Item 12

set research information for teachers
number one 1986

Six Weeks Writing in Two Secondary School Classrooms



Trace Hodgson

Six Weeks Writing in Two Secondary School Classrooms

By David Philips
NZCER

> *When people say they do a lot of work in class, they usually mean writing and, for me, writing is the hardest thing to do.*

Philip, a fourth former in a Wellington high school, was not very keen on writing. He thought little of his own writing ability, tended to write very slowly and was of the view that his difficulties with spelling prevented him from writing down good ideas:

> *When I spell things right I think it's good. I wouldn't mind writing so much if I could spell correctly.*

For Philip, writing was indeed hard work.

Not all students find writing as painful as he does. Philip and several other students told me what they thought of writing as I looked on. Two of us spent six weeks in a third form (Year 8) and six weeks in a fourth form (Year 9) to find out how 13- and 14-year-olds approach the tasks which writing presents. We also noted how their teachers in English, Science and Social/Economic Studies were using written work as a part of their teaching. The students and teachers were interviewed regularly and actual samples of writing were examined while the students were producing them and afterwards. What strategies were used by the students when writing? How did the teachers tell their students what to write?

I How Do 13- and 14-Year-Olds Approach Writing?

Variety

In one school only, we selected 8 students for detailed study. Variety was the norm. There were differences in the emphasis given to presentation, in the amount of writing completed and the time taken, in the attention given to proofreading and revising, and in the way specific difficulties were handled (such as asking the teacher what to do).

Let's look at each of these aspects in turn to see how the students approached them.

(A) Presentation

Layout of pages

Much of the written work both the third and fourth formers were required to do was accompanied by diagrams, charts and other kinds of illustration, often forming an integral part of what they were asked to do. Most students also adhered to various requirements for the layout involving features such as the day's date, underlining, headings (important ones such as the titles of lists), gaps between paragraphs and sections of work, and margins.

Art work

Some students spent a great deal of effort on the appearance of the written page. Tidy handwriting, carefully lettered and coloured headings (most commonly using felt-tip pens), numbered sections and the date written in the top lefthand corner of the page received a lot of attention. A page from Tania's work illustrates this. (See figure 1.)

Figure 1
Page from Tania's Writing

4/10/83

T.V.'s VIEW OF MEN AND WOMEN...

The women in ad's seem to always have golden sun-tans, make-up and colgate smiles! and long legs.
The men are good-looking, muscles, physical, goldern tans and do physical jobs
Women are shown as housewives, or doing low jobs-secretary.
Men have high executive positions.

T.V. SURVEY ON "THE YOUNG DOCTORS".

① JOBS...

	M	F
① Secretary		✓
② Doctors	✓	
③ Nurses		✓
④ Orderlies	✓	
⑤ Sisters		✓
⑥ Kiosk Lady		✓
⑦ Admin.	✓	

② ACTIVITIES...

MALE	FEMALE
pushing things	beds
serve at bar	test samples
doctors	make/serve tea
order people about	answer phones/call.
look after child	write reports.
	give orders.

③ APPEARANCE...

	M all	F all
good looking		
skinny/slim	all	all
fat		
tall	II	III
short	I	
old	I	
young	most	most
glasses		
Australian	all	all
others		
long hair		II
Short hair	all	

	M	F
married		II
single	most	most
blonde	I	I
other colour	IIII	IIII
handicaps	0	

④ CLOTHING

FEMALE...

uniform	HHT
casual	I
top	I
skirts	III
jeans	I
dresses	I

Hats	HHT

MALE ♂

Getting the minimum down

Most students, however, were content with rather less artwork; to them an aesthetically pleasing page was less important than writing the least number of words required. Nearly all the students underlined headings, provided the date and gave extra attention to important headings. Occasionally, one or two students wrote out questions in a different colour from the rest of their text for additional emphasis. A few pupils in each class, too, largely ignored such aspects of presentation, perhaps because they interpreted them as finicky details, perhaps because they preferred to do other things. One fourth former, for example, often brought no exercise books to class, made a few jottings on a piece of borrowed paper and then consigned it to the rubbish bin at the end of the period.

Avoidance techniques

Many of the third formers found writing to be an unpleasant and difficult experience. Drawing or decorating pages enabled them to avoid writing. Another avoidance tactic was to give more time to headings, ruling off, underlining, or labelling maps, diagrams and charts than to putting together sentences. While some students wrote for a considerable portion of the English periods, for example, others preferred to search for suitable material for collages, to draw maps very carefully, or to colour-in headings and illustrations for a long-term project they were working on. Inevitably, prolonged attention to these activities reduced the time used for creating a 'text'.

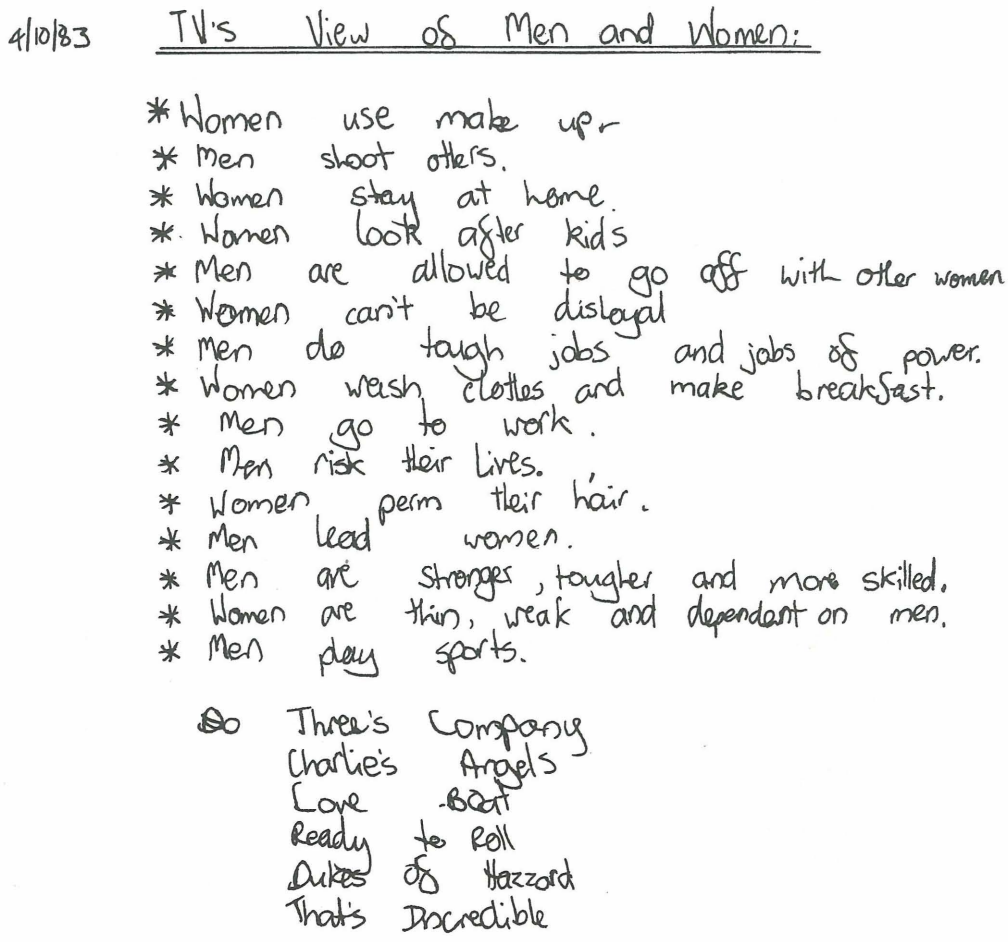
Managing time

On the whole, however, they did not spend an unusual amount of time on presentation. When the deadline for handing in writing approached many students took an hour or more to sort pages out, to complete parts of tasks previously left unfinished, to rule off headings and, occasionally, to add colour to some pages. But, in general, the students simply wrote or chatted with their neighbours, rather than 'decorating'.

Individual decorative differences

Interestingly enough, those students who wrote the most, and also often appeared to enjoy writing a great deal, did not necessarily spend most time on presentation. Tania, for example, was one of the most prolific of the fourth formers, and also spent considerable time on presentation. Mark, however, the *most* prolific writer, was much less concerned about the presentation of his work. (See figure 2.)

Figure 2
Extract from Mark's Work

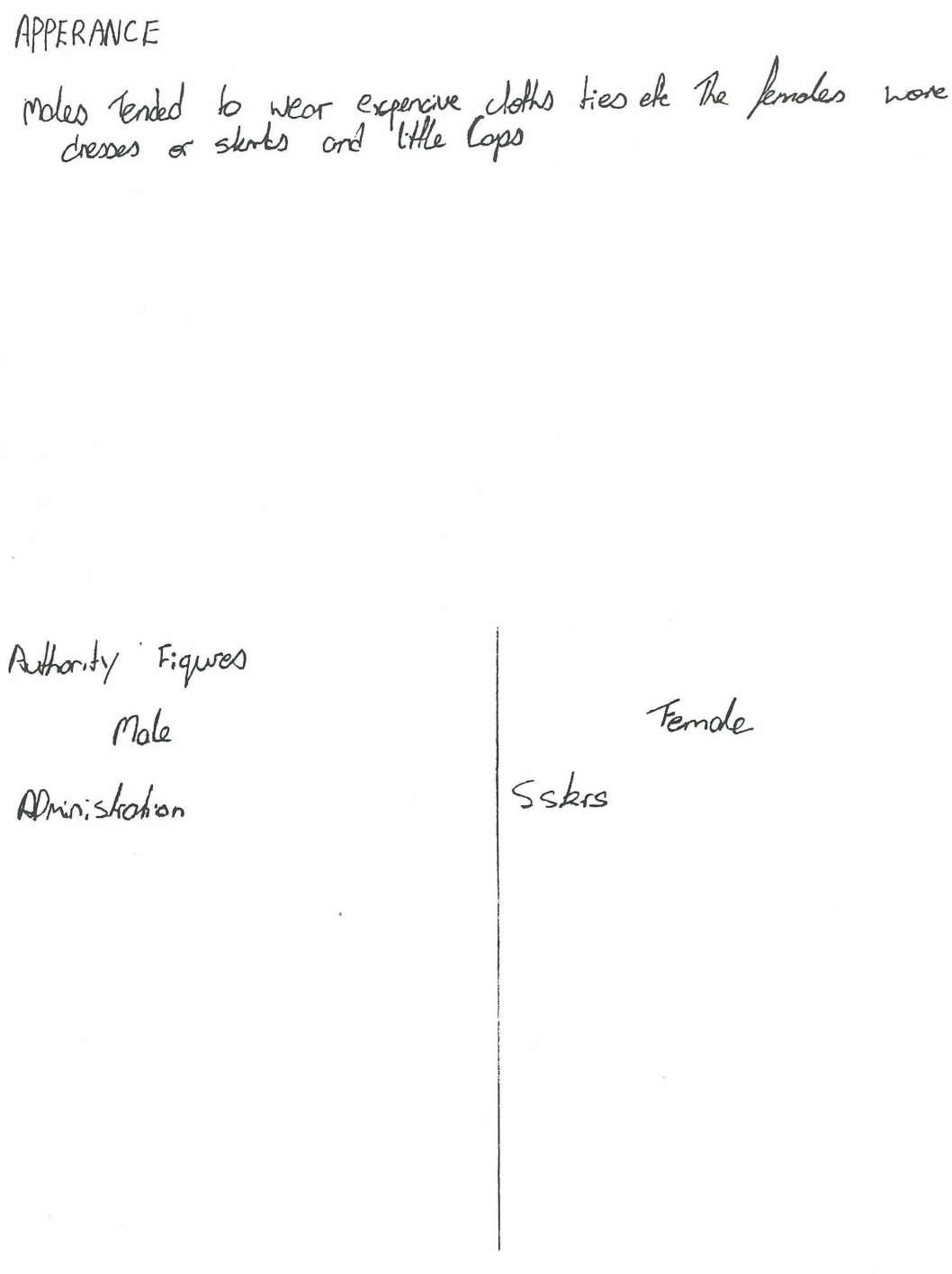


Although Mark's pages were well-organized, he wasted very little time in attending to matters of appearance, apart from underlining headings twice in red ballpoint. Even his diagrams in Science were hurriedly drawn. Mark preferred to *write.* Similarly, Irene, one of the most competent writers in the third form class, avoided elaborate headings and other decorative features. The remaining pupils were at one extreme or the other. Kate was meticulous about all aspects of presentation. Owen was unconcerned about presentation, often ignored the underlining of headings and left some parts of his work incomplete. (See figure 3.)

Handwriting

Nearly all the students observed had a legible script, though some styles of handwriting needed to be deciphered. However, it is worth noting that Mark, the most prolific, had handwriting that was generally untidy, possibly because of the rapidity with which he wrote. Again, there was not a simple relationship between legibility and overall writing competence, apart from those students who found spelling accurately very difficult and who also seemed to have problems in physically forming letters.

Figure 3
Extract from Owen's Work



(B) Productivity

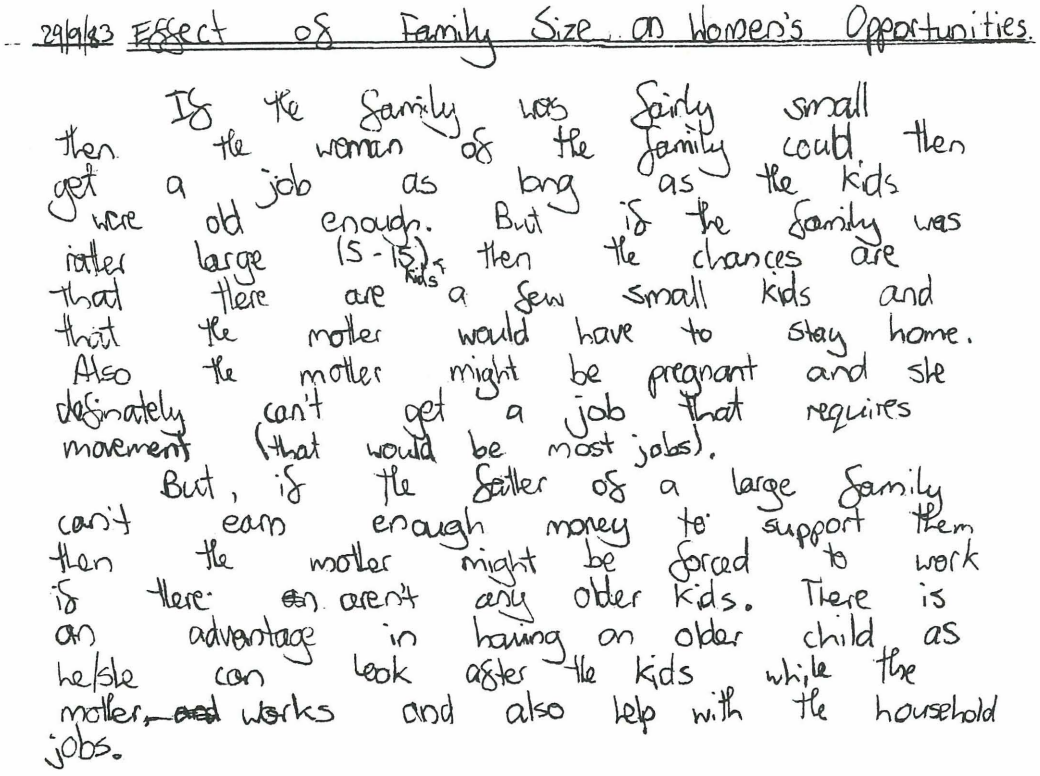
Amount

The students also differed in the *amount* of writing they completed. The occasional student in each class wrote copious amounts for all assigned tasks. At the other extreme were pupils who wrote the bare minimum, failed to complete some tasks or did not even attempt others. As a result they produced significantly less writing daily, for nearly every task.

Speed

Rates of productivity varied markedly within each class from student to student. In the third form class, for example, one student once wrote three words in an hour while another pupil wrote three and a half pages. In the fourth form Social/Economic Studies Mark frequently wrote half a page or more in the time it took other pupils to write a few lines. (See figure 4.) Consequently, his responses were rather more detailed, covering a wider range of ideas. Over the whole period of the study he wrote more than four times as much as some of his peers. Nina, though, also a prolific writer, took longer to put her ideas down than Mark. Working in bursts was also common, with many pupils alternating between writing for a short period and talking to neighbours or gazing about the room. Other students found writing to be a difficult and laborious task, such as Philip and Leon, who often produced very little even when on-task.

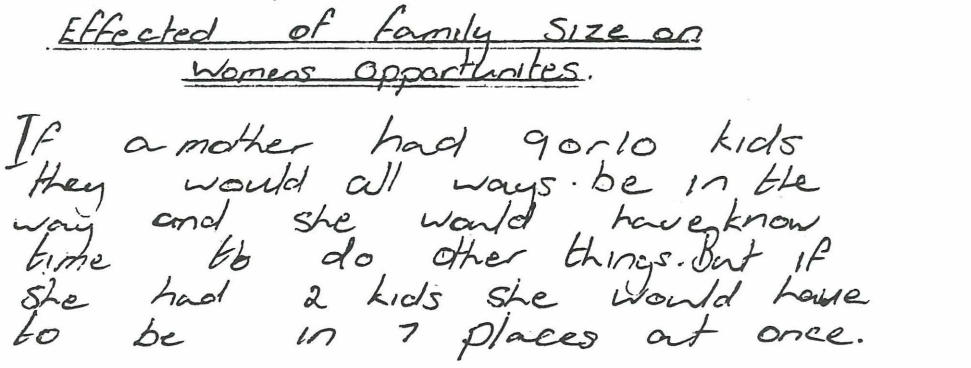
Figure 4 (a)
An Extract from Mark's Notes


24/9/83 Effect of Family Size on Women's Opportunities.

If the family was fairly small then the woman of the family could then get a job as long as the kids were old enough. But if the family was rather large (5-15 kids) then the chances are that there are a few small kids and that the mother would have to stay home. Also the mother might be pregnant and she definately can't get a job that requires movement (that would be most jobs).

But, if the father of a large family can't earn enough money to support them then the mother might be forced to work if there en aren't any older kids. There is an advantage in having an older child as he/she can look after the kids while the mother, ~~and~~ works and also help with the household jobs.

Figure 4 (b)
An extract from Philip's Notes


Effected of family size on Womens opportunites.

If a mother had 9or10 kids they would all ways be in the way and she would haveg know time to do other things. But if she had 2 kids she would have to be in 7 places at once.

Dealing with a chore

For most students, writing was a chore. Even Mark, who never postponed writing, admitted that 'writing is boring – there's always something you have to hand in'. Some students, therefore, adopted avoidance tactics in order to postpone having to write until it was absolutely necessary. James and Owen rarely began writing with the other students and often left tasks till the last possible moment; Owen, however, could work fast when he wanted to. Another student on one occasion wrote six lines of a story and followed that up by writing in his name and address several times. Occasionally students would doodle on a scrap of paper or in the back of their exercise books. Others 'lost' work and had to start again.

Self-management

The fourth form Science teacher stated that 'Some pupils race ahead, and finish while others fluff about and don't get very much done'. Perhaps behaviour of this kind was more evident in Science simply because, as a result of the way the sessions were structured, students themselves usually decided when to write.

Anti-writing

Some students regularly 'lost' their previous day's work, or had an excuse for not doing their written homework. As a result, they often fell behind the class as a whole in the amount and range of writing completed; it seemed that these students were relatively unconcerned about finishing sections of written work accurately and reasonably comprehensively, or perhaps they lost interest in some tasks once new ones were set. Many students laboured over writing and clearly disliked having to write, such as Philip. Those who wrote least tended to have the severest writing difficulties.

(C) Proofreading, drafting and notetaking

A rare thing

Students in both classes rarely altered what they had first written. Proofreading or editing (checking sentences for their sense and grammatical accuracy, correcting misspelt words or punctuation), appeared to be undertaken very infrequently despite occasional reminders by some of the teachers about the need to read over. Kate, for example, claimed to proofread her written work but very rarely made alterations, and a large number of errors could be found in her writing. Owen also claimed to re-read his writing to check the sense of what he had written, but when words with spelling mistakes were pointed out to him in a passage he claimed to have checked, he admitted that he had not been aware of them. As did other students, however, Mark openly admitted that he was happy enough with his work and did not read it over. He said: 'I just write straight off. I don't read what I'm writing'. Crossed-out words in his writing were indeed very rare.

Changes, changes

Competence in writing and willingness to proofread seemed to have nothing to do with each other: both good writers and bad didn't bother with proofreading. Dictionaries were rarely consulted and using them was regarded as slightly suspect. When changes were made, they were done so immediately, usually after unintentional slips of the pen. Correcting fluid was very popular with some students and in the fourth form class a small bottle was often passed around the room surreptitiously to those who wanted to use it. In the third form class, corrections were usually made by crossing out and writing the new word above.

'Right' first time

Drafting (preparing an initial copy of a piece of writing), was also rare and was universal only once, in a 'formal' letter-writing exercise in third form English. In the third form class, Irene and Kate rarely began with drafts, while James and Leon did not use them at all. In the fourth form class, none of the students made drafts. Some of the female students, however, wrote out an unaltered version twice, first in pencil on to loose leaves, later word by word, in their exercise books. Anne said that she liked to 'write it up properly afterwards'. Linda occasionally took notes in shorthand which she then transcribed fully. This was the closest to making drafts that any of the fourth formers attained.

Making notes

When students were engaged in notetaking, the usual practice was for actual phrases from the source to be loosely strung together. Students rarely attempted to summarize material in their own words. No student wrote draft versions and then edited them; all wrote directly into their exercise books. Students made little or no effort to amend their own notes, even when the class discussion suggested that they had misinterpreted a point or omitted an important piece of information.

Not revising

Revisions (altering relatively large blocks of content) were not observed either. Once, in the fourth form class, a few stories written by the students were read out

aloud to the whole class. It is possible that Tania's reaction, after hearing the teacher read out her story, provides a clue as to why revision was not undertaken by the students: 'When you read it I could tell that some parts should have been different, but not when I wrote it'. There was very little opportunity for students to listen to each other's imaginative writing, though it must be remembered that such writing occurred very infrequently in any case.

(D) Problems

You have to do it

While some of the students seemed to enjoy writing, such as one fourth former whose major problem seemed to be preventing her baby sister from eating the corners of projects she was completing at home, others disliked having to write. When asked why, they gave replies such as, 'It's too hard', 'Writing is boring', and 'I don't know enough about it'. Even the prolific and competent writers often appeared to find writing a chore: 'There's always something you have to hand in' and 'You've *got* to write'. Therefore, just being able to write, putting words on the page when requested to do so, *was* a problem for some students (see the section 'Productivity').

Ideas and presentation coped with

Despite the difficulty of writing, though, most students appeared to have at least some ideas to write down, even if there were large variations in the quantity and quality of content. Matters of presentation (placement of headings, underlining, margins, and numbering sections of work), were rarely a source of difficulty even though some students were more attentive to presentation than others. Perhaps presentation was easy because the requirements were consistently reinforced by the teachers and, to a large extent, simply entailed following instructions.

Insurmountable problems

Spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and paragraphing presented major problems for some students. Students such as Philip rarely asked for help, because they thought that their difficulties were insurmountable. In general, they were satisfied with their first attempts; it was as if they considered that further effort on their part to improve their current level of performance would be futile.

Talking is easier

Why was this the case? Many students seemed to be overwhelmed by the sheer complexity of the writing process, for reasons hinted at by one of the students who was considered to be a good writer:

> *Writing is work for most kids . . . because you have to think about everything. When you are writing something you have to think about what you're saying, about all the punctuation, spelling and everything like that. When you're saying it, you don't have to worry about these things.*

Writing accurately demands concentration on both the content of the subject written about and the use of language appropriate to that subject; it is possible that some students were unable to cope adequately with both aspects at once. In such cases 'correct' language took second place to the subject matter and the need to write down at least *some* relevant material. After all, if the subject is Science, can the students be blamed for emphasizing the facts of Science as they see them?

Missing proofreading skills

In addition, most students appeared to be still learning how to write well. It has already been pointed out that proofreading occurred infrequently in the classes observed, despite the occasional reminder from some of the teachers to students about the need to read over their writing carefully. Some students, therefore, may not have known *how* to proofread even when asked to do it (though presumably they could learn), simply because they had received insufficient practice in applying the appropriate techniques. As a result, their writing continued to have language-related mistakes in it.

Lack of time for developing language skills?

Other students may have lacked the skills of self-appraisal and objectivity necessary to carry out proofreading or an evaluation of the adequacy of their own writing. Teacher comments occasionally reminded them of their writing difficulties, but these students may have been so bogged down (such as Philip with his spelling) that only a superhuman intervention on the part of their teachers would be able to bring about gradual improvements. Teaching these students proofreading skills may have been futile, because their writing required intensive, prolonged, individual attention by teachers aware of language learning processes and with the necessary time to do it. Such ideal conditions are rare in any educational setting.

(E) The Students' Approaches to Written Work: A Summary

Summary

(i) Many students thought writing was difficult or boring and some seemed overwhelmed by the effort required.

(ii) Students varied widely in the amount of writing they completed from day to day. While some wrote a few words or lines, others wrote up to two pages or more in an hour.

(iii) Work habits varied. Some students steadily progressed through each step of a writing task, while others left writing till the last possible moment. Some seemed unconcerned about completing writing tasks.

(iv) Many students spent more time on the presentation of individual writing tasks than on the writing itself.

(v) On the whole, pupils worked independently and after discussion there was little interaction with the teacher. Students sometimes exchanged ideas with each other.

(vi) Proofreading was rarely observed. As a rule students did not seem to check over their written work, and there were wide variations in accuracy of language usage.

(vii) Those students who wrote the least tended to have major problems, such as very poor spelling or an inadequate grasp of the concepts involved in a particular topic.

II How Do Teachers of 13- and 14-Year-Olds Use Writing in their Subjects?

(A) Mastering Subject Content: Writing as Thinking

Subject knowledge

The content (English, Science or Social/Economic Studies) for which the teachers were responsible received more attention than the teaching of writing itself. Teaching time was organised around the knowledge that the students were expected to acquire, and activities were planned to interpret and manipulate this knowledge. As writing tasks were but one element of this process, written work tended to be a by-product.

Teachers' suggestions

Writing was generally used to stimulate ideas (English and Social/Economic Studies) or to record information (Science). It required a moderately high level of thinking from the students themselves, even though the teachers clearly outlined the required tasks first and, through lengthy discussions and suggestions written on the board, often provided ideas before the students began writing. The most important feature of each piece of writing was its content, and that was usually predetermined by the teacher. As a result, the ideas were regarded as more significant than the language used to express them, or the format adopted in presenting them, despite the students' emphasis on layout.

Extending thinking through writing

Writing was seen as one of the primary methods, if not the main one, for helping students to extend their own *thinking.* At certain points in some lessons, therefore, the teachers assisted their students to clarify their views towards a particular topic or issue by asking them to jot down some ideas. The third form English teacher, for example, wanted the students to be 'uninhibited about putting their ideas on paper'. The fourth form English teacher had a similar purpose:

> *Often I will get them to jot down notes to help them focus their ideas. I place a lot of importance on oral work and hope that it rubs off onto written work where they can justify what they have to say. I want to get them into the habit of justifying things in a written way.*

The fourth form Social/Economic Studies teacher shared this aim, too: 'I use writing to get the pupils doing something when only half of them are thinking'. In such instances the ideas expressed by the students took precedence and notes (collections of phrases or incomplete sentences) were considered acceptable.

Writing as a means to an end

Naturally, the writing was of most interest to the teachers as an indication of how well the content was understood, or of the students' ability to follow instructions (e.g., 'Write an introductory paragraph to an expository essay', in fourth form English). When asked which aspects of the students' writing gave cause for concern the fourth form English teacher said:

> *It's not so much the grammatical, technical things. It's if the pupils haven't grasped the specific thing we're looking at, at that particular moment. For example, when they were writing a story about death some hadn't grasped that we were getting at mood. I don't think I get them to write just for the sake of writing.*

Covering the ground adequately

Assessment of students' written work, therefore, tended to reflect these central concerns. When checking students' writing in class the fourth form Social/Economic Studies teacher looked for 'analytical skills, the ability to classify, to categorize, i.e., pattern-finding'. When assigning marks to the students' folders of work the fourth form English teacher checked what the students had done chiefly for its comprehensiveness of content. He looked for work that had been set during the preceding weeks and based the final grade on three or four key exercises to which the students were expected to make a considerable personal contribution, rather than the sets of notes or summary paragraphs taken from comments listed on the blackboard. The main criterion for a high mark was that the student had covered the set tasks in a reasonably thorough manner. Similarly, the third form English teacher reserved 40 percent of the marks (for a long-term project) for completing the discrete components of the task.

(B) Tasks Set: Writing to Meet Teacher Requirements

Brief in length

On a day-to-day basis, tasks requiring writing followed a consistent pattern. Most were relatively brief. In Science, at both class levels, short sentences or single-word responses were all that was required. Also, much of the notetaking was direct copying or, if in the pupils' own words, adapted minimally from a booklet supplied. In Social/Economic Studies, at both levels, writing tasks rarely consisted of more than two or three sentences. Although the writing tasks in English were more varied, most writing still involved short responses, as answers to questions set by the teacher, and were usually only a few sentences in length.

Time allowed for writing

The written work was not *always* tightly prescribed or of a brief nature. Occasionally, students were given tasks which required more extensive writing, chiefly in English (at both levels) but also in Social/Economic Studies. However, 'essays' were less than 5 percent of the students' writing in both the third and fourth form classes. Interestingly, more time was allowed for written work in the third form class (just over 50% of each period observed) than in the fourth form class (about 40%). More interesting still, more writing occurred in Science than in either English or Social/Economic Studies.

Assisting the students

The general pattern for nearly all writing was for the teacher to explain to the students what they had to do, to guide the class's discussion of the task(s) and then to leave the students to complete the task(s) independently. All the teachers moved about the classroom at times dealing with students' queries, and sometimes made encouraging comments in passing or provided extra motivation for some students. In particular, if individuals said they were uncertain about *what* they had to do, teachers gave assistance readily about the nature of the tasks. Also, if students appeared to be bogged down the teachers sometimes provided gentle encouragement. For example, the third form English teacher said: 'What I do is sit down next to them and I'll try to get them expressing their ideas and I write them down. Some of them just can't order their ideas'.

(C) Commenting Upon the Students' Writing

A supportive climate

All of the teachers understood the need to encourage their students to learn in a positive rather than in a punitive manner. At this school, developing and maintaining a warm and secure classroom environment was considered essential not just for

writing but for all classroom activities. As the fourth form English teacher said:

> *It is always easy to criticise or attack a student's work or abilities, but it often requires considerable effort and patience to be positive. Moreover, the aim of developing and praising a student's strengths, rather than constantly highlighting his or her weaknesses, is a key principle at our school.*

This perception may explain why the teachers avoided drawing constant attention to those aspects of their students' writing which were recurrent problems.

'Overlooking' language difficulties

Many students, for example, were consistently poor spellers, or used a barely legible style of handwriting, or were unable to express their thoughts on a topic in a clear and coherent manner. But they were largely left to their own devices to improve those aspects of their writing which were giving them difficulty. Why? It was difficult to find time for those struggling; 'correct' or appropriate usage was often considered less important than the quality or number of ideas; and the teachers did attempt to be 'positive'. The third form English teacher put it well:

> *I think it is very demoralising for a student who is perhaps super on ideas but has difficulty either with spelling or even with the fundamental writing task. I think it is very damaging to simply get back work the whole time which has corrections scrawled throughout.*

Feedback

When circulating around the classroom (though this occurred rarely), teachers did answer specific inquiries. But pupils did not receive much immediate feedback on either the content or form of their writing as written work was formally collected about once a month or, more rarely, once a fortnight. Detailed written feedback was rare. In the third form English class, pupils received a comprehensive assessment of the long-term project, covering aspects such as language, content, organisation and presentation. However, for Social/Economic Studies and Science at both levels, and fourth form English, it was unusual for students to receive such details. They obtained a positive global comment and a series of ticks for satisfactory work. Occasionally, when a student had not completed a task, this was drawn to the student's attention (e.g., 'Where are the answers to these questions?'), but generally very few errors were corrected or commented upon.

(D) Writing Appropriately

Teaching writing skills

Writing, therefore, was not 'taught'; the teachers tended to expect their students already to possess and be capable of using writing and associated language skills in their subject-areas. This was not an unreasonable expectation as most of the students coped adequately with the written work they were required to carry out. It was different for those students who experienced difficulties of some kind, however, as there appeared to be little awareness of the problems they encountered while they were engaged in the *process* of writing. Perhaps this suggests that much more instruction in how to teach writing skills is needed.

Appropriate language usage

Instead of an interest in how to write, most teachers, particularly English teachers, were concerned about the appropriateness of language for different purposes. The fourth form English teacher wrote:

> *I'm trying to develop certain skills in the (NESC) modes. Writing is not something given deliberate focus to, in the sense of 'today is writing, tomorrow shaping'. Subconsciously, I'm aware of what I'm trying to do, e.g., to get the pupils to punctuate, but I don't think 'this is the week I'm going to do punctuation'.* I do push the idea that different kinds of language are appropriate on different occasions. *For example, if they're writing a letter to the editor, they can't write it with errors, so punctuation will come in there; with a newspaper report using direct speech, speech marks will come in there. And I do have concerns, depending on what the situation is, the area I'm looking at. For example, essay writing: if they hadn't been able to get down notes or write an introductory paragraph that would have worried me.*

As a result, writing was seen mainly as a tool for putting down notes or for recording thoughts on specific topics. Little emphasis was placed on correct language usage; much was put on the ideas or content written in words; writing was used for thinking and learning, rather than as an end in itself.

(E) The Teaching of Writing: A Summary

Summary

(i) Nearly all tasks requiring writing were clearly outlined by the teachers before the students began writing, often with considerable prior discussion and notes on the blackboard to provide ideas.

(ii) A lot of guidance was provided by the teachers when *setting* writing tasks, but students were only helped, once they were engaged in writing down their ideas or notes, if they required assistance.

(iii) Most writing tasks were very brief, up to two or three sentences in length, and were of a descriptive/factual nature.

(iv) Formal assessment was infrequent, and the main concern seemed to be that students had covered the necessary work sufficiently. There was little detailed written feedback once tasks were completed.

(v) Because the teachers tried not to be overly critical of students, persistent writing difficulties were often tolerated rather than constantly commented upon in order not to dishearten individual writers.

(vi) Teachers were mostly concerned with students' grasp of their subject (the use of appropriate ideas and topics) rather than correct language usage.

(vii) Emphasis was placed on appropriate language usage for a particular context rather than on the deliberate teaching of discrete writing skills.

(viii) Writing was chiefly used as a method of recording facts, to extend students' thinking, and as an indication of the level of understanding of particular topics.

III Where to Next?

There appears to be a sense of urgency associated with the use of written language at the third and fourth form level. Take a good writer like Mark, who said, for example, 'I don't go over my writing to find mistakes . . . I'm more interested in the ideas and getting them down'. He found it difficult to review his work. What chance then have slow writers like Philip? Despite the assistance he was offered, when under pressure, Philip was not able to write effectively. When asked what aspect of his writing he was most happy with, he replied: 'None really. I'm really quite hopeless at it.'

Surely Philip can be helped. Do we need writing workshops in schools run by writing specialists? At present, they would be working in very 'ad hoc' ways since research into the process of writing has advanced only a few steps. Research may provide teachers and pupils with the clues they are seeking, but despite a century of widespread literacy, and concerted international research on writing since 1980, it is early days yet.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the teachers and pupils who took part in the study on which these comments are based for their patient co-operation and interest, and also Neil Reid, NZCER for carrying out some of the observations referred to in this article.

Footnote

A more detailed account of the study on which this article is based, and a complementary study of observations made in two intermediate classrooms (a form 1 and a form 2) can be found in the research report entitled *A Month's Writing in Four Classrooms.* It is available from NZCER, P.O. Box 3237, Wellington for $10.00.

Copying Permitted

© Copyright on this item is held by NZCER and ACER who grant to all people actively engaged in education the right to copy it in the interests of better teaching.