of the child’s development, his activities acquire a meaning of their own in a system of social behavior and, being directed towards a definite purpose, are refracted through the prism of the child’s environment. (p 30)

Children, then, grow and learn as they join in ongoing social activities, engaging in problem solving with others. Gradually, they begin to internalize—take over internally—the processes they initially performed collaboratively. Just as a symphony gives meaning to the individual notes it contains, the social system in which children participate shapes the cognitive development of individuals (Rogoff. 1990; Rogoff & Lave. 1984).

Schools, therefore, can promote development best if they are very social places, places where students have ample opportunities to interact with one another and with their teacher. Schools can maintain order and organization, but they cannot remain halls of silence. Although the emphasis here is on teachers’ efforts in classroom settings, efforts to build interactive classroom communities will be influenced by institutional qualities of schools themselves. For example, in her study of secondary school classrooms in Great Britain and the United States, S. Freedman (1994) analyzed school-level support for teachers’ efforts to create learning communities, support that was much stronger for British than U.S. teachers. All the British schools allowed teachers longer time spans to work with and get to know the same group of children; they also subdivided the school itself into smaller working units and, within those units, offered smaller classes. Moreover, the schools organized academic departments that allowed substantive interaction among teachers themselves. These school-level supports, which were not the norm for U.S. schools, were related to the general nature of communities teachers envisioned and enacted and, moreover, to the depth of student involvement in the intellectual life of the classroom.

It is to the nature of involvement itself, and its relationship to learning, that we now turn. In so doing, we circle back here, in the closing pages of this chapter, to the concepts discussed earlier in the section Literacy in the Classroom Community. Because writing research has placed much theoretical and pedagogical emphasis on dyadic encounters between individual students and their teachers, we begin by highlighting these encounters. However, ultimately, the social support system for writing is found in the qualities of the classroom community as a whole.

The role of interaction in development. Vygotsky (1934/1978) suggested that social interaction leads a child’s development forward in the context of specific, culturally valued activity. Learning does not wait upon but in fact leads development, as the instructor aims for the learner’s “zone of proximal development... the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with peers” (p. 86). A child’s learning, then, is dependent on the nature of the social activity, which reveals and extends (or does not) that child’s relevant knowledge and skill. As Lee and Smagorinsky (2000a) commented, in Vygotskian-inspired studies, “context and capacity are intertwined” (p. 2).

Researchers have focused on understanding more precisely how thinking is influenced by social interaction in a variety of home, work, and school settings (e.g., Goodnow, Miller, & Kessel. 1995; Haneda & Wells. 2000; Lee & Smagorinsky. 2000b). In daily life, teachers do not simply direct learners’ performance but, rather, collaborate with them: teachers model both problem-solving processes and involve learners in those processes.

The following classroom example illustrates a collaborative social interaction about a piece of writing between Art Peterson and his ninth-grade student, Gina. In this example, Peterson and Gina discussed a draft of a paper that she had written about her friend Dianne. After reading Gina’s draft, Peterson modeled how Gina might go back and forth between generalization and support for her generalizations:
Peterson: All right. . . . What is Dianne’s main quality as you see it?
Gina: Uhm, well, she is pretty phony.
Peterson: Phony.
Gina: . . . That’s the main word. Phony. Uhm . . . she has a lot of money and she uses it to get people to like her. She thinks that her money is the only thing that’s in her that’s worth anything. So in a lot of ways she’s very uh—
Peterson: Insecure.
Gina: Insecure. Well she’s also secure in that . . . she tries to act as if she is secure. You can really see through that after you get to know her. . . . She uses her friends as a sort of shield. If she wants to do something, and because of her insecurity she feels bad about it, she tells her friend, “Go do this for me.” For example, if she wants to uh ask somebody to do something for her. . . . Her friend said she wanted me to go to the movies with her. She was insecure about me saying “yes” or “no,” whether or not I liked her. So she asked her friend to ask me.
Peterson: Okay. Okay. So you’ve got this insecure person, but she has certain uh uh—
Gina: But she tells people in a lot of ways. A lot of people think that she is the most secure person that they’ve ever seen.
Peterson: Yeah. Because she has these little uh tricks or devices, one of which is money.
Gina: Yeah. Uhm.
Peterson: Another, another, another . . .
Gina: She has lots of clothes, her tennis ability, her skiing ability. That stuff.
Peterson: Okay, and then she has all these other little manipulative techniques.
Gina: Yeah. She uses her friends.
Peterson: Yeah right.
Gina: Yeah.
Peterson: Okay. So that’s good. You’ve got a person who is basically insecure, but is able to cover it up. Of course you’ve got to establish her insecurity. You can’t just say she’s insecure.
Gina: Uh hum.
Peterson: I mean you’ve got to [unclear] give me some examples of how this shows through sometimes. Uh hum. But then, you get in to the way you use these little techniques that she uses. That could be good. (S. Freedman, 1987b)

Peterson’s questions allowed Gina to articulate her essential understanding of Dianne. Through this collaborative problem solving with her teacher, Gina comes to new understandings of Dianne’s insecurity, as she sorts out the appearance from the reality. Gina moved from describing Dianne as phony to insecure, to apparently secure. Peterson did not impose his ideas; rather, he has never met Dianne. Instead, playing the roles of interested listener and reader, as well as teacher, he drew an inference from what Gina had said about Dianne, gave Gina opportunity to elaborate on the reasons others perceive Dianne as secure, coached Gina in synthesizing her thoughts by taking one of her judgments (Dianne appears secure although she is really insecure), modeled the process of supporting a generalization by adding a piece of support from what Gina has already said (Dianne’s use of money), and then asked Gina to independently add further elaboration and thereby show that she understood the process he had just modeled. Finally, he summarized what he and Gina had constructed, what would become the essence of Gina’s paper: “You’ve got a person who is basically insecure, but is able to cover it up.” Peterson led Gina to verbalize more than the surface phoniness, to understand its source and its effects. Gina used oral language in the form of a student-teacher conversation to bring her thoughts together (S. N. Freedman, 1987b).

As Peterson illustrated, teachers need to be sensitive to their students’ current skills and understandings and provide collaborative support to help them move along (Cole & Griffin, 1980; Wertsch et al., 1980). “In instruction using the zone of proximal development, the adult oversees the construction of an instructional context by establishing references to what the child already knows. This context allows the child to build new information or skills into the existing knowledge structure” (Rogoff & Gardner, 1984, p. 100).

Instructional procedures. In 1979, Cazden summarized research on discourse learning and proposed Bruner’s studies of mother-infant interaction as a starting point for instructional models, which indeed were developed (e.g., Applebee & Langer, 1983; Brown et al., 1986; Langer & Applebee, 1984; Palincsar & Brown, 1984). It was Bruner and his colleagues who characterized the adult role as one of “scaffolding” early language learning (Bruner, 1978; Ninio & Bruner, 1978; Rainier & Bruner, 1978). This scaffolding involved familiar and routinized situations such as peekaboo games and storyline rituals, which serve both as immediate ends in themselves and as contexts within which children gradually learn more sophisticated language functions: Mothers “would introduce a new procedure and gradually ‘hand it over’ to the child as his skills for executing it developed” (Bruner, 1983, p. 60).

These efforts to apply the concept of scaffolding to teaching and learning in schools are appealing. However, as earlier discussed, the scaffolding metaphor oversimplifies the professional challenge of establishing truly dialogic relationships between teachers and students (McCarthy, 1994; Nystrand, 1997), of actually being able to establish references to what the child already knows; to return to Rogoff and Gardner’s confident phrase (1984, p. 100): In classrooms, there is no generic “‘the child’; children may not share teachers’ assumptions about what sort of text is being collaboratively produced, nor even about how teacher-student interaction should proceed (e.g., Delpit, 1995; Dyson, 1993; Reyes, 1991; Walker, 1992). Indeed even the scaffolding Bruner described may unfold in very different ways in different cultures (Heath, 1983; Schieffelin, 1979).

In assisting developing writers, teachers can provide a variety of kinds of social interaction around writing—including teacher-guided class collaborations, teacher conferences with individuals or small groups, and formal and informal interactions.
among the students themselves (see, e.g., Flood & Lapp, 2000; Larson & Maier, 2000; Moll & Whitmore, 1995; Putney, Green, Dixon, Duran, & Yeager, 2000). Indeed, as Larson (1999) noted, in interactive composing events, the responsibilities of adults and children can be quite fluid, as participants shift among the roles of, and overlap their actions as, teachers, authors, coauthors, and overhears of others’ efforts.

Student interaction itself can take many forms. In classrooms, writers may talk to one another about their writing informally as they work side by side on their individual papers (Dyson, 1989) or as they collaborate on a joint piece (Daute, 1989, 1993). As Daute (1993) argued, the informal and playful talk of elementary school children sounds quite different from more formal teacher-student conferences. However, its playfulness—its childlikeness—is in fact its value, for language play involves modeling, exploring, and negotiating the sounds and meanings of language. Students, particularly secondary school students, may also interact in highly structured peer response groups (Berkenkotter, 1984; S. Freedman, 1984, 1987b; Gere & Abbott, 1985; Gere & Stevens, 1985; Healy, 1980; Macrorie, 1970, 1984; Moffett, 1968; Newkirk, 1984), in special peer tutoring programs (Bruffee, 1973, 1974, 1984, 1985; Hawkins, 1976), in classrooms organized specifically to allow for peer writing groups (Elbow, 1973; Murray, 1984; Nystrand, 1985), and even in writing groups that are based in communities rather than schools (Gere, 1987; Heller, 1987).

In working toward interactive classroom communities and, particularly, in their efforts to establish common frames of reference with their students, teachers have engaged with children’s families and communities outside the classroom (e.g., Edwards, 1999; McCaleb, 1994; Moll et al., 1992). Within the classroom, they have organized a curriculum of thematically interrelated events on which both they and their students can draw (e.g., Putney et al., 2000). Furthermore, teachers have organized classroom practices in which to learn from and with children about the textual practices—including those influenced by the popular media—that inform their composing efforts: such practices help teachers and students enact “permeable curricula” (Dyson, 1993), in which they allow for students’ social and textual knowledge, for class members to learn from each other, and for their own provision of analytic language to help students name and discuss the diversity of textual and media practices that may be unanticipated by the curriculum but critical to contemporary society (see also Edelsky, 1999).

In the end, for teachers or peers to provide meaningful support to developing writers, they must work in environments that are flexible, where they can be attentive to the highly varied needs of individual writers. Indeed, writers and teachers of writing will need to become “members of a diversified community of learners—dynamically interacting and, like the business of becoming a writers, forever in process” (DiPardo & S. Freedman, 1988, p. 145).

CONCLUSION

Sharon’s task is complex but has many years. Indeed, a lifetime, in which to build a repertoire of skills that will enable her to create the music of her written language portfolio. She will need the help and encouragement of many people along her way—members of her community and of her family, teachers, friends, and classmates.

As she grows up, Sharon’s developmental path may take different directions from the paths of some of her other 5-year-old friends. The challenge for the schools is to understand Sharon’s needs and the needs of Sharon’s friends and to provide the support they all will need throughout their years in the classroom.

Through supportive and responsive classroom environments, schools may best help each generation grow into literacy in ways that enable them to use written language productively and fulfillingly throughout their lives.

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