DEVELOPING A PROCESS-ORIENTED WRITING PROGRAM THAT PROMOTES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN'S MOTIVATION AS WRITERS: A TEACHER'S PEDAGOGICAL JOURNEY

By

KEVIN MICHAEL EAMON MILLER

Professional Development Program, Simon Fraser University, 1992

B. A. Simon Fraser University, 1981

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to describe the ongoing evolution of an elementary school teacher's process-oriented approach to the teaching of writing and the new support structures recently put in place within the teacher's writing program in order to promote his students' motivation to write. Research literature on the historical context of the process approach to writing instruction is reviewed, as is research exploring the links between motivation - and its constituent elements, interest, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-regulation - and writing. Next, the author's impetus for changing his approach to teaching writing is discussed. Lastly, the author offers reflections on the connections between these support structures and the positive effects they may (or may not) have had on his students' experiences with writing. These support structures were introduced in the following areas: the day-to-day environment of the writing program; the overall teaching framework chosen to deliver the author's writing program; peer response groups; and types of writing assignments. The paper concludes with the author's reflections on the successes he has recently observed as a writing teacher, and a brief discussion of possible directions to be taken in the writing classroom in the future.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Over four decades have past since a now-iconic illustration published in a popular account of human evolution captured the public eye. Appearing in F. Clark Howell's (1965) book, *Early Man*, the illustration, entitled "March of Progress", depicted the evolutionary development of hominid species, as it was then understood. A succession of figures, representing approximations of the physical appearance of the earliest to latest forms of hominids, range from left to right. On the immediate left is an image of a proto-hominid, standing barely upright, teetering precariously forward, in less than perfect bipedal motion. Scanning to the right, the viewer sees images of later and later hominids march across the pages of time. They carry with them tools – technological revolutions of their respective eras: rocks, bones, chipped stone axes, spears. The parade of hominids stand and walk ever more confidently, their faces bearing an increasing sense of awareness until, on the far right, homo sapiens strides purposefully, eyes fixed keenly toward the future.

Though the illustration is now known to contain inaccuracies in its depictions of early hominid physiognomies and provides no hint of the interplay between vast numbers of variables driving evolutionary forces, it became the impetus for innumerable cartoons picturing the process of evolution culminating in, variously, an atheist; a baker; a creationist; a dog lover; a mother; a politician; a publican; a rock musician; a teacher; a writer. The conjunction of these last two products of evolution - teacher and writer – is particularly salient to my purpose in this paper: to reflect upon the 'evolution' of my professional practice as a teacher of writing to children, particularly as it relates to my attempts to motivate my students to write and to bolster their beliefs about themselves as writers.

The act of teaching is itself a process of evolution, an act of learning from and adapting to the environment in which one teaches. As in the natural world, where organisms necessarily adapt to the demands of their biological and physical environments, so too must teachers respond to 'environmental' pressures: external institutional demands for higher academic results; parental concerns; the availability of teaching resources; ever-expanding curricula; the necessity to master new information technologies; and the demands to adopt shifting, and often conflicting, pedagogical practices. But these demands pale in the light of the most powerful factor with which teachers must wrestle: the unique bundle of talents and interests that is each child for whom the teacher must act as a guide and mentor. In a conversation about this undeniable uniqueness amongst children, a seasoned teacher once told me that, to be a successful teacher, one must possess a very high threshold for ambiguity.

As a student teacher in a highly touted teacher-training program, two unfortunate circumstances combined to set the stage for my earliest experience of ambiguity in the teaching profession. First, during my final practicum, my sponsor teacher did not wish to relinquish her writing classes to me, choosing instead to retain control of it as her 20% of the teaching load, while I taught extra math lessons in a French Immersion class down the hall. Second, in my final term of the teaching program, no methodology course in the teaching of writing was offered. After graduating from the program, I was in no way prepared to tackle the teaching of writing.

Early in my teaching career, moving from class to class every day as a teacher-on-call, I observed a bewildering array of contradictory approaches to the teaching of writing; in some classes, there appeared to be no discernible method for teaching writing. Later, working as an E.S.L. and resource teacher, much of my professional focus was on teaching reading to small groups of young students. After a period of five years, I became a classroom teacher of thirty-two students in a split class of grades 5, 6, and 7. Planning for and teaching in such a class was the

source of strong doses of ambiguity. Not only was there a considerable range of curricular demands to meet in every subject area, the students themselves represented a widely diverse spectrum of abilities and developmental stages. With a considerable amount of hard work, and some reliance on trial and error, I survived the first of three years in this teaching assignment. Though I gained confidence in teaching subject matter at three grade levels, I remained at a loss as to how to implement an effective writing program. This resulted in the delivery of a disjointed, ramshackle writing program that did little to foster my students' interest or progress in writing. The teaching of writing appeared to be the province of divines. For someone who has long enjoyed writing and who admires the abilities of great writers, this was particularly disturbing. As a teacher, I wished to pass on to my students an appreciation of writing as a wonderfully rich and absorbing human experience.

At the beginning of the next school year, I had decided to make a concerted effort to build a writing program that was enjoyable, interesting and meaningful for my students, and based in sound pedagogical research. My initial concern was to develop an overall framework for my writing program and to build gradually into it support structures that would enhance my students' motivation to write and help them grow more sure of their writing abilities. I did not know how long this work would take to complete, nor where it would lead me. Now, some five years later, I have learned a great deal about teaching writing, most particularly in the last two years.

The focus of this paper is to describe the evolution of my basic approach to the teaching of writing and the new support structures I have put in place within my writing program. First, I will review research literature on the historical context of the process approach to writing instruction, and the links between motivation – and its constituent elements, interest, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-regulation - and writing. Second, I discuss the impetus for changing my approach to teaching writing. Lastly, I will offer reflections on the connections between these

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new support structures and the positive effects they may (or may not) have had on my students' experiences with writing. These support structures have been introduced in the following areas: the day-to-day environment of the writing program; the overall teaching framework chosen to deliver my writing program; peer response groups; and types of writing assignments. I will conclude with reflections on the most recent discoveries I have made on my journey as a writing teacher, and briefly discuss directions I wish to take in the near future.

Theoretical Framework

The human capacity for the use of spoken language evolved over many thousands of generations. Depending on their particular conceptual model, researchers currently estimate its beginnings at from 500,000 to 150,000 years ago, perhaps even as little as 50,000 years ago (Zimmer, 2008). Acceleration in the growth of brain size and changes in complex neural architecture necessary for the development of language were selected for as having distinct evolutionary advantages.

Though an increasing ability to communicate in more sophisticated ways is thought to have been of immense evolutionary advantage, the evolutionary pathways that led to the human capacity for extraordinarily complex language is still far from clear. What is very clear however, is that spoken language is innate – every human has the potential to use it to communicate with precision. Barring any impediments to their learning, children master it naturally, in readily predictable developmental stages (Farnan & Dahl, 2003; Sperling & Freedman, 2001).

The same cannot be said about reading and writing. Though the evolution and organization of the human brain allows for the ability to learn to read and write, there are no innate neural mechanisms which are specific to the learning of reading and writing. Reading and writing are extensions of spoken language, but are strictly cultural inventions requiring instruction, formal or informal, to learn. Reading itself involves comprehending spoken language,

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associating spoken sounds with written symbols or marks and "recognizing sequences or assemblies (in pictograms) of those marks as constructs that map to words" (Lynch & Granger, 2008, p. 198). Writing involves producing a visual output "that performs the sounds-to-visual (letters) mapping" (Lynch & Granger, p. 198). At the time writing systems first appeared, they might have constituted "among the most taxing possible tasks to be performed by the existing human populations" (Lynch & Granger, p. 198). It remains a "complex process, one involving the orchestration of many kinds of skills" (Dyson & Freedman, 2003, p. 967). Writing is a developmental skill, and "is itself a process dependent on a range of other skills, and, moreover, a process that is kaleidoscopic, shaped by an author's purpose" (Dyson & Freedman, 2003, p. 967).

This paper will utilize a sociocultural theoretical framework that recognizes the social and cultural contexts within which children learn to write. At the base of this approach are the contributions made by Lev Vygotsky to educational theories, research and practice.

Vygotsky examined, and found lacking, the two prevailing psychological theories of his day: "one that relied on stimulus-response to explain human behavior and the other that relied on introspection as an alternative to empirical research" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 2003, p. 131). While acknowledging that children possess "a host of physiological and psychological dispositions that serve as the basis for distinctively human functions" (Nicolopoulou, 1993, p. 8), Vygotsky argued that children's "capabilities are shaped to a large extent by the cultural practices" and social contexts in which they are situated (Nicolopoulou, 1993, p. 8). In Vygotsky's view, a child cannot independently construct a conceptual world (Nicolopoulou, 1993); it is the social and cultural environment that forms conceptual frameworks within which a child develops.

Vygotsky specified two key elements of interconnected sociocultural factors shaping a child's development: social interaction and communication (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Social interactions and relationships provide the child with countless opportunities to share, learn and

gradually internalize increasingly complex skills, strategies and behaviours. Communication, first in the form of speech and then in an array of culturally invented semiotic systems, is what Vygotsky termed a socially mediated "psychological tool", through which the outer, sociocultural world and the internal, the individual child, are connected. Examples of such psychological tools would include the following: "language; various systems for counting; mnemonic techniques; algebraic symbol systems; works of art; writing; schemes, diagrams, maps, and mechanical drawings; all sorts of conventional signs; etc." (Vygotsky, 1981, p.137). These are "central to the appropriation of knowledge through representational activity by the developing individual" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p.193).

Unlike some of his contemporaries, Vygotsky further "argued against maturation as the central explanatory principle in development" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 2003, p. 133). He held that intellectual and social development is not driven largely by biological maturation. Rather, he maintained, "development proceeds not toward socialization, but toward converting social relations into mental functions" (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 106). It is in the milieu of social interaction that children learn and develop, and "improve their ability to communicate, solve problems, and build advanced concepts of life" (Vanderburg, 2006, p. 377). The arena of social interaction provides a long series of overlapping learning situations that "develop and redevelop thought" in children (Vanderburg, 2006, p. 376). Vygotsky characterized this learning process in his concept of the zone of proximal development, which he defined as "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 more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Children learn primarily through social interaction with others - adults or peers - who possess more expertise or experience. This form of interaction has been likened to a "scaffolding process" (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), in which

students are guided through learning a task by an adult or peer who models it or assists in its completion.

Vygotsky saw the classroom as a social organization in its own right, an extension or microcosm of the "larger social community" (Glassman, 2001, p. 13). For schools to be truly effective in promoting the cognitive development of children, they must reflect the very real learning processes occurring in the greater social environment. This would entail building into classrooms a sense of community among students and teachers, one that allows "for the organization and reorganization of learners' problem-solving strategies, which integrate the social and individual experiences of learners with the culturally shaped artifacts available in their societies" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 2003, p. 147).

These central ideas of Vygotsky's work have immediate and powerful relevance to the teaching of writing to children. In order "to learn and develop as writers – to 'appropriate' the information, skills, and values associated with writing – students need to be engaged in social interactions" (Sperling & Freedman, 2001, p. 374). The writing class must provide social interactions that "center around aspects of the task of writing (including generating ideas, selecting language, shaping and reshaping text) that they cannot accomplish alone but that they can accomplish with assistance" (Sperling & Freedman, 2001, p. 374). Vygotsky himself noted that writing "should be meaningful for children, that an intrinsic need should be aroused in them, and that writing should be incorporated into a task that is necessary and relevant for life" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 118).

In the past two years, I have come to see clearly the value of teaching writing in a manner that is more and more anchored in a sociocultural approach to children's learning and development. It has afforded my students and me a more productive means by which to explore the world of writing, not as a body of discrete skills to be mastered in lockstep (or scattered)

fashion, but as an enterprise that instills a sense of new possibilities and individual accomplishment. It provides a wealth of prospects for dialogue between my students and me, as well as allowing my students to recognize their potential as writers.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Process Model of Writing

In defining the process model of writing as it is now typically understood, Goldstein and Carr (1996) state that it consists of "a broad range of strategies that include pre-writing activities, such as defining an audience, using a variety of resources, planning the writing, as well as drafting and revising" (p. 1). They characterize the model as viewing writing "as problem-solving" (p. 1).

The idea that writing is a process has a long history. Bloodgood (2002) explores the views of writing held by the Roman rhetorician Quintilian (ca. 35–ca. 100 A.D.), some of which "have relevance to process writing" as it is practiced now (Bloodgood, 2002, p. 30). Quintilian believed that learning the art of composition necessitated imitation, authenticity, modeling and practice. Students began to learn to write by "imitating fables which had short and tightly constructed forms" (Bloodgood, 2002, p. 30). Writing was to be authentic, reflecting the need for students to write about what was meaningful to them. Quintilian advised instructors to model their own writing processes in the presence of students, and to give students opportunities to write frequently (Bloodgood, 2002).

Mills (1953) believed that modern forms of writing instruction too often reflected "an unwillingness to think of writing in terms of process" (Mills, 1953, p. 19). He maintained that teachers persisted in thinking "of communication in terms that are static, atomistic, nonfunctional" (Mills, 1953, p.19). According to Mills, writing needs to be purposeful for the student, practiced often, generated by freer forms of organization or pre-writing, less preoccupied with mechanics, and more responsive to individual students' needs (Mills, 1953).

Until the mid-1960's, the traditional product approach to writing instruction predominated in classrooms. In this teacher-centered approach, the teaching of writing is "viewed primarily as

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teaching mechanics: punctuation, subject-verb agreement, spelling and correct usage" and much "class time is devoted to drills and exercises on mechanics and grammar" (Williams, 1998, p. 47). During the late 1960's, "composition scholars began reassessing the effectiveness of the product model" (Williams, 1998, p.51). In its place arose the process model of writing instruction. This approach had its base in process philosophy, which "identifies reality with pure process" (Williams, 1998, p. 51); more specifically, process philosophy held that everything in the natural world, including human experience, arises from and is shaped by processes.

The early works of Murray (1968), Elbow (1973), and Emig (1983) were highly influential in the adoption of process writing in classrooms. Murray held that schools presented writing as the study of the formal use of language, which does not have "any relation to the student's ability to write" (Murray, 1968, p 104). This, Murray claimed, "isolates language from meaning or use" (Murray, 1968, p.104). Murray's (1968) work laid out a suggested method for the teaching of writing that emphasized heavily the need for both teachers and students to be intimately involved in all stages of the writing process.

Elbow proposed a "developmental model" of writing that emphasized the use of free writing, in which the writer accepts a "lack of control" (Elbow, 1973, p. 32); writers need to allow their ideas to generate freely, without excessive and restrictive focus on writing with a tightly controlled plan. He did not suggest that writing classes were to be utterly unfocused; the results of free writing were to be discarded, set aside, or reworked in order to create a pleasing piece of writing (Elbow, 1973). This reworking was seen as a form of problem solving.

In reviewing the implications of her work with American high school students, Emig expressed the opinion that their experience with writing was a "limited and limiting experience" (Emig, 1983, p. 92). She concluded that students were exposed to a narrow variety of writing forms; that teachers themselves had little or no experience in writing; that the process of writing

was undervalued; and, that an inordinate amount of time was spent on the "neurotic activity" of relentless attendance to the mechanics of writing (Emig, 1983, p. 94). The work of Murray, Elbow and Emig did much to introduce the process model of writing instruction to North American schools (Goldstein & Carr, 1996; Pritchard and Honeycutt, 2006).

Thinking about "the definition and elements of the writing process" has undergone significant evolution, being defined and redefined over several decades (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006, p.277). Work by cognitive research provided the momentum whereby "most researchers and practitioners questioned the linear-perspective view of the composing process and embraced one that is recursive and more complex" (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006, p. 277). Flower and Hayes (1981) proposed that the processes of writing involve "a set of distinctive thought processes" that is organized "during the act of composing" (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 366). These processes are recursive and bound within a "hierarchical, highly embedded organization" (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 366). Writing is a "goal-directed thinking process, guided by the writer's own growing network of goals" which themselves undergo shifts during the act of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p.366).

Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987) cognitive model presented the writing process as being comprised of two forms of writing: *knowledge telling* and *knowledge transformation*. Knowledge telling, utilized by novice writers, "makes maximum use of natural endowments of language competence and of skills learned through ordinary social experience, but it is also limited by them" (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, p.5); novice writers produce texts that are based on immediate knowledge. Knowledge transformation is characteristic of the writing produced by experienced writers, in which "normal linguistic endowments" are transcended, allowing "the individual to accomplish alone what is normally accomplished only through social interaction – namely, the reprocessing of knowledge" (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, p. 5-6). As writers

become more accomplished, they exercise increasingly sophisticated control over the complex, self-conscious processes of planning, reshaping and reorganizing a piece of writing.

This view of writing as a "mental recursive process with procedural strategies for completing writing tasks" is now widely held by researchers (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006, p.277). It informs much of the teaching practice seen in classrooms today. However, as Lipson, Mosenthal, Daniels and Woodside-Iron (2000) have illustrated, there is wide discrepancy as to how the process model is implemented in classrooms. In examining the practice of 11 classroom teachers who embraced the process approach, they found all the teachers "had different interpretations of the process approach, creating very different climates and purposes for writing" (Lipson, Mosenthal, Daniels, & Woodside-Iron, 2000, p. 227).

Among the first studies to lend support for early forms of the process model for writing instruction was Hillock's (1984; 1986) meta-analyses of over 500 studies. Looking at the variability of instructional modes, focus and duration of instruction and their effects on writing quality, Hillock's (1984) meta-analysis examined four modes of writing instruction: a "presentational mode" characteristic of traditional language study approaches to writing; a "naturalistic mode", wherein teachers provided little structure to the writing environment; an "environmental mode", in which teachers and students had focused objectives, students were involved in purposeful, problem-solving activities, and high levels of student interaction were the norm; and, finally, an "individualized mode" where students worked individually with tutors (Hillocks, 1984). The environmental mode provided the best means of improving students' writing (Hillocks, 1984). This mode is closely associated with the 'Writer's Workshop' relatively common in schools now.

Additional support for the process approach came from data generated by the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Writing, administered to 29,500

students in grade 4, 8, and 12. The results showed that "several process writing techniques are associated with higher writing proficiency skills" (Goldstein & Carr, 1996, p. 3). These techniques included planning, defining purpose and audience, and the teachers' use of a variety of process writing strategies (Goldstein & Carr, 1996).

A significant factor that has made it difficult to assess the overall effectiveness of the process model of writing instruction is the fact that classroom practitioners and researchers are not unanimous in their conceptions of what constitutes the process approach (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). There is no essential form of implementation of the process approach that can be compared from classroom to classroom. Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, and Valdés (2004) compared the implementation of process writing instruction by 11 teachers of grade 7 students. They found a wide range of pedagogical approaches to teaching process writing, many of them resembling old product approach techniques, particularly as it related to providing student writers with feedback "that supports revision across drafts" (Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, and Valdés, 2004, p. 475).

In their review of research studies in the effectiveness of process approaches to writing instruction, Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) note that the process approach has evolved, in practice and theory, to include numerous components "not commonly associated with the process model" in its early form (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006, p. 279). Much of the research over this time has come to focus on a limited number of specific aspects of the process approach, with researchers realizing "that studying one component at a time makes an enormously complex research task more manageable" (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006, p. 281). Dyson and Freedman (2003) note that there is no fixed form of process writing, but only a "flexible process" (Dyson & Freedman, 2003, p. 974). They argue that because of this shifting flexibility, process research cannot supply definitive recommendations for practice, "but it can offer a vocabulary for talking

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about the nature of writing – and insight into how these processes work for particular writers in particular situations" (Dyson & Freedman, 2003, p. 974).

While they consider the process movement as having made significant contributions to improving writing instruction, some researchers maintain "the extent to which writing as a process affects student achievement and attitudes is uncertain" (Baines, Baines, Stanley & Kunkel, 1999, p. 67). After observing over 300 classes from grades 6 to 12, these researchers concluded that the three typical approaches to teaching writing they observed - the "classic" process, the "antigrammarian", and the "five-paragraph" approaches - had their own particular strengths and weaknesses. However, these researchers found the teachers' evaluations of students' writing to be lacking in objectivity, though their study offered no quantitative analysis of text quality. They considered it necessary that the process approach should not be an excuse to ignore the teaching of grammatical rules or "standard English" (Baines, Baines, Stanley & Kunkel, 1999, p. 71).

Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) make several important points regarding research into the effectiveness of process writing instruction. First, because of the highly complex nature of writing, no research study "can account for all the factors that influence the final product" in the writing classroom (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006, p. 285). Second, there is a need for research into the comparative success of process writing in different genres. Third, process-writing instruction must allow for the inclusion of more direct forms of instruction when suitable (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). Fourth, though the process approach to writing instruction is in popular use in classrooms, there is much room for research to "provide a foundation for what professionals consider best practices for enhancing student writing performance" (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006, p. 285). These four considerations illustrate the need for writing teachers to be cognizant of the background subtleties of process writing instruction.

Motivation

For several decades, research into the relationship between motivation and writing has progressed in the light of numerous theories of motivation and theoretical concepts of writing (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006). Boscolo and Hidi (2007) regard motivation to be "so broad a research field that it is difficult to analyze its various aspects" (p.1). They suggest that the variety of motivational constructs can be organized into three main areas of research: interest, self-efficacy and self-regulation (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007). The rise of cognitive psychology in the 1970's saw the development of a sustained interest in the topic of motivation, primarily as examinations of "the rational and structural aspects of cognition" as they related to writing (Hidi, 1990, p. 550). Hidi (1990) noted that numerous researchers at that time began to recognize "the restricted nature of a purely cognitive focus", as ignoring environmental and "energetic" (motivational) "aspects of information processing" (Hidi, 1990, p.550). She suggested that interest resulted "from an interaction between an energized individual and the external world", thus representing the two aspects of cognition that have been neglected (Hidi, 1990, p. 550).

Interest

Hidi and Baird (1986) maintained that then-current research regarded interest as "a general state of arousal which will automatically facilitate learning", triggered by conditions "such as novelty, thematic interest, and incongruity" (Hidi & Baird, 1986, p. 191). They argued that this concept ignored the idea that "there are conditions which ensure the continuation of interest" (Hidi & Baird, 1986, p. 191). They urged that research should examine closely those conditions under which learners' interest is maintained, suggesting that this could be done by taking into account the affective experience of learners (Hidi & Baird, 1986).

Hidi (1990), when writing on how interest is "central in determining how we select and persist in processing certain types of information in preference to others" (p. 549), proposed a

distinction between two types of interest: individual and situational. Individual interest is personal and "develops slowly over time to have long-lasting effects on a person's knowledge and values" (Hidi, 1990, p. 551). In contrast, situational interest is "evoked more suddenly by something in the environment" and may not have a lasting effect on an individual's knowledge and values. However, the two different kinds of interest could not be considered immutable or utterly distinct from each other. Situational interest has the capacity to develop into a longer-lasting individual interest, and an individual interest may be strengthened or altered by novel situational events (Hidi, 1990; Hidi & McLaren, 1991; Renninger, 1992). The two forms of interest can interact with, moderate, and influence each other's development (Hidi, 1990; Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000; Renninger, 1992).

The connection between individual and situational interest and students' writing performance was investigated early on by Hidi and McLaren (1991). They asked if "children writing with tutorial support on high-interest topics would do better than" children with such support (Hidi & McLaren, 1991, p. 187). Their expectation that children receiving support would produce higher quality writing was not confirmed. Among their results, they found that "high interest topics facilitated only better quality ideas, but not qualitatively better writing (Hidi & McLaren, 1991, p. 187). The discrete effects of interesting topics and children's prior knowledge appeared to be confused, with children showing a tendency to produce better writing if they possessed background knowledge about an interesting topic.

In an examination of the relationship between knowledge, interest and narrative writing, Benton, Corkill, Sharp, Downey and Khramstova (1995) used different measures for knowledge of and interest in a topic. They expected that "high levels of knowledge and high interest should have stronger effects than low knowledge and high interest" (Benton et al, 1995, p. 77). Their research suggests that "knowledge and interest are related but separate constructs" (Benton et al,

1995, p. 77). Greater knowledge of a topic resulted in better planning and organization of writing, which in turn enabled writers to convey "to the reader a meaningful representation of their ideas" (Benton et al, 1995, p. 76). That is, they produced written text of more interestingness to the reader. Benton et al (1995) also found that greater discourse knowledge – understanding how to write - enables writers to more easily express their ideas.

Albin, Benton and Khramstova (1996) also investigated individual differences in interest and narrative writing about two topics, soccer (low interest) and baseball (high interest). Their results showed that students produced a greater number of pertinent ideas when writing about higher interest topics, organized their ideas more clearly, and employed topic knowledge in planning their writing (Albin, Benton, & Khramstova, 1996). Noting the implications of their findings for teachers, these researchers suggested that teachers establish inventories of their students' interests and knowledge in certain topics, allow students to choose some writing topics, and to "expect inconsistency in the quality of students' writing across topics" (Albin, Benton, & Khramstova, 1996, p. 322).

Hidi and Renninger (2006) proposed a four-phase model of the development of interest. The initial stage is "a triggered situational interest", which if supported and reinforced by the individual, the efforts of others, or events in the environment, may progress through distinct, successive stages and emerge as a mature individual interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). All phases of interest development "are characterized by varying amounts of affect, knowledge, and value", and influenced by "individual experience, temperament and genetic disposition" (Hidi & Renninger, 2006, p. 112). If not supported or maintained, the newly established interest may revert to previously low levels, or be distinguished altogether (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Renninger & Hidi, 2002). This model provides educators with a broad frame of reference when considering avenues for increasing students' interest in learning (Hidi & Renninger, 2006).

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Lipstein and Renninger (2007) conducted a study investigating 1) "the relation among students' interest for writing and their conceptual competence, goals and strategies as writers"; 2) "the relation among the students' interest for writing and their perceptions of their effort, self-efficacy, and feedback preferences in their writing", and 3) the conditions that support students in becoming effective writers (Lipstein & Renninger, 2007, p. 114). They used Hidi and Renninger's (2006) four-phase model of interest development as conceptual background, and extensive student portraitures (questionnaires and interviews). Providing support for Hidi and Renninger's (2006) model of interest development, Lipstein and Renninger (2007) found that students progress through stages wherein they refine their understanding of the nature and purpose of writing, experience writing as less effortful, "experience increased self-efficacy about writing", and "seek feedback that makes connections to ideas and form" (Lipstein & Renninger, 2007, 140). The researchers suggest that their findings have highly relevant implications for the classroom: teachers need to acquaint themselves with the stages of developing interest, self-efficacy and understanding of writing through which students pass. This would include giving careful consideration to the types of assignments, writing strategies and feedback they employ in their classrooms.

Self-efficacy

Closely linked to the overall motivation to write is the notion of self-efficacy (Pajares & Vialante, 2006). Perceived self-efficacy refers "to people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Research in the relationship between self-efficacy and motivation grew out of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. Denying human social behaviour as based entirely in biology, social cognitive theory is based "in a view of human agency in which individuals are agents proactively engaged in their own development and can make things happen

by their actions" (Pajares, 2002, p. 2). As Bandura (1986) put it, "what people think, believe and feel affects how they behave" and the "extrinsic effects of their actions, in turn, partly determine their thought patterns and affective reactions" (Bandura, 1986, p. 25).

Bandura (1986) maintains that humans possess particular capabilities, most significantly the "capabilities to symbolize, plan alternate strategies (forethought), learn from vicarious experience, self-regulate and self-reflect" (Pajares, 2002, p. 3). Bandura referred to learning from vicarious experience as learning from the experience or behaviour modeled by others, and to self-regulation as "self-directed changes in behavior" (Pajares, 2002, p. 3). Research has generally supported "the contentions of social cognitive theory as regards the role of self-efficacy" (Pajares, 1996, p. 546).

The assessing of writing self-efficacy is typically done through the use of students' self-reporting in a Likert-scale continuum or a number scale such as the Writer Self-Perception Scale (WSPS) (Bottomley, Henk, & Melnick, 1998; Pajares & Vialante, 2006). The self-report measurements of self-efficacy reflect the students' confidence in their use of particular writing skills such as grammar, composition, organization and mechanics; their ability to perform or complete particular writing tasks; and, their confidence in obtaining a certain grade for a writing task as compared to the grade eventually awarded (Pajares & Vialante, 2006).

Research into the relationship between writers' self-efficacy and their writing performance has consistently pointed to a positive correlation: writers with higher writing self-efficacy beliefs tend to obtain better writing performance (Pajares, 2003; Pajares & Vialante, 2006). When using a regression model to analyze the "relationships among self-confidence about expected writing outcomes, writing apprehension, general self-confidence, and writing performance, Pajares and Johnson (1994) found that 30 undergraduates' beliefs "about their own composition skills and the pre-performance measure were the only significant predictors"

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(Pajares & Johnson, 1994, p. 313). Similarly, Pajares and Johnson (1996) found that high school students' aptitude and writing self-efficacy beliefs had clear effects on their writing performance. Pajares and Vialante (1997) reported, in their study of 218 grade 5 students, that "elementary students' self-efficacy perceptions predict their writing performance" (p. 357). In reviewing 16 research studies investigating the writing self-efficacy beliefs of grade 6 to grade 10 students, Klassen (2002) found that "self-efficacy beliefs play an important role in predicting writing achievement in early adolescence" (Klassen, 2002, p. 195).

Self-regulation

The process of writing makes cognitive, metacognitive and linguistic demands of writers (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007). Aside from wrestling with the myriad issues of grammar, spelling, and writing mechanics, writers also need to self-regulate their writing processes (Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997). The self-regulation of writing entails the use of learning strategies such as planning, organizing and completing writing assignments, setting goals or gathering information (Pajares & Vialante, 2006).

Schunk and Zimmerman (1997) examined self-regulation from a social cognitive view, particularly as it relates to the constructs of modeling and self-efficacy. They proposed that learners move through four phases of socially moderated self-regulation competence: observation (witnessing or hearing a model); emulation (using modeled skills); self-control (use of a strategy in a self-planned way); and self-regulation (strategies or skills are used and self-evaluated automatically) (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). In terms of learning to write, a novice writer's progression through these four phases would be typified by the writer watching a teacher perform a new writing task or skill, imitating that task or skill, attempting to use the new skill and self-monitor success in using the skill, and, finally, employing the strategy automatically, without

deliberate self-monitoring. With the mastery of successive numerous strategies, skills or goals comes increased self-efficacy (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999).

In examining 10 such self-regulatory processes in writing used by accomplished writers, and then reviewing empirical studies of the use of self-regulation strategies by elementary, high school, and college students, Zimmerman and Risemberg (1997) found that these self-regulatory strategies "can be defined and assessed reliably in both field and laboratory settings", and that students who used as little as one of these strategies were more effective writers, attained better grades and strengthened their writing self-efficacy (p. 94).

Zimmerman and Kitsantas (1999) demonstrated that high school girls who were provided with modeling and instruction in a writing revision (sentence combining) strategy achieved varying levels of mastery under different, subsequent experimental conditions. Those girls who were asked to practice the modeled strategy in a self-directed manner until achieving automaticity (self-control), while self-recording their efforts and relative successes, and then shifted their focus to the outcome goal of revising redundant sentences, displayed higher levels of skill with the strategy than did the other experimental groups, who, with or without self-recording, focused primarily on either practicing the strategy or the outcome sentence-combining task (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999). Girls in the highest achieving group also reported higher levels of writing self-efficacy.

More recent research on self-regulation has emphasized evaluating the effectiveness of teaching self-regulation strategies, particularly as they may relate to planning and revising text (Graham, 2006). De La Paz and Graham (2002) used what they term the self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) to teach strategies, skills and knowledge for expository writing to typically developing grade 8 students in process-writing classrooms. Students in the experimental treatment group, who received sustained modeling, instruction and feedback in the various

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writing strategies, "produced essays that were longer, contained more mature vocabulary, and were qualitatively better" than the control group receiving no SRSD instruction (De La Paz & Graham, 2002). The gains demonstrated by the students showed persistence in follow-ups to the study (De La Paz & Graham, 2002). Similar results were found by Fidalgo, Torrance and Garcia (2008), in another study of grade 8 students who also received a strategy-focused intervention, referred to as cognitive self-regulation instruction (CSRI). Researchers in this area have pointed to the results of studies on writing self-regulation strategies as having potentially positive applications for both special needs and regularly developing students, as well as enhancing the effectiveness of process-oriented writing classes (De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz and Graham, 2002; Graham & Perin, 2007).

Summary

As is revealed by the research on the process approach to teaching writing and the issues surrounding the promotion of students' interest, self-efficacy and self-regulation as writers, there is highly complicated interplay between the pedagogical environment of the writing class and the unique emotional, intellectual and experiential development of every student who learns to write. Learning to write is a vastly complex process and is possibly the most difficult and potentially frustrating task faced by school children. To make it an onerous and seemingly meaningless task is to do a disservice to children. To avoid this possibility, writing researchers and writing teachers need to continue their search for effective and meaningful ways to engage students in writing. This would preclude the adherence to teaching practices that do not allow students to understand the nature of the writing process or do not foster a sense of social purpose, accomplishment and self-discovery. The teaching of writing demands pedagogical flexibility and an awareness of the factors that contribute to students' growth as writers.

SECTION 3: CONNECTIONS TO CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Impetus for Change

At any point in a teacher's career, there may arise moments in which one must face doubts about one's effectiveness as a teacher. Such occasions may be sparked suddenly, or sidle into one's consciousness, little by little. These potentially unsettling experiences have been termed critical events (Webster & Mertova, 2007; Woods, 1993). Critical events often represent strong challenges to one's world view, imply the need for change, are never foreseeable, and can be understood only in retrospect (Webster & Mertova, 2007; Woods, 1993). In outlining a number of ways that critical events have a role in educational settings, Woods (1993) maintains that critical events are crucial for teacher development, in that they may be the impetus for teachers to examine their practice and move it in more creative directions. I experienced a long series of critical events in my first five years as a teacher of writing in elementary classrooms.

In my first three years as a classroom teacher, the combination of a complete lack of pedagogical knowledge, training and experience, as well as little acquaintance with writing research, doomed my initial attempts to formulate a writing program of any benefit to my upper elementary school students. This state of affairs was exacerbated by my unexamined beliefs about the nature of writing, how the abilities of young writers develop, and the conditions under which inexpert writers might flourish. Nothing in my academic or personal writing background had prepared me to teach writing. As Norman and Spencer (2005) point out, this is not an uncommon experience among pre-service and beginning teachers, who typically "receive much more instruction in reading theory and practice than in writing" (p. 26), and whose own earlier experiences with teachers and writing instruction in public school and in university greatly affect – for good or for bad – both their attitudes toward writing and their beliefs about their abilities as writers.

Contending with three grades in one classroom meant maintaining vigilance over a broad and complex swath of curricular requirements, particularly in the area of writing. Therefore, to 'ensure' my success as a teacher, and my students' success as writers, I trotted out strategy after strategy, one 'catchy' writing topic after another, and isolated grammar and syntax activities ad nauseam. All of this had sadly ironic consequences: few of my students made any discernible progress in 'fixing' the grammatical, syntactical and structural errors common to their writing; the overall organization and clarity of ideas in their writing improved little; and they cared no more for writing than they had at the beginning of each school year. Worst of all, no sense of a writers' community had developed in the classroom, giving the students no opportunity to share their writing and ideas with anyone but the teacher. The students did not gain any experience in writing for an audience of personal significance to them; nor did they acquire an appreciation of the social purposes of writing. Pondering this embarrassing muddle of critical events, I thought it time to adopt a purposeful system or framework to serve as the basis of my writing program.

Since my student teaching days, I had heard constant reference to writers' workshops as an effective process approach to teaching writing. Though I had an interest in exploring its use, working in isolation for several years had not afforded me the opportunity to see it in action. On arriving at a new school in my fourth year of teaching, I hoped to encounter and learn from peers who might use this approach in their classrooms. I was disappointed to find that none of the teachers in the school did so, largely because they regarded it as potentially chaotic. It was necessary for me to initiate my own version of a writer's workshop in my classroom.

I settled on a classic version of writers' workshop, with all its organizational baggage. I presented my students with a host of workshop supplies: two-hole punched paper folders for storing rough drafts; a checklist of (prescribed) writing genres to be attempted; a spelling 'bloopers' sheet to ward off common spelling sins; a sheet to record brainstormed topics and

titles; tracking forms for rough drafts started and abandoned; a form for marking dates of upcoming proofreading and editing sessions. In retrospect, accountability was the major focus of the whole exercise. Some two months into the school year, all this paper was the chief source of litter in my classroom. Keeping track of it was a serious challenge to the organizational skills of most of the students, who came to loathe the busywork. Policing the confusion became nothing more than an irritant to me.

I continued to model points of grammar, usage, style, vocabulary, purpose and genre; I employed canned, supposedly surefire, attention-grabbing writing and brainstorming activities 'guaranteed' to spark my students' inner fires. Still, my students exhibited varying degrees of indifference to writing, producing little work of any depth or passion.

In the second year at my new school, my writing program resembled the previous year's approach, with one exception: I decided to jettison a large measure of the paperwork and tracking records; after all, these had little to do with the act of writing. I consigned all handouts and guides to a resource center in the classroom, and practiced their uses with my students on a daily basis for a month. This freed up more time to teach writing, although I continued to place an undiminished emphasis on correct form and the mechanics of writing. I also maintained tight control over topic choices.

After beginning my graduate studies in language and literacy education, with a particular interest in examining the research on the teaching of writing, I gained a deeper appreciation of the theoretical underpinnings of the process approach to teaching writing and the extensive research related to its use in classrooms. Of equal importance was my belated exposure to sociocultural and social cognitive theories of learning in general, as exemplified by Vygotsky (1978), Bandura (1986), and Rogoff (1990; 2003), as well as my gradual encounters with theoretical models of writing as a cultural and social process (e.g., Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Dyson, 1995; Prior,

2006; Sperling & Freedman, 2001) and their implications for practical classroom application. These models seriously challenged my concepts of how children learn to write. Eventually, I was led to the research on motivation – and, more specifically, its constituent elements of interest, self-efficacy beliefs and self-regulation - and its relation to children's experiences with writing in the classroom. All this reading convinced me that I needed to find ways to embed the teaching of process writing in my classroom within a broader social context, while enabling me to use teaching strategies to help my students develop their skills and confidence as writers; I also needed to rethink the manner in which I tried to interest my students in the act of writing.

Writing Environment

The impetus for making radical changes to my writing program came initially from two observations. First, most of my students lacked the motivation to write. Second, many of them held low writing self-efficacy beliefs: they viewed themselves as poor writers or as unable to understand how to become better writers. This reflected what I later saw described as typical of the emotional issues connected with students' negative experiences with writing, due to the manner in which it may be taught: if the process of writing is perceived as mysterious or threatening, students may well develop a disinterest in writing (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007).

Many teachers' resources emphasize the need to create a non-threatening environment in which children can write often, share and respond to writing, and observe the process of writing being modeled by a teacher. However, this may not occur on a frequent or consistent basis in many writing classes (Kara-Soteriou & Kaufman, 2002). Though I had modeled the writing process in my classes, this often focused largely on the particular form of a genre. Little time was spent on modeling writing as a process involving thinking, decision-making and reflection, and which is seldom perfectible, often messy and susceptible to revision. Now, I make a conscious effort to demonstrate my own attempts at writing - essays, stories, poems, quotidian observations,

ruminations, personal reflections, experiences or opinions - and I do so while exhibiting a sense of humour and enthusiasm. My students can observe me work through a draft containing scratched-out words and passages, replaced and rewritten in different colours (so that I can keep track of my revisions). I have shown them my own notebooks and journals full of dizzily scrawled notes and drafts. They are genuinely interested in looking at these drafts and can see first hand that even for a practiced writer, writing is evolution: it is wholly acceptable, in fact necessary, to change one's mind about a topic, abandon ideas, or question one's own thinking. They are also surprised by what I write about and what it reveals about me as a person. My students observe my writing process almost every day and express an interest in watching it develop. They are invited to respond, to assess the writing in relation to my writing goals, and to make suggestions for revision, either on their own or in consultation with a neighbour.

After striving consistently for nearly two school years to put my students more at ease with the potentially frustrating act of writing, I have observed a greater willingness in my students to participate in all of the activities in our writing classes – warm-ups, planning, drafting, vocabulary games, mini-lessons, peer response, publication – and to share their writing with either another student or the whole class. They are less adverse to making public their efforts to write. They also generate far more questions about their writing tasks than when I modeled only form or structure; my current practice of demonstrating my active thinking and reflection about the process whereby I wrestle with achieving a writing goal has created a less threatening writing environment. This is particularly so when they are able to exercise their personal choices in writing topics, when writing topics enable then to connect to either their prior knowledge, or some aspect of their experiences with the world around them. The one-on-one conferences that I conduct with my students - either when they deem it necessary to consult with me, or when I observe that a student needs further support – are gateways to establishing positive working

relationships with my students, by giving me the opportunity to offer both appropriate praise and suggestions for wrestling with various writing skills. Keeping the potentially hard work of writing in perspective with a sense of humour also helps to put students more at ease with their writing.

Teaching the Writing Process: Choosing a Framework

In trying to clarify for myself how writing and motivation are linked, and pondering the nature of a teaching framework with which to address this issue, I encountered research readings that led me to consider the issue of young writers' self-efficacy beliefs. Much of this literature focuses on the abilities of younger, less experienced writers to cope with the many complex demands of writing. These studies typically examine the extent to which writers are confident about their general writing abilities, whether they see themselves as capable of accomplishing specific writing tasks, or have a sense that they can improve their writing skills. (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Pajares & Vialante, 1997). In a discussion on the role of self-efficacy beliefs in the classroom, Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) recommend that teachers base their classroom practice on experience and psychological research. They make four suggestions for promoting studies engagement or motivation in the classroom. Specifically, they believe that teachers need to: 1) ensure that students' self-efficacy beliefs are "relatively high but accurate"; 2) give "challenging academic tasks that most students can reach with effort"; 3) help students understand that "competence or ability is a changeable, controllable aspect of development"; 4) "promote students' domain specific self-efficacy beliefs rather than global self-esteem" (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003, pp. 134-136).

In reading the research on the relationship between self-efficacy and writing, I was struck with the extent to which stronger self-efficacy beliefs and higher writing achievement are linked (Pajares & Johnson, 1996; Pajares & Vialante, 1997; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; White & Bruning,

2005). I found the research that examined the fostering of self-efficacy beliefs in writers commonly pointed to the need for effective modeling and the development of students' self-regulation strategies in the classroom (Bruning & Horn, 2000; De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; White & Bruning, 2005). As a consequence, I have reconsidered the forms of modeling and learning strategies I employ in the classroom.

In the past, I modeled writing in the classroom. However, I now believe that I presented it in too formulaic a manner, somewhat akin to lecturing. I emphasized a prescriptive, step-by-step writing 'process' that varied little and demonstrated only the nuts and bolts of a given writing task. I have now adopted, and made considerable adaptations to, modeling and teaching strategies that are based in the self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) approach, as outlined by a number of researchers (De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Graham & Harris, 2005; Harris & Graham, 1996; Harris, Graham, Mason & Friedlander, 2008). Though earlier research showed SRSD to be beneficial for learning-disabled students or struggling writers (De La Paz, Owen, Harris & Graham, 2000; Graham, Harris & Mason, 2005), it has also been shown as effective in teaching regularly developing writers (De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz & Graham 2002).

A full complement of SRSD includes the direct teaching of several self-regulation strategies: goal setting (to determine the nature of a writing task and establish a plan for its successful completion); self-monitoring (used by students to monitor their attention levels, performance and effective use of strategies); self-instruction (six forms of self-speech used by students to help them focus on, understand and solve a problem); and self-reinforcement (praising oneself for accomplishing a task) (Graham & Harris, 2005). These are to be used within the context of six implementation stages of SRSD: developing background knowledge; discussing the use of SRSD strategies in the writing task at hand; modeling while thinking aloud about the use of the strategy; memorizing (ensuring that students know all the steps for a strategy); support

(wherein teachers and students employ SRSD strategies in various guided and collaborative writing activities; and independent writing while using SRSD strategies (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Being leery of taking on another full suite of mere technique, replete with the ever-present acronyms and planning sheets, I currently utilize the goal setting activities and, in a far more abbreviated form, the self-monitoring strategies of SRSD. I have also adopted the basic implementation stages, but again in a modified form. I made these adaptations to the SRSD framework because I saw their potential to provide a more flexible and socially interactive writing environment in my students' writing classes.

I now introduce a writing task by taking cues from the first implementation stage of SRSD: developing background. My class and I read several examples of a writing genre. These are taken from wherever I find them: children's books and magazines, internet sites, local newspapers, posters, advertisements, cartoon strips, my own writing – whatever serves to develop a sense of how a genre works, its purpose, its constituent parts, and a vocabulary for discussing the writing form.

In the second stage, the class discusses the criteria for successfully completing the writing task. This is similar to the goal setting stage in SRSD. The criteria or goals are agreed upon and posted in plain view in the classroom. The students transfer these into their writing notebooks, for later referral when at home. These criteria are expressed as succinctly as possible, in 'kid-friendly' language. I have compressed the third and fourth implementation stages into one. Now, when modeling writing for my students, I ensure that I think aloud as I write, addressing points of criteria as I go. At times, I ask my students to work in pairs or small groups to discuss and analyze my efforts in relation to the criteria, and then to make suggestions for changes they think

are necessary. To reinforce the students' understanding of the criteria, all of my comments or questions to them are couched in terms of our posted goals.

To support the use of basic self-regulation strategies, I have found it effective to have students work collaboratively in order to practice a writing task. When necessary or appropriate, I arrange the groups so that students whose writing abilities are more strongly developed are matched up with at least one other student whose writing skills are less advanced. The discussion between group members serves to reinforce their familiarity with the writing criteria and it appears to lessen the anxiety experienced by some students when faced with new writing tasks. While monitoring the collaborative work, I am able to address any questions the students may have about organization or revision, for example, and provide them with prompts or further guidance. When completed, collaborative writing is then viewed and revised by the whole class.

The shift to independent writing is always the test of how well students are able to negotiate their writing assignments. Rather than leave my students up to their own devices, as I may have done in the past, I now continue to support their efforts to complete independent writing and to self-monitor their progress in addressing their goals. I meet with students in brief one-on-one conferences with students during writing classes, which allows me to assess their understanding of the writing form or task, and to offer encouragement, give personalized mini-lessons, or answer their questions.

Though at first I was wary about taking another technocratic approach to teaching writing by adopting SRSD methods, I was encouraged by comments made by researchers who support the use of SRSD as an effective classroom tool. They caution against regarding SRSD as a panacea and recommend that it be adapted as individual teachers see fit (Harris, Schmidt & Graham, 1997). Since incorporating my much-modified SRSD framework into my writing program, I have found it easier to blend together support structures that address more of my

students' needs with regard to writing. However, I began very recently to use the goal setting, self-monitoring, self-instruction and self-reinforcement aspects of SRSD with two students in my class who are on modified programs. Both have significant, but different, struggles with writing. So far, I have observed some success with the organization of ideas in their writing.

Peer Response

As my appreciation of writing as a social activity grew, I wondered often about the possible benefits of using peer response (or 'peer editing' as it was commonly referred to in teachers' recipes for conducting writers' workshops) as a means of enhancing my students' development as writers. My first attempts to introduce peer response were wildly unspectacular. My off-the-cuff directives to huddle in pairs and peer edit left my students up to their own devices, knowing neither how nor what to edit. These editing sessions inevitably slumped into futile disarray.

My initial readings of research on peer response made me cognizant of its theoretical foundations in process theory (Elbow, 1973), collaborative learning theory (Bruffee, 1984), and in Vygotsky's views of cognitive development as shaped largely by social interaction (Di Pardo & Freedman, 1988; Liu & Hansen, 2002). Hillocks (1986) commented on the relative effectiveness of certain forms of feedback given to writers, concluding that when feedback — either written or oral — "are focused and tied to some aspect of instruction, either prewriting or revision, they do increase the quality of their writing" (Hillocks, 1986, p. 168). Further reading of the research literature - much of it related to the use of peer response in second language, high school and college classes — enlightened me as to the need for student preparation when attempting to build it into a writing program (Barron, 1991; Denyer & LaFleur, 2001; Ferris, 2003; Freedman, 1992; Neubert & McNelis, 1990).

Keeping in mind the need for instructing my students in conducting effective peer response sessions, I carefully discuss with them the purpose and rationale for peer response groups: that it is intended to help them discuss and revise their writing in a focused manner, with support from others. Showing them samples of my own work that has been reworked in peer response sessions demonstrates that even experienced writers can benefit from peer revision. I explain the process by which they will be introduced to conducting a peer response session, emphasizing that our goal is to build a comfortable and constructive social environment in which to work.

Introducing the process of peer response requires a great deal of modeling. I have been assisted by a resource teacher, a now-retired principal, an educational assistant and, when possible, a fellow teacher. We use our own compositions, written on a common theme (so that students can see different approaches to the same writing task). At first, my modeling focuses only on editing for clarity, as well as on the forms of verbal communication that is constructive, positive and courteous. Next, I ask my students to practice as a class, using my writing as a model. On occasion, I provide models from the writings of well-known children's authors, without identifying the author. After the class has responded with suggestions for revising these excerpts, they are surprised to learn that they are able to act as 'editors' for a published author.

The students' first attempts at conducting their own peer response groups are always done with writing provided by me, or one of my collaborators. They are asked to work in small groups to read and discuss the writing, and then to record any suggestions on a response sheet. Their initial focus is on the clarity of ideas. Each group then reports back to the class. I monitor these sessions closely, providing prompts when needed and positive feedback for praiseworthy contributions to the discussions. The next step is to have students work again in small groups to complete a short collaborative writing task. The writing groups then exchange drafts and respond

to each other's first draft. They record their comments on a response sheet and return the drafts to the authors.

The crucial final step is to bring students into peer response groups with their own writing. Some students are very comfortable in doing so, while others are understandably reluctant at first. The majority of the students usually display a tentative willingness to participate. Bridging the gap between the safety of responding to writing models and the riskiness of putting their own writing on the table is potentially unnerving for some students. There is no foolproof way of making this utterly painless for all students, but I find that asking them to share writing they have competed in warm-up activities, learning journals, free writes, or drafts of writing assignments from various subject areas serves as a cushion for students before they share drafts of guided or independent writing.

There are a number of caveats to offer here. First, there is the issue of what kinds of editing or corrections students should be expected to offer competently. To expect students to enter a peer response group and red-ink all errors of grammar, syntax and organization would only defeat the purpose of peer response groups which is for students to learn from each other, and to come away with comprehensible input from their peers (and to leave with their self-efficacy beliefs intact). To avoid a descent into editorial mayhem during peer response meetings, I find it is absolutely essential to expect students to concern themselves with only those writing points that have been, or continue to be, instructional foci, as suggested by Neubert and McNelis (1990). It is imperative that the differences between students' writing abilities and working memory for writing tasks be respected and not pushed beyond reasonable bounds.

Another aspect of peer response groups that needs consistent monitoring is the inevitable appearance of editorial or participatory stances adopted by students during their meetings. Students will display different tendencies to dominate discussions, provide little or no input,

nitpick over grammatical or spelling errors, take a defensive (or offensive) attitude, or simply be off task. When necessary, I review or remodel our collective expectations for productive peer response sessions. I sometimes sit with a group of students during a meeting, in order to reinforce positive, on-task contributions. Keeping the groups to only three members, and the meetings to a maximum of about 15 to 20 minutes in length, helps to avoid the loss of focus.

In addition, I require students to submit a half-page response sheet after peer response meetings. They are expected to record two or three point-form comments on each sheet, with all members of the group signing their names on each sheet. I photocopy these sheets for future reference and put them in a writing portfolio I keep for each student. These response forms serve two purposes: first, they add a modicum of accountability to the peer response meetings, as the students know that they will receive credit for constructive meetings; second, I can compare them with their owners' final drafts, hoping to see evidence of the incorporation of peer response suggestions.

Lastly, some students and their parents, especially those from an E.S.L. background, may not feel confident in their ability to provide feedback, and some may express their desire for an expert – the teacher – to make any and all corrections necessary. When I point out that they are responsible for trying to make suggestions that reflect what they have been taught in writing mini-lessons, they may feel more at ease. However, I will also meet them halfway, by sitting with them during a peer response meeting and making a limited number of suggestions.

Though effective peer response groups require effort to establish and maintain, I believe this work has made significant contributions to my writing program. Once they are comfortable and reasonably proficient in participating in peer group meetings, most students show a willingness to share their ideas and to help others. It is a very useful opportunity for them to rehearse teaching points and increase their self-awareness of, and self-efficacy beliefs in, their

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writing skills. Equally important, however, is that the children can gain a greater sense of writing as a social act meant for the sharing of ideas, and that their personal contributions to this social activity are both valid and valued. In addition to the benefits that students derive from engaging in peer response groups, there is a benefit to me as a teacher: while students share ideas in a social setting, I am provided with opportunities to monitor and assess their individual progress in various writing skills and to ascertain the need for reviewing certain concepts.

Writing in the Classroom: Assignments or Journeys?

The formation of a "literate community", as envisioned by Nolen (2007), in which "literacy activities form a social core that helps establish and maintain the relatedness of individuals" (Nolen, 2007, p. 242) is a long-term goal that I have recently set for myself as a writing teacher. I have taken small, steady steps toward this goal by involving my students in more varied, purposeful, socially interactive and personally meaningful writing 'journeys', as opposed to mere assignments. Within the new instructional framework that I use, along with still-developing support structures, my writing program has branched into two components: guided writing, which constitutes a major share of the program, and independent writing.

Within the guided writing component, my chief goal is to learn how to challenge my students with writing activities that are of genuine interest to them. Such writing activities are sometimes referred to as 'authentic', in that they are of personal value and relevance to students, yet function as appropriate vehicles for learning to write (Boscolo & Gelati, 2007; Bruning & Horn, 2000). This would not include most of the canned writing activities often found in teachers' writing resources. From observation, I find these are frequently of no genuine personal relevance to children's experience, or have little connection to their background knowledge, an important factor in promoting students' interest and achievement in writing (Hidi & McLaren,

1991). My aim is to help my students gain a stronger belief in their ability to write, by engaging them in interesting writing activities that serve as communicative, social acts.

The majority of the guided writing my students and I do is often collaborative in the initial stages of instruction. It is varied in purpose, and tied to the students' immediate experience, whether in the classroom, the school community or outside of school. Each activity is couched within the modified SRSD teaching framework I currently use, thus making it possible to build background knowledge, set writing goals, and reinforce self-regulation strategies. I will provide two brief examples of these activities, which differ in scope and intent.

This year, when well into a science unit on extreme environments (deep oceans, polar regions, deserts and space), I set my students the task of writing an employment advertisement calling for applications from explorers to work in a given extreme environment. Much introductory work had been done in learning about the nature of conditions within these extreme environments. We examined employment advertisements for professional positions, identifying and discussing the constituents of the various ads – technological and educational qualifications, previous work experience, personal qualities, benefits, and job responsibilities. Using this information, we worked together to create drafts of a possible advertisement (for an archeologist to work in a desert) and subsequent application letters. Students then selected an environment at random, and worked in groups to draft advertisements for 'explorer' positions. These were discussed and revised in peer response groups, then posted on chart paper. The class then reviewed each of the ads and made further suggestions for revision. Later, when preparing for a now annual spring science exhibition involving two classes, each student was responsible for creating one employment advertisement to display in the 'career centre' section of their particular extreme environment exhibit. Though the students had not experienced extreme environments first hand, their classroom preparation, and the prospect of danger and derring-do connected with

each 'explorer' job advertisement, made the writing activity attractive to the students, many of whom wrote effective advertisements that were informative and creatively displayed.

In a mini-unit focusing on the use of descriptive vocabulary and the proper use of a thesaurus, I worked with my students to create richer imagery. In one lesson, I generated a column of 15 nouns on the left side of an overhead projection, and a column of 15 modifiers on the right. I then drew lines connecting nouns and plausible modifiers. Afterward, I used eight pairs of words as the basis of a poem (and was lucky, in that images of a river's sinuous luster worked its way into my list). Then, in groups of three, my students concocted their own lists of nouns and modifiers, doing so in rotation among the group members. I stressed the need not to be deliberate in their word choices. Once their lists were completed, each group tried to compose a short piece of writing, in prose or poetic form. The groups presented their work to the class, amidst animated discussions about the diverse and surprising images. When the students were asked to create their own works of imagery, the results were truly unexpected. The children painted some remarkably thoughtful and textured images. Several were taken aback when I expressed my genuine admiration for their work, which appeared in various poetic and prose forms, including a postcard story. When it was displayed on the writing board in the classroom, all of the students were keen to read each other's work; they read quietly at first, gradually bubbling up with expressive chatter and compliments.

The independent writing component of my writing program started as a gamble, but it is now firmly in place, and continues to meet with success. Taking a suggestion from Kara-Soteriou and Kaufman (2002), I encourage my students to explore topics of possible personal interest to them - "writing territories" as they are described by Atwell (2002, p. 4). As I explain to my students, I believe writing only for marks is not a valid impetus to write. Writing involves persistence, but also requires an open mind and playfulness. The children are free to work in any

genre they wish and for any reason. There are only three stipulations: first, they must write independently as much as possible in class, and at home; second, they may abandon, put aside, or return any piece of writing they begin; third, in the last week of each calendar month, they must submit one piece of polished writing. No minimum or maximum length is imposed. During independent writing, my students may conference with me to ask questions or receive feedback about their work. This writing is not graded, a fact that initially astounded the students. It is done simply to try new writing forms or work on their existing writing goals in ways of interest to them. When they submit the work, I reply in writing - a full page - noting their successes and making only one suggestion for revision. I follow this up with a brief conference with each student during silent reading time or independent writing classes.

In the beginning, I did not know how responsive the students would be to writing independently. However, I was greatly surprised by the first results (and continue to be every month). To date, the non-threatening nature of this writing program component has sparked writing in a remarkable array of genres and topics. I have received writing such as the following: two plays by a girl who studies drama; an astonishingly witty four-chapter booklet entitled *A Beginner's Guide to Perfectionism* (written by a highly perceptive and self-aware girl with whom I joke about the character trait we share); poems in many forms – particularly notable are those written by a boy who is an excellent mathematician and enjoys shaping the complex rhythms in poetic forms such as sonnets and terza rimas; one-minute mysteries; a conversation between four planets of our solar system, in which the planets boast of their respective extreme physical features; a how-to guide for building solar ovens for summer barbecuing; fantasy stories (written largely by boys, who mistakenly assumed I would not be interested in reading their work); an essay questioning the need for belief in God; just-so stories; a suite of limericks critiquing various television shows. We have practiced writing most of these forms in class, but many

students have chosen to utilize them in their independent writing. With encouragement and guidance, several students for whom writing is a challenge, have gradually brought to completion short adventure stories or poems containing more strongly connected plot lines or more descriptive vocabulary.

The independent writing component, as successful as it is, does come with some hitches. A few students, for their various reasons, are resistant to or avoid most writing activities, and sometimes do as little independent writing as possible. I have yet to find a reliable way to engage these students more fully. Some students do not consistently apply their revision skills to their independent writing and I often need to prompt them to reread their work aloud to notice unclear meanings, missing words, and weak connections. The odd student will 'cram', working briefly on only one piece just before the monthly submission dates.

Intertwined as they are with the support structures I have placed within my new program framework, these two program components have made significant contributions to motivating my students to write. They have provided the students with purposeful reasons to write, and to do so for audiences other than their teacher. The students are given more opportunities to learn about the act of writing in a far more social context than I previously provided. I can also say that the implementation of these program components have fostered a greater enthusiasm for writing in my students, as well as qualitative improvements in their writing.

SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

The process approach to the teaching of writing is not a newfangled creation fresh off the pedagogical press; the rationale for employing it in classrooms is broadly accepted and a multitude of teachers' guides and resources recommend its adoption as a sound basis for writing programs at all educational levels. In fact, some education researchers may no longer regard the process approach as a "hot" research topic (Kara-Soteriou & Kaufman, 2002, p. 25). Something of a paradox remains, however: though it may be regarded as a highly useful instructional model, the process approach is frequently applied in ineffective forms (Kara-Soteriou & Kaufman, 2002). This may occur as a result of discrepancies in teachers' perceptions or understandings of writing development in children and their actual classroom practice (Berry, 2005; Brindley & Schneider, 2002); it may arise from teachers' own negative experiences with writing instruction or low self-efficacy beliefs in their own abilities as writers (Kara-Soteriou, 2002; Norman & Spencer, 2005); the simple fear of good classroom management being placed at risk because of the implied freedom of the process approach may prevent many teachers - experienced or inexperienced – from implementing it in their classrooms.

That the process approach may be misapplied (or ignored altogether) in many classrooms is not to suggest that there is one absolute, preferred form of the model to be utilized in all cases and at all times. After reviewing current research literature on the process approach, Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) conclude that "writing and the writing process are best understood as complex phenomena that include not only procedural strategies for going through the writing process to generate text but also to a multitude of other strategies to develop specific schema" (p. 285). To the classroom teacher, this means attention must be paid not only to the writing process, but also to the host of lower-level writing skills, including matters of conventions, organization, cohesion, topic, audience, genre and the emotional and attitudinal issues involved in writing

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(Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). I believe this broad range of necessary considerations imply the need to be flexible and informed as a teacher of writing.

I have found it imperative to adjust or reshape my writing program, the earlier forms of which I often believed to be a reasonable representation of a sound process approach to writing instruction. I realize that it emphasized either process at the possible expense of product, or stressed product, at the risk of ignoring the benefits to students of understanding or experiencing the process of writing. After reading widely on the topic of the process approach and attempting to apply what I have read in a strategic manner, I have begun to erect a far more suitable framework for guiding my students through the writing process, while permitting greater flexibility in addressing the teaching of writing sub-skills and strategies. In addition, those motivational elements so necessary to the development of good writers - an interest in writing, positive self-efficacy beliefs, and the ability to regulate one's own progress in writing - have made a welcome and tangible presence in my writing classes. My students' greater enthusiasm for writing, their expression of increased confidence in their ability to write, the qualitative improvement in their writing, the broader spectrum of genres they are willing to explore independently, and their improved ability to assess their progress in writing indicate that I have made important steps in the right direction as a teacher of writing.

At this point, I am reminded of the guidelines for narrative self-study research in education put forward by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001), who make, among other suggestions, two important points: autobiographical self-studies about teaching or teacher education must attend to genuine problems and issues that arise in learning to teach, and these studies must represent an attempt "to improve the learning situation not only for the self but for the other" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 17). The 'other' mentioned here I take to mean not only the reader and writer of the self-study, but also one's students. To embark on an examination of some

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aspect of one's teaching practice implies the wish to learn from it and to look for ways to serve better one's students. This is so in the present case, wherein I have consciously re-evaluated a large measure of my practice as a writing teacher, which was in serious need of reformulation. But there is a great deal I have yet to address. Looking ahead, I have a desire to acquaint myself with the developmental issues connected to writing, as I believe these are closely related to the self-efficacy beliefs of young writers. I also have an interest in exploring more widely the potential benefits of introducing critical literacy to my writing program as a means of promoting richer social and motivational contexts for writing. As well, I wish to strengthen my ability to help struggling writers through the use of self-regulation strategies.

While reading research material on process writing and the relationship between writing and motivation, I have often seen the act of writing referred to as an immensely challenging and complex undertaking, one that has the potential to baffle and frustrate writers of any age. On one occasion, I heard writing characterized as "untameable" (C. Leggo, personal communication, August 28, 2008). As unsettling as this notion may be on first consideration, conjuring up images of writing as an uncontrollable beast impossible to contain, it also offers an impression of writing as intriguingly beautiful in its vast and subtle complexity. Perhaps writing is better regarded as akin to a wilderness, unruly and insuppressible, resistant to stiff-necked attempts to carve one neat, permanent path through its interior. It is this portrayal of writing that I choose to contemplate as I enter the classroom, willing to seek out and journey down unexpected paths.

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