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"MY PEN WON'T TALK"
TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF CREATIVE WRITING EXPERIENCES AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

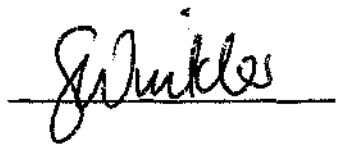
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A Research Project submitted to the Faculty of Education University of the Witwatersrand in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education by Coursework and Research Report

Johannesburg 1995

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master in Education at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.



GISELA GERTRUD WINKLER

SIGNED ON THE 23 DAY OF JANUARY 1995.

ABSTRACT

The work of Piaget and Vygotsky has formed the theoretical foundation for many research projects that investigate children's cognitive processes which are part of their learning experience. These investigations, however, do not address the affective aspects of the learning process. This study seeks to isolate and explore the affective components of writing by conceptualizing a "creative writing experience" as a personal meaning making event which is simultaneously influenced by the children's cognitive development and their emotional development. The feelings experienced by the children while writing are a particular interest. Theories developed by Freud and Klein are used to investigate the children's emotions and to assess the impact these have on their writing process. The methods of investigation employ a detailed observation of external behaviour with the help of a video camera, a focus group interview, a reflective interview and a projective technique. The children's emotional experience of writing is deduced from the visual data as well as the interviews. It is concluded that the children's experience of writing is dominated by anxious emotions. As the medium of writing does not provide children with a communicative structure, it presents many children with an experience of isolation and meaninglessness. If the children fail to provide a purpose for their task, writing becomes an experience of insecurity and alienation. The role of children's talk during the writing process does not have a cognitive significance. On the contrary, its primary function seems to be to control affective forces and to maintain the personal purposefulness of the writing task.

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INTRODUCTION

The challenges of multicultural and multilingual education in South Africa are no longer confined to small, progressive experiments, but have become the source of widespread difficulties and debate in ordinary classrooms. One of the crucial challenges facing all teachers in classrooms at present is how to help learners with a limited proficiency in English to overcome the vast gap between their oral and written competence in the medium of instruction. Many students cope well in class if the work is presented and examined orally, but fail to perform correspondingly in their written work. Their oral competence makes them feel that they understand the work and thus they get frustrated and angry if their written tasks do not provide them with the results they expect. The time teachers spend talking with them about the required responses does not seem adequate preparation for the demands of the written tasks.

Writing does not seem to be a simple matter of "talking with the pen". It is a process that takes students beyond a communicative role and forces them to work out a permanent and formalised position in relation to the task. This means writing provides no space for tentative thoughts and thus forces students to confront their own feelings of insecurity in relationship to the task and to the language they are expected to use. The difficulties and anxieties of the writing process can best be observed when students are engaged in creative writing tasks where their performance does not depend on their knowledge of any particular content, but seems to be limited by the act of writing itself.

However, the current understanding of these limitations is inadequate and therefore it is difficult to design a process that successfully supports students in their feelings of insecurity and brings them from an oral approach to a literate approach in their school work. As a result teachers are easily frustrated by the unexplained, yet persistent difficulty that students have with written school tasks and struggle with the students' intense emotions that seem to be part of the problem.

THE AIM

It is precisely this difficulty that leads me to ask how students experience the writing process in general and, in particular, what emotional factors are part of their creative writing experience. My position as a teacher at an Open Catholic School has confronted me with the learning experiences of 10 to 14 year- old students who mostly come from multi-lingual (non-English) backgrounds and I have chosen to look at this particular group of children in an attempt to explore their difficulties with a creative writing task in English. **The aim of this research project therefore is to understand a creative writing experience among primary school children.**

A purely cognitive perspective on writing concentrates on writing as a process, rather than as an experience. Thus it would seem that creative writing is only deemed possible when 1. a child has internalized signs that have been provided by culture and are shared by society; 2. the child has some internal control over the process of meaning making and can voluntarily and creatively engage in it; and 3. the child shares the conventional functions of signs so s/he can share his/her own meaning with others. Learning to perform creative writing tasks is part of the cultural development of a child that results from the mediated use of signs and the mediation will have a transforming effect on the process of cognition of the child.

In the course of the proposal it will be argued, however, that a theoretical framework based exclusively on theories of cognitive development does not provide

sufficient concepts to penetrate the complex web of feelings and activities that make up the actual experience of the writing process. Neither "internalization" nor "control over meaning-making processes" can be said to be purely rational, cognitive operations and language cannot simply be conceptualized as a transparent tool provided by society, which represents meaning that is to be shared. To bridge the gap basic concepts of the psychoanalytic tradition will be applied to differentiate notions such as mediation and internalization of language. The use of language is understood to be part of the symbolic processes that continually create new meanings by establishing links between affective energy and external objects. These meanings give the child power to take up an independent and personal position in the social network of communications. The ability to use language in order to communicate with other people is a crucial extension of the child's power to symbolise personal meaning and provides the child with a social process to manage emotion and desire. If the symbolisation takes the form of writing, however, the social norms apply not only to the content, but also to the form of the communication. Thus creative writing, understood as an act of formalised social communication, demands of the child that s/he voluntarily and creatively makes new meanings that link the internally and externally experienced realities of the child in a socially acceptable way.

The empirical investigation of the research project will engage with these issues in pursuit of four specific aims:

i. to generate a theoretical framework with which it becomes possible

to investigate the [illegible]ship between the cognitive and the affective factors involved in the creative writing process;

ii. to investigate the affective factors impacting on the writing processes of children during a specific creative writing task;

iii. to attempt to throw new light on the impact of emotional experiences on a cognitive task such as writing;

iv. to suggest ways in which writing programmes can explicitly support children in their emotional needs during the learning process.

RATIONALE

Recent work on the methodological concerns of teaching writing has implicitly elaborated some of the concerns noted so far. There is no explicit reference to psychoanalytic theory in the texts, but there is a clear recognition of the fact that writing includes both affective and cognitive processes and that the affective processes are particularly important if students are not writing in their mother tongue (Edelsky 1991). Many of the recent methodological suggestions address the emotional rather than the linguistic aspects of the writing task. Edelsky (1986, 1991) stresses the importance of a "real purpose" in writing and argues that the knowledge of a real audience helps the writer to focus and structure the writing task. This concern is also expressed by Hedge (1988) who argues that it is the teacher's responsibility to identify who the readers will be and to design activities which support students through all the phases of writing. Valadez (1981) links the development of writing skills to the development of the writer's cultural identity. The notion of identity is also of interest to Hall (1989) who argues that the teaching of writing must promote the emergence of authorship in young writers. Children grow to see themselves as authors if they are involved in the decisions about the purpose, form and audience of their writing. What all of these methodologies have in common is that they conceptualize writing as a long and difficult experience (not simply a task) and that they explore ways in which teachers can support the writers by providing a process that will ease the pain and increase the writer's sense of control. They do not, however, provide a sound theoretical basis for their recommendations.

Wilkinson, Barnsley, Hanna and Swan (1980) do make an explicit link between writing and theories of affective development. The affective domain is defined as the emotional, interpersonal and imaginative aspects of a child's development. These include the dimension of the "self", "others" and "reality". Wilkinson et al proceed to develop an inventory with which the content of children's writing can be analysed to provide insights into their general emotional development. Although their work draws on general theories of affective development, once again it does not provide an adequate theoretical framework that can be used specifically to comprehend children's experience of the writing process. Thus it seems that there is very little research done that goes beyond the level of description of the emotional experience of children when they are engaged in a seemingly cognitive task such as writing. These descriptions are useful, but provide no substantive explanatory framework for the difficulties that children experience with writing.

In this project I will attempt to fill this gap and to develop an understanding of the children's feelings while they are writing. This might prepare the field for more detailed investigations into the complex net of cognitive and affective factors that impact on the actual experiences of children that are learning in order to meet demands of written school tasks.

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING LEARNING EXPERIENCES

In trying to understand the experience of writing tasks at school it is important to develop constructs that allow us to conceptualize the complex and interrelated feelings and activities of learners and teachers that constitute the learning experience. This means 1. exploring the cognitive and affective processes of learning; 2. looking at the development of symbol formations; and 3. understanding writing as a particular instance of the previous two areas. Thus this literature review will cover mainstream cognitive and psychoanalytic theories to identify the most useful concepts to be used in the theoretical part of the study and it will also apply these theories to the specific conditions of the writing process.

Cognitive theorists such as Piaget (1968), (1970), (1981) and Vygotsky (1978), (1962) seem to agree that learning is more than imitation or reproduction of information or skill. The essential feature of learning is that it is a constructive activity. New knowledge is actively being constructed by the learner (with the help of the teacher) and this results in qualitatively new mental activity on the part of the learner. There are, however, significant differences in their explanation of the construction process.

Piaget conceptualizes learning as an activity internal to the learner when he suggests that equilibration is the generative mechanism behind cognitive development. New

mental structures are constructed by the learner when the contradictions between existing knowledge of reality and new demands thereof cause an internal imbalance and conflict. The resolution of the mental disequilibrium depends on a process of equilibration that will constru ew cognitive schemes which result in new ways of knowing. For Piaget, however, this notion of an inner imbalance is not conceptualized a an actual experience of conflict. It is rather part of his theoretical model of an expanding process of equilibration (Furth, 1983). Unlike its mechanical counterpart, cognitive equilibration does not return mental structures to their former state of non-disturbance. The balance rather occurs when the cognitive structures are expanded through the construction of a higher plane of mental functioning. Thus equilibration is put forward as a hidden, intrinsic biological mechanism of mental construction without which learning cannot take place. School learning is therefore not a direct result of teaching. Learning (as defined above) will only take place at school if the school experience causes disequilibrium in systems of knowledge and if the learners can use their inner resources to overcome this internal non-balance through equilibration.

Vygotsky's critique of Piaget focuses on the notion that a child will naturally (i.e. independently from mediation/teaching) develop new mental structures. For Vygotsky the mechanism that assures cognitive development is not an intrinsic biological process. He rather postulates semiotic mediation as an extrinsic mechanism of mental development when he explores the role of verbal transactions between the learner and the teacher in the learning process. Here Vygotsky introduces a concept of cognitive development which is mediated through the use of

tools and signs. Children develop cognitively when they are initiated into the symbolic activity of their community through mediation. Central to Vygotsky's theory is the notion that symbolic activity assumes an organizing function that transforms mental processes. Initially these symbolic activities are embedded in external, social relationships that give them meaning. Gradually these processes are internalized and the individual increasingly provides an internal context for the signs and thus increasingly develops personal control over the process of meaning making.

According to Vygotsky, therefore, school will only provide a learning experience if the daily activities provide explicit opportunities for transactions between the social and intrapersonal construction of meaning. This implies opportunities to shift from an external to an internal regulation of mental activity. This transaction will not occur naturally. It is initiated by those acts of speech (communication) between the learning material, teacher and the learner which have a mediating function linking the external and internal realities of the learner.

In summary then, the crucial factors of cognitive development according to Vygotsky are

i. that a qualitative change in mental functions is always the result of a qualitative change (development) in the function of the signs used as a psychological tool to perform mental functions;

ii. the qualitative change in the use of the sign is

> mediated. This means the mental function associated with it appears twice during the course of cognitive development - once externally in the interpsychological sphere and the second time internally in the intrapsychological sphere.

Vygotsky's ideas made a particular impact on the debates around the influence of literacy on cognition. He argued that the presence of a system of writing is a necessary condition for the emergence of scientific thought as written language is more removed from reality than spoken language and this made writing more abstract. The decontextualization of written words in turn changes the function of words as they no longer represent a concrete situation but have themselves become an abstract, systematized situation with which people can interact. Thus the ability to write must involve mental functions of abstraction and systematization that in turn form the basis of scientific thought. The crucial question behind this argument is whether the decontextualization of a written word differs from the decontextualization of a verbal word in such a way that it causes the development of more abstract mental functions. In other words, does the difference in the medium of the word mean a difference in the form of mediation and thus have a transforming effect on the mental functions involved?

Vygotsky (1978) states that writing is a system of second order symbolization. The written sign is a representation of a verbal sign which in turn is a representation of a real referent. Thus it is considered to be more abstract. When literacy is acquired

the verbal sign as "middle link" falls away and the reader moves directly from the written word to the referent. There seems to be no indication, however, that the symbolic function of the sign changes. Once the written sign system has been mediated, the individual can use the written signs at the same level of generality as the verbal signs (Vygotsky 1962). Thus the decontextualization and abstraction involved in a written sign system does not affect the symbolic function of the signs. It affects the medium, but not the structure of mediation. The written text is decontextualized in the sense that words take the place of the context and have to create an explicit framework into which the message is placed. The framework is created through words, grammatical rules and syntax, not through new language concepts. Thus the written sign system is structurally analogous to the verbal system used. It is only more explicit.

There is, however, one way in which the written sign changes the condition of mental activity. The written sign, being extracted from a specific context, releases the intended meaning from the constraints of time. The sign is no longer bound to the impressions of the short term memory but rather operates within a space where there is the possibility for reflection and abstraction. It no longer has to encode the "immediate story of experiences" but structurally provides the possibility for a person to rethink a situation and to draw out general features of an experience. Thus it does not seem to be literacy as such that gives rise to conceptual thought. The written sign rather creates a non-situational context which seems an important condition under which a broader cultural and theoretical practice of critical discourse can develop, i.e. the act of reading or writing in itself is not a sufficient condition

for the development of new cognitive structures, but the presence of the written word seems to Vygotsky to be at least a necessary condition for this.

The work of Piaget and Vygotsky underpins a vast body of research on cognitive development and learning. Piaget's concept of equilibration illuminates the personal potential and limitation of the learner and this has led to a widespread acceptance of the notion that development happens in stages and that the curriculum should accommodate the natural limitation of students. [Athey (1970), Donaldson (1978), Varma (1976) and Light et al (1991)]. Vygotsky's concept of mediation, on the other hand, has generated a lot of debate around the potential and limitation of the learning environment [Luria (1979), Tulviste (1991), Cole and John-Steiner in Wertsch (1985a),].

Although Piaget and Vygotsky's work is presented as separate theoretical positions, they complement each other well when one tries to understand the complexity of an empirical learning experience. Macdonald (1990) presents an example of a South African study that uses both theoretical frameworks in a complementary way to investigate the learning experiences of rural primary school children. Her study differs from those referred to above in that she attempts to shift from an understanding of the learning process to an understanding of the learning experience. After reflecting on the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of cognitive processes, she proposes that a successful learning experience depends on

i. the existence of conflict between familiar and unfamiliar knowledge of the world (Piaget)

ii. the intentional provocation of this cognitive conflict and pursuit of its resolution by the community of learning (Vygotsky)

iii. the availability of resources to overcome the inner conflict and to reach a new state of equilibrium (Piaget).

The only aspect of Macdonald's position that remains without a theoretical basis is that of the availability of resources to overcome the inner conflict. She fails to provide any account of the inner resources that support the learners while they are struggling to internalize mediated material (or resource) and engage in processes of self-regulation which will create a new internal equilibrium. In other words, the one aspect of the learning experience that can not be understood with the help of mainstream cognitive theory is **the experience of learning itself**. What does it feel like to learn? Does it involve an actual experience of conflict? If yes, what are the resources that learners rely on to overcome the experience of inner conflict? Are these available? How can teachers know what the learners need?

The psychoanalytic tradition is based on a theory of experienced inner conflict and therefore is able to provide some helpful insights here. Freud (1984) suggests that a child is born with conflicting psychic energies - life and death instincts. These energies flow freely in the unconscious mind where a concentration of energy is experienced as anxiety and a release of energy is experienced as pleasure. Freud formulates the pleasure principle as an inborn regulator of these energies: humans

instinctively seek to avoid pain. The demands of external reality (called the reality principle) necessitate the postponement of immediate pleasure and gradually both instincts are directed and held in balance by the ego which seeks to control the internal conflict by bringing the reality principle to bear on it. Regulating conflicting emotions (love/hate) by means of the reality principle is the first learnt, mental function.

Further development of mental functions happens with the strengthening of the ego by means of projection, introjection, and repression of threatening wishes and ideas into the Unconscious (Freud 1984). Although a barrier between the Conscious and Unconscious is established, no life experiences are lost to the child. The Unconscious becomes realm of unbound energy and repressed emotions that exert a dynamic pressure on consciousness.

For Freud, learning (i.e. development of mental functions) is fundamentally an emotional process because it is conceived of as a process of controlling and structuring powerful, yet opposing feelings of pleasure and pain that can be equated to an experience of anxiety. Education is an "incitement to the conquest of the pleasure principle" (Freud 1984, pg.41) but has to be conceptualized as a struggle between opposing psychic forces during which energies become bound by images and experiences of the external world.

Melanie Klein (1988a and 1988b) explored these ideas further and suggests that it is the destructive impulses within the child that cause anxiety. The child cannot

escape its own destructive urges and yet has a need to protect itself from their threat. Therefore the child will project his/her anxiety onto an external object which in turn is perceived to be the threat. Filling the object with the anxious feelings "restricts" the feelings to the object and in this sense the destructive impulse gets "bou[illegible]". It also means that the object becomes a symbol of anxiety. This process of projection is the beginning of the child's symbolic function where external reality is given a meaning that reflects the internal reality. This function can also be directed inwards and introjection will take place. The child will introject images of external objects to maintain their influence on its internal reality in the absence of the real objects themselves.

Symbolism, in the form of projection and introjection, therefore is the first process of constructing memory and meaning. The mechanisms of introjection or projection also allow a child to mentally repair and restore an image previously "damaged" by the destructive energy. The wish for reparation, i.e. the wish for the dominance of the life instinct, is understood as a maturation in the symbolic activity.

Frosh (1989) presents Klein's argument that symbol formation (and the anxiety that gave rise to it) are the foundation of a child's phantasy and its relationship to reality. Symbolism, especially the experience of symbolic reparation, increases the child's capacity to tolerate anxiety and to link internal phantasy with the external world. In her original paper Klein (1988a; "The importance of symbol-formation in the development of the ego") had developed this point further and had claimed that without phantasy the child's relationship to the external world would be impaired.

Without phantasy (attaching private meanings to external objects) the child would have no basis from which to relate to and negotiate with the external objects themselves. Thus the **interaction** of phantasy and reality are a precondition for a child's interest in the external world and its rational understanding of it.

Segal (1985) illustrates how close this link between unconscious phantasy and reality remains, even in adulthood. She records various examples of people who "complete" their superficial perceptions of people and relationships with their own "internal perceptions", i.e. phantasies. They are unaware of the fact that they understand situations to mean more than they say and this leads to misunderstandings or distortions of events. As phantasies are images that are bound to powerful internal energies and have been repressed into the Unconscious, their meaning cannot easily be challenged and so these images can maintain people's "unrealistic" perceptions of the world in spite of contradictions and rational arguments. Once these internal perceptions become differentiated and allow for a distinction between private phantasy and external reality, a rational understanding of the situation can develop.

Thus it would seem that a crucial consequence of the development of the symbolic function as presented above is the **simultaneous** development of a child's relationship to phantasy and to reality. The two relationships are both the result of "making meaning" by linking internal and external realities through projection and introjection. As a result perceptions of phantasy and reality influence each other and might overlap. Thus the child from very young, long before it can speak, not only

has a relationship to, but also an understanding of reality. This understanding might be private and "unrealistic", but it is there. As our understanding of reality involves a process of constructing meaning of the external world, the act of understanding is essentially a symbolic act.

Cognition of reality that is based on sensorimotor or mediated activities are not the first symbolic acts that a child engages in and thus cognition necessarily will have to confront the existing personal, affective knowledge of the external world. This will involve the negotiation of the ego between perceptions of phantasy and those shared by people in the external world. Thus cognitive processes rely on external, social meanings to construct reality whereas affective processes can be understood as either using reality to construct internal, personal meanings or allowing external meanings to take on internal significance.

Vygotsky acknowledges the existence of both personal and social meanings when he argues that, as a result of mediation, an external sign has become for oneself what it had been for others. He also claims that the change in the function of the sign from communication to self-regulation causes cognitive development. However, Vygotsky gives no account of the learner's inner reality before the social sign has been internalized and directed toward the self. If we accept that the symbolic function which makes cognition possible is the same function that ensures projection and introjection, then we have to accept that the cognitive construction of knowledge does not fill an "empty" head with interactions or signs provided by society. Rather cognition of the social world changes the aim of symbolic acts by shifting it from

an internal personal meaning (caused by the binding of psychic energy to external images) to its social meaning. In this sense, Vygotsky's claim that cognitive development depends on the development of a new function of a sign from communication to self-regulation still holds, but can be seen to be limited to the social aspect of the symbolic function only.

The above claim that the cognitive symbolic function has the same origin as the affective symbolizations and that therefore cognition necessarily involves an encounter with the personal, emotional meanings of a situation also makes it possible to explain why Piaget maintains that cognitive development is essentially a biological process that is neither smooth nor predictable. The disequilibrium that provokes the mechanism of equilibration can be understood as the disequilibrium and free flow of psychic energy that is causing anxiety. The pleasure principle comes into effect when equilibration is achieved by binding energy through new symbolic acts and thereby extending and stabilizing mental activity. We can say cognitive development has taken place as the result of a struggle (disequilibrium and equilibration) between internal and external meaning making.

Salzberger - Wittenberg et al (1983) have looked at the emotional experience of learning and teaching and claim that learning is essentially an experience of struggle and mental pain. It involves feelings of insecurity, frustration, disappointment and helplessness. If the pain is more than can be tolerated, learning will be avoided and the anxiety (flow of energy) can become expressed as fear, panic or anger in relation to the teacher. Mental processes such as transference or repression arise in defence

of the ego against the mental pain and are therefore part of the learning process. Resistance to learning is often the most obvious "defence behaviour" in a learning situation. All of these defence mechanisms rely on the symbolic function as much as cognition does and both processes occur simultaneously. Thus learning can no longer be conceptualised as the primary, rational construction of knowledge, but rather has to be seen as the separation and "reconstruction" of reality and phantasy in the Conscious and Unconscious respectively.

CHAPTER 2

DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

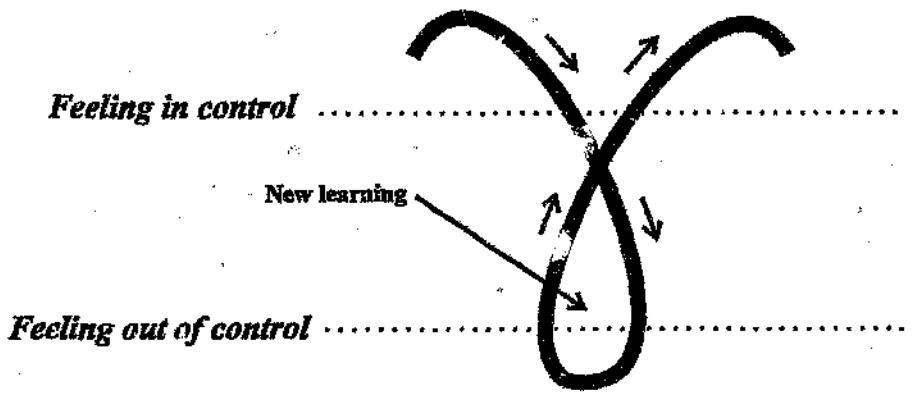
The theoretical consequences of the above position are extensive. If internal and external symbol formations are no longer understood as separate processes, we can use the notion of simultaneous symbol formations to explain the emotional interference in cognition or, on the other hand, the impact of cognition on emotion. It also allows us to explore the subjective experience of cognitive processes and to conceptualize the internalization of resources that are necessary for a successful learning experience.

As argued above, internalization of new semiotic material is not a neutral, rational construction of internal signs. It involves the child in a process of identification with the teacher by which the child's initial object cathexis (e.g. current rational or irrational knowledge and use of signs) has to be abandoned and be reconstructed to produce a new cognition of reality. This process of letting go and reconstructing can be conceptualised as a struggle between the security of knowing (pleasure principle) and the awareness that this knowledge no longer meets the demands of external reality (reality principle).

A new construction of reality relies on a temporary positive identification with the teacher (as the knower, controller) to provide the security lost when the existing

knowledge is temporarily abandoned. In other words, the state of not knowing (result of abandoned object cathexis) can only be endured if the ego is supported in this crisis by the introjected image of the teacher (stability, security). Thus identification becomes the condition under which an object cathexis can be abandoned and the psychic energy can be released without losing a sense of reality and control. The free flowing energy will once again be bound when a new use of signs (new knowledge) can direct the libidinal energy and provide it with a new aim. The child can therefore only risk learning if the image of the teacher provides him/her with the temporary stability and security s/he needs.

The internalization of resources in a learning situation therefore depends on the increasing strengthening of the ego and the development of the super-ego through the identification process so that the "teacher-trust" can gradually grow into "self-trust" and self confidence. The internalization (introjection) of positive learning relationships can become a critical factor in the learning process. The conscious or unconscious memory of the fact that learning ultimately results in a new feeling of security and safety can sustain a learner's openness in the learning relationship when mediation is experienced as an intense struggle for signs. Thus it follows that internalization of semiotic material in the learning situation is the result of an individuals's psychic need to internally maintain the influence of reality (mediation) and to use it to strengthen the life instinct. This happens in a continuous cyclical movement:



The experience of learning follows a cycle of feeling in and out of control.

The learning experience of a person will hence follow a cycle of feeling in or out of control. The learner will instinctively resist the loss of control and security and might abandon the learning process when s/he experiences excessive anxiety. Recognizing this cycle leads me to suggest that the affective factors that contribute to successful learning are any factors that sustain the learner's sense of security and control, despite the necessary process of letting go. These factors are:

i. capacity for love and ability to trust in order to engage in relational experience of learning;

ii. tolerance of pain and frustration in order to endure the temporary feeling of being out of control;

iii. some awareness (by teacher or learner) of personal inner history and how cognition (use of mediated signs) can become a tool to control and stabilize inner realities;

iv. access to affective energies that allow for change and

creativity.

The application of the preceding discussion to the context of creative writing will show that creative writing is caught in a deep conflict between the personal, emotional demands of the creative process and the social, cognitive demands of the writing process. The creative process as described by Klein (1988a) is rooted in a person's need to repair and restore images damaged by the person's destructive impulses. Thus it will only occur if the child 1. allows some free flow of psychic energy (anxiety) so that repressed phantasies can emerge; 2. that it rebinds this energy in new symbol formations that are drawn from the child's internal or external reality . This rebinding of energy provides the child with an opportunity for the destruction or reparation of previous images. This ability to repair images essentially is the creative space where no meanings are taken for granted and the child is able to make something "new". Thus the notion of control in the creative process is intensely personal as it takes the child through both feelings of anxiety and pleasure caused by the guilt and reparation (renewed control) of its internal, private world.

The demands of the writing process are in complete opposition to those of creativity. Writing is a process of symbol formation that is governed by strict social rules. The written words have to be socially acceptable, e.g. correct spelling so that they can communicate the meaning of the creative process. Frosh (1985) expresses the social demands of communicative language as the "principle of otherness that any act of speech presupposes" (pg. 150). This principle operates naturally in speech, but in

writing it is rather a formal demand. Writing, being an act of communication, therefore presupposes an act of reading. The reader, however, is not a neutral figure. S/he is part of the external social reality and will judge the creative act in terms of the norms of that reality. Thus it is the imagined act of reading by an "Other" that contains - simultaneously - the purpose and the limitation of the creative act.

Although the imagined presence of a reader provides the purpose and the limitations for the writing process, it is not part of the writing experience as such. Writing is very lonely. It is fundamentally different to talking. There is no immediate listener, no immediate response. The child is speaking to an "Other" which cannot answer. The "Other" is lost. The child is forced (by the creative process) into an internal struggle, is abandoned in it and in addition has to internally provide the audience for the final outcome of the struggle. At the same time the child is also under immense pressure to communicate with the "emptiness" in a highly prescribed and coded ritual of writing conventions. If children do not have inner resources of love and trust which will enable them to create their own audience through identification, they will not cope well with the loneliness of writing. If children feel unsure of the conventions, the fear of "failure" and of permanently being "abandoned in the wilderness" is increased. If children cannot tolerate the temporary anxiety and loneliness of creative writing, they might resist to engage in the process by refusing to find a story to tell.

Thus the experience of creative writing will necessarily include an experience of

increased anxiety as it centres around a gap between what exists internally for the writer and what is actually expressed through language. This gap is a product of the censorship and repression that the writing process entails and without which the creation of meaning cannot be communicated and shared by others. At the same time, however, it offers opportunities for pleasure when it becomes a creative process of constructing new meaning out of uncertainty; of dealing with deeper anxiety (by providing objects for cathexis); and producing a stronger sense of personal integrity, stability and power. It can be a chance to temporarily fantasise wholeness and control where it will never exist.

Thus moments of anxiety and pleasure are both part of writing. Based on the above considerations I would suggest that the painful parts of the writing process are "getting started, editing (being confronted with one's own mistakes), getting marked (judgement of final product)". The pleasurable aspects are likely to be "making up a story, reading (listening to) other stories, getting praise and help during editing, sharing the story with a real audience". Although these moments of anxiety and pleasure would occur in any writing experience, the particular emotions related to writing in a language that one is unsure of, need some mention here. A very common emotion that can be expected among writers with a limited proficiency in English is one of frustration when they feel they are not able to "say what they mean". They are also likely to feel very insecure about the formalities of the task and the expectations of the "imagined reader" who will necessarily be English. Heightened anxiety about the formal aspects of language use (e.g. spelling, vocabulary) and fear of making mistakes can also be expected.

The theoretical framework of this research report therefore rests on the notion that the experience of creative writing is similar to any other learning experience, in that it follows a cycle of feeling in and out of control. The experience of losing control is caused by an internal release of psychic energy from existing symbol formations. The binding of the free-flowing energy to the same symbols or to new images introduced from external sources reduces anxiety and leads to a renewed feeling of inner control.

Creative writing, however, differs from other learning experiences in that it does not provide an explicit learning relationship in which the task is pursued. The act of writing essentially isolates the writers and they are forced to project their readership in the absence of a real communicative setting. They are thus continually confronted with the difficulty of bridging the gap between their complex inner reality and their limited external expression of it. The isolation from a real "Other" during the writing task is experienced as a painful, alienating process which makes the feeling of losing control all the more threatening.

CHAPTER 3

COLLECTING THE DATA

The collection of data involving the feelings of children while they perform a creative writing task has to take into account the very personal nature of the creative process. Qualitative evaluation and research methods (Patton, 1990), (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992), (Bell, 1984) provide the tools to understand individual children's behaviour and feelings and allow one to probe their emotional reactions to particular tasks. Explanation in this methodology rests not on an observable causality between behaviour and written outcome, but on a critical description and analysis of the empirical writing behaviour, as well as the children's perceptions thereof. The latter will be done in terms of generative forces put forward in the theoretical part of the study (Harré & Secord 1972). Validity of the study will be secured through triangulation, reflexivity and plausibility of explanation (Maxwell,1992).

The subjects

The subjects involved in the research project are 29 Standard 4 pupils at a Catholic Primary School in Johannesburg. There are 16 boys and 13 girls in the class. The class was chosen because I, the researcher, am also the class teacher and consequently I have direct and daily access to the students. The majority of the children live in townships around Johannesburg or in Hillbrow and come to school travelling over an hour in taxis or busses. Very few children in the class live in the

vicinity of the school or are brought to school by their parents. Only 11 of the 29 children are currently brought up in a nuclear family and have regular contact with both parents. Most other children are taken care of by single mothers with the help of their extended families.

As most children are growing up in the townships they are "streetwise", regularly telling stories of violence and crime during their weekly "news hour" and many have been victims of some form of violence themselves. The ages of the children in the class range from 11 years to 14 years and 10 students have repeated at least one year of schooling. All children are orally proficient in English and can fully participate in the school's social life as well as class discussions. However, only five children speak English at home. Not all students are fully proficient in written English and generally the students are not confident in their written school work.

Salzberger - Wittenberg et al (1983) point out that children's early learning experiences form the basis for their emotional involvement with school tasks and she lists some of the factors that contribute to children's heightened anxiety during points of transition and open endedness in their daily learning experiences. At risk are:

1. those who have had frequent changes of parenting in infancy and early childhood, each change undermining the trust and the reliability of a helping adult;
2. those who have experienced traumatic separations in early childhood - such events undermine the trust in the survival of

the loved person in one's absence;

3. those who have not been able to internalize a good relational experience because:

   a) their mothers were unable to provide a sufficiently safe holding situation, or

   b) the child is so tolerant of any frustration that any withdrawal of the mother results in the destruction of the memory of the good experience.

   In both cases, no safe internal equipment can be acquired. These children and adults therefore tend to cling to an external static situation for to them any change spells disaster;

4. those who have recently experienced loss or separation and may therefore already be psychically overloaded at this particular moment in time.

(pg. 14 and 15)

Due to the difficulties associated with single parenting, many children in the research group fall into the first or second "risk" category. A full investigation of the effects of emotional trauma on children's ability to learn is beyond the scope of this research project. Nevertheless, it is important to note that many of the children participating in the research are likely to have had traumatic experiences that could have undermined their trust in learning relationships.

Apparatus and Method

The validity of the study is secured through triangulation, and therefore three separate methods of data collection were employed in an attempt to gain access to the experienced inner life of the students who participated in the creative writing task. Data collection took the form of 1. detailed observations (Webb,1975); 2. a focus group interview (Folch - Lyon, 1981); 3. a reflective interview; and 4. the use of a projective technique (Semeonoff,1976). As I am simultaneously the researcher and the class teacher, the methods of data collection had to release me from immediate involvement in the process. The data collection therefore was done with the help of a camera operator and a facilitator, using two video cameras, a tape recorder and my reflective notes written on the day the research was done.

The data collection took place in three phases. The first phase commenced once all the parents had granted written permission for their children to take part in the project. It began with the observation of the class' behaviour during a writing lesson. The second phase was a focus group interview with eight members of the class immediately following the writing lesson and the third phase was an interview with two members of the class four months after the initial observation, recording their reaction to a viewing of the video showing the class during the writing lesson.

Observation:

The data collection was part of an ordinary school day. The class was given a

chance to acclimatise themselves to the presence of a video camera before they were presented with a creative writing task. The two cameras were set up on high tripods in two corners of the class. One camera recorded the activities of a small section of the class, that was later part of the focus group interview. The other camera was set at a wide angle and captured the activities of the remaining class members. A row of 3 students could not be seen clearly during the recording and thus were not counted as part of the group. Although the children were aware of the cameras and had been introduced to the person handling them, many did not realise the two cameras were recording during the lesson, as the recording light had been blocked off, and the camera operator left the room during the lesson.

During the writing of the first draft, the activities of the teacher, the mood of the class and the writing behaviour of the children were recorded on video tape. This method of observation provided a detailed account of the external behaviour (especially body movements, resistance to the task and relational interactions) of the students and it freed me to be part of the process and to reflect on my own activity as part of the research. I also made reflective notes on the reasons for my interventions during the lesson.

The mood and reactions of the class after completing the first draft of the task was also be recorded on video. While the class went to another lesson, I managed to read the first drafts and provide the children with feedback on their first writing efforts, before they wrote their final copy to be handed in. The second part of the writing lesson, where the children were given a chance to correct and rewrite their

stories, was not recorded on video as the cameras had to be moved to another room in preparation for the focus group interview.

Focus group interview:

For the purpose of moving toward a more detailed understanding of the students' experience, a focus group interview with eight children was conducted. As soon as the same two video cameras were set up in another class room, eight children joined the facilitator to participate in the focus group interview. The group of eight children was made up of two from every "spelling group", thus roughly representing the spread of language ability in the class. The interview followed the form of a free attitude interview. As the children struggled with the precise expression of their feelings, they were given opportunities for discussion between themselves and reflective summaries were used to facilitate a deepening in their responses. The focus of the interview was to draw out the writers' experience of the different phases of the writing process.

The interviews were once again recorded on video tape. Each camera was set up on a tripod and was directed at one half of the group sitting in a circle. This meant the two recordings added up to a complete and continuous reflection of all members of the group during the discussion. As the interview was led by an outside facilitator, the children were more self conscious and nervous during the interview than they had been during the class observation.

The interview was then transcribed, using the sound track from both recordings as data base. The responses to this interview were compared to the observable behaviour recorded during the writing session. The data collected in the interview can, however, not be generalized to the experience of the whole group.

Reflective interview:

The third and final phase of data collection was done four months later in the media centre where two children from the class were shown extracts from the video recording made during the first phase, and then were asked to comment on what they thought was happening on the video. Their responses were recorded on a tape recorder and transcribed. As the aim of this interview was to deepen and elaborate patterns established by the observation and the focus group interview, the two children were selected on the basis of the significant contributions they made during the focus group interviews.

Projective technique:

The content of the writing task was not restricted. In order to set a "free topic" and yet provide some structure for the task, a picture that forms part of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) was used (Semeonoff 1976). The TAT material provided an opportunity for the class to write a story in response to a picture involving a learning situation (a boy with a violin). The pictures in the test were originally chosen because of their power to evoke phantasies and therefore it was assumed that

"the story" which the children projected into the picture revealed, in a fairly direct way, something of their own inner reality.

As the images of the TAT were compiled in 1943 in the United States and reflect a eurocentric culture, they could be considered unsuitable for use in a multicultural environment. There are two factors, however, that persuaded me to use the TAT despite its cultural limitations. Firstly, the English medium school environment of the children presents as much of a eurocentric culture as the TAT and therefore the children's encounter with the image from the TAT could be emotionally similar to their daily encounter with their other eurocentric school tasks. Secondly, the projective features of the children's responses to the TAT image would only be used indexically to understand what underlying forces exist and what feelings the children project into the learning situation they find themselves in. It would not be used to identify and analyse underlying pathologies. Thus, the limitations of the test and the test situation would be recognized and respected.

Guidelines for analysis and interpretation

For the purpose of this research report the video recording of the class is used as detailed observation data. In an attempt to isolate patterns of behaviour while observing the children's writing process, this data is analysed by using a time sampling method. During the time sampling, the recording is interrupted every sixty seconds and at that point a sample of the children's behaviour is taken. It is noted

how many children are writing, talking, are out of their seats or showing signs of aggression. The aggressive behaviour is explicitly defined. The results of the sampling procedure are then recorded on a graph and emerging patterns are identified and reflected upon. A similar process of time sampling is also used to analyse the changing noise level of the class during the lesson as well as the dominance of any particular behaviour.

In addition to the time sampling, a detailed transcript of the behaviour of a few children is made. The finer observation of individual children, as well as the analysis of the interviews are aimed at deepening the understanding gained from the initial class observation. During the observation of the children's individual behaviour, the following observable activities are considered significant indicators of emotional states: shouting, fidgeting, restlessness, disruptive actions and aggressive acts. These are interpreted in the context of the patterns identified with the aid of the time sampling method. Finally, the children's comments on their own behaviour are used to reflect on contradictions and similarities between the actual behaviour and their perceptions of it. The content of the stories written by the children is also analysed according to themes and images that seem to contain the children's emotional projections while they were writing the story.

Following the above guidelines, the analysis and interpretation of the data begins with a description of the class's behaviour patterns during the writing lesson and provides a preliminary interpretation of these patterns, identifying the emotional experience that gives rise to them. This initial interpretation is then assessed in the

context of a careful consideration of particular sequences during the lesson, as well as detailed observations of individual children. Finally, the analysis of the data becomes focused on the experiences of a few children, as their observable behaviour and their verbal reflections on this behaviour are juxtaposed and explored.

The outcome of this increasingly personalised analysis of the writing experiences of the children provides an insight into the unconscious aspects of their writing behaviour and these cannot be generalized to the whole class. The depth and complexity of interpretation achieved by the analysis of individual experiences, however, provides some insight into the complexity of the writing process as a whole.

CHAPTER 4

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CREATIVE WRITING EXPERIENCE

Understanding behaviour patterns

The experience of any learning situation is fundamentally personal and is determined simultaneously by the external and internal realities of each individual involved. Even if the external factors of the learning context are systematically controlled, each person participating in the situation confronts it with their own, unique inner reality and thus their individual experiences of the situation will not be the same. The children's experience of the creative writing lesson documented in the research data will therefore also differ from child to child. Their distinct psychic realities interact with the common external reality of the writing lesson to constitute individual experiences. These experiences, however, are not directly accessible. They have to be deduced from the children's observable behaviour and from their personal reflections made during the interviews. The identification of patterns in the children's writing behaviour, with the help of the time sampling method, is a significant component of the process of understanding their creative writing experiences as the patterns could point to consistent features of the children's experience.

General behaviour

The general behaviour of the children was observed and recorded using a time sampling method. Figure 1 on pg. 40 is a summary of the time sampling data collected during the 25-minute writing lesson.

Noise level

A similar sampling process was followed to establish the noise level patterns during the lesson. At each 60-minute interval it was noted if the noise level in the class during the interval had been high , medium or low. The identification of each level was based on my subjective rating in relation to my notion of a quiet, working environment. The class was considered to be "very noisy" when children were shouting out comments, whistling, making other non-verbal sounds and generally were speaking at a high pitch. The class was said to be "noisy" if many children were talking at a normal pitch, some children were making loud comments and if the general audible impression of the class was one of restlessness. The class was rated "quiet" when most children were settled, concentrating on their task and when the verbal interactions of children were at a low pitch and focused on the task. The fluctuating noise level during the 25-minute lesson is shown in Figure 2 on pg. 41. and Figure 3 on pg. 42.

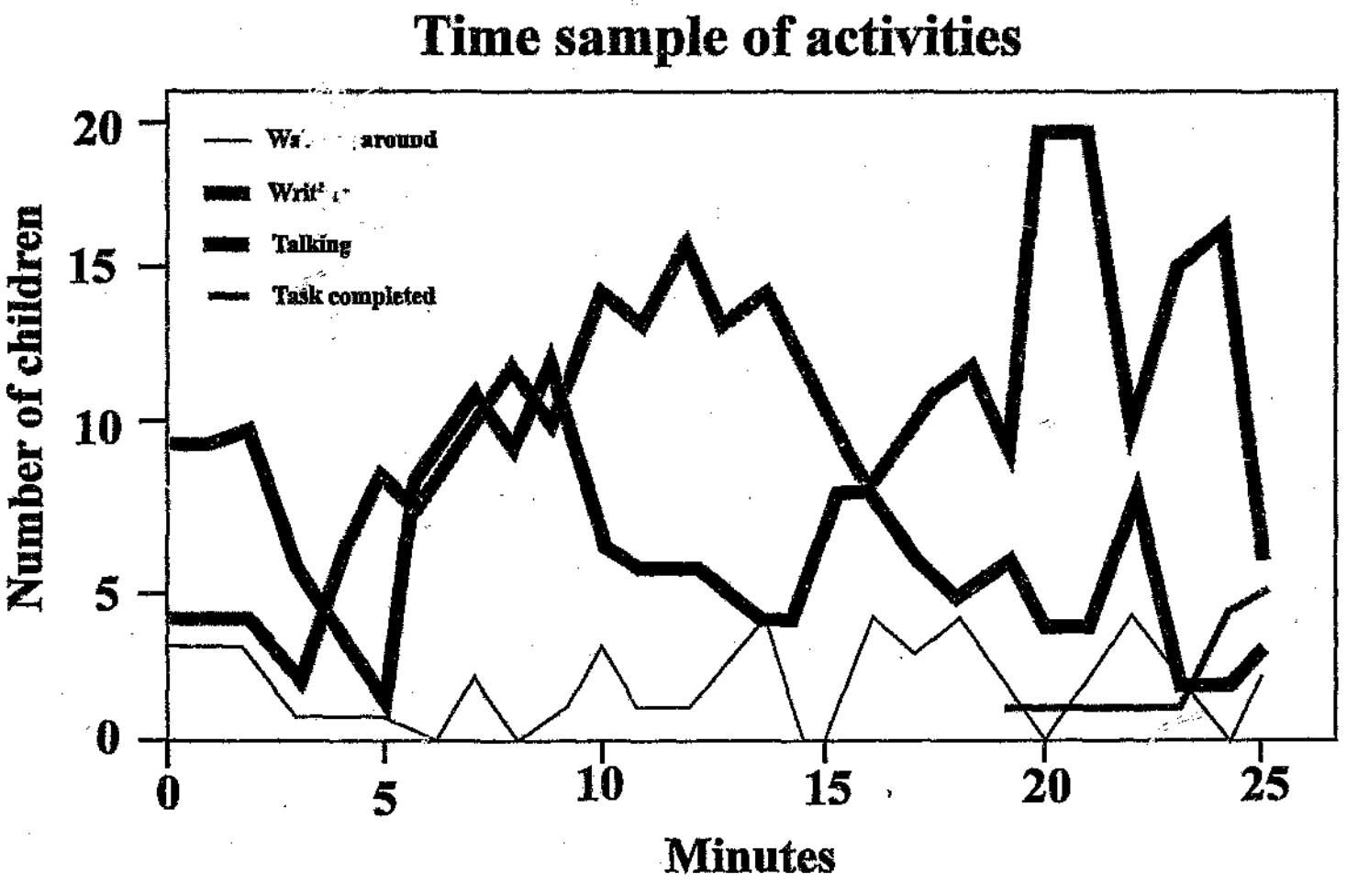


Figure 1
This is a summary of the time sampling data with a sample taken every minute during a 25 minute lesson.

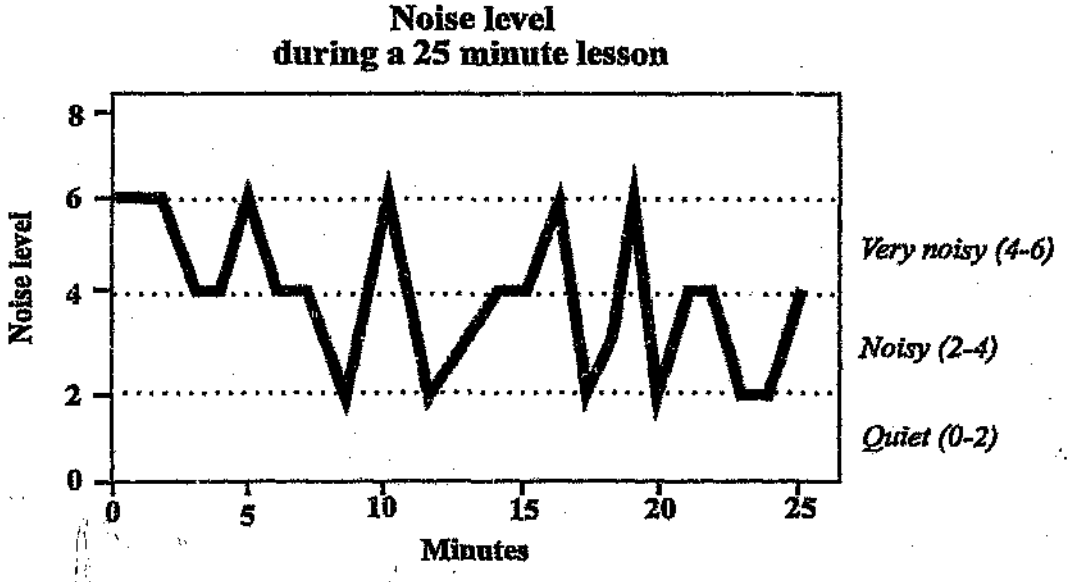


Figure 2

The noise level in the class fluctuated throughout the lesson.

The above representation of the noise level during the writing lesson reveals that the class was settled and focused during 6 of the 25 minutes observed. Of these 6 quiet minutes only 3 minutes (8th, 20th and 21st minutes) could be regarded as a sample of a natural, busy silence.[1] The relative quiet during the other 3 minutes was a direct result of my interventions.

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[1]A natural busy silence describes the class engaged in their task, with a busy buzz being heard. There are no disruptions of the activity and the children communicate softly.

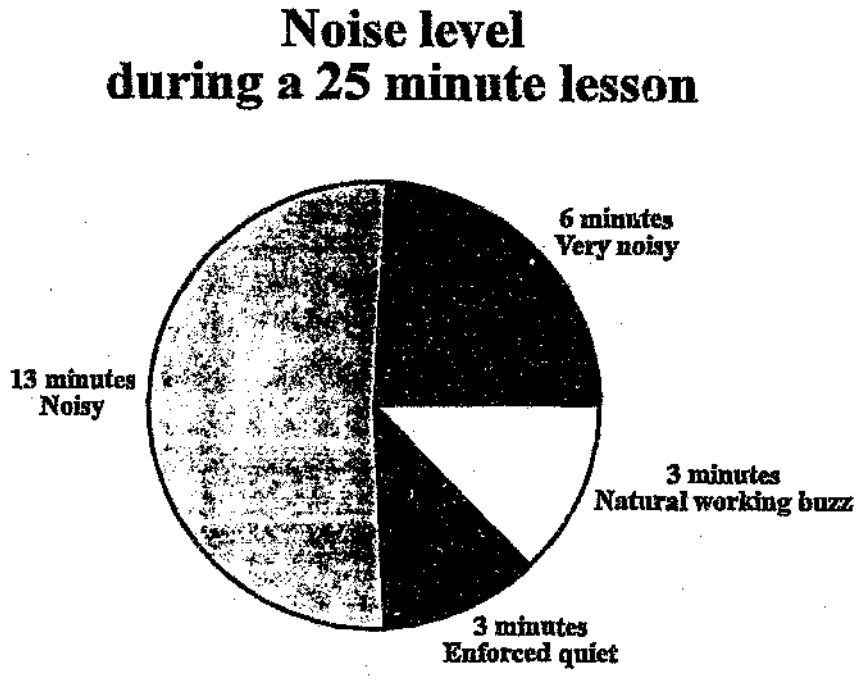


Figure 3

The children were talking throughout the lesson.

Due to the emotional dimension of the research question, I tried to keep my intervention during the writing lesson to a minimum. I only intervened directly on 3 occasions, when I felt the students' behaviour in the class was beginning to undermine the project. My interventions were an attempt to refocus and encourage the class to complete their task. The first intervention (in the 12th minute) took the form of re-explaining the task. The second intervention (in the 17th minute) was mostly non-verbal, as I walked around the class, answering individual children's

questions and observing the progress of restless children. The third intervention (in the 20th minute) set out a time limit for the task ("you have only five minutes left") and at this stage it included some behavioural guidelines for individual children.

Aggressive behaviour

It is widely acknowledged that it is very difficult to characterize the children's subjective experience of the writing lesson, as the mental pain it entails will not be directly accessible to the observer. The occurrence of emotions such as uneasiness, fear or aggression can only be deduced from external behaviour such as shouting, fidgeting, restlessness or other disruptive behaviour. The following activities were considered to be acts of aggression and were recorded as such in the above graph: throwing dirty tissues into a neighbour's desk, pushing a pupil walking past, 2 pupils imitating a boxing fight, poking a neighbour's face with a pen, shouting at and arguing with a neighbour about stationery. Initially, there were only two incidents of aggression in the first 17 minutes. They increased to 6 incidents during the following 8 minutes. Most displays of aggression occurred immediately after the teacher made an intervention and while most of the class was busy writing. The increase in aggressive behaviour towards the end of the lesson furthermore coincided with the first student completing her writing task.

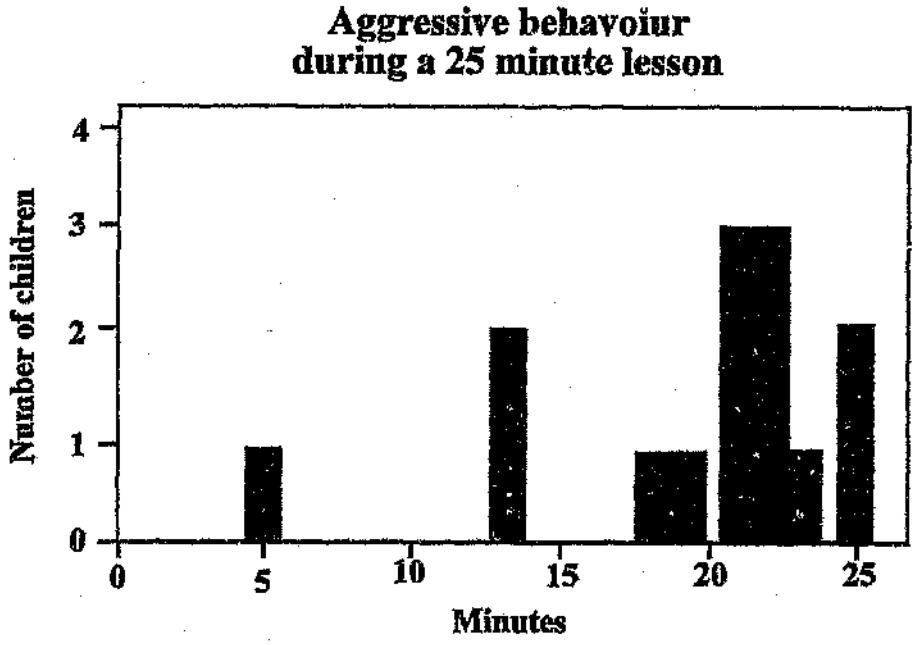


Figure 4

Aggressive behaviour increased towards the end of the lesson.

Discussion: the pain of getting started

It was suggested in the theoretical introduction to this study that the learning experience of a person will follow a cycle of feeling in and out of control as psychic energy is released and rebound to changing internal and external symbol formations. The experience of "creating a story" about a given picture is no different. The children have to allow some fluidity of internal energy to enable themselves to encounter repressed phantasies that respond to the image presented to the child by

the teacher. The freed energy then has to be rebound in new symbol formations that are drawn from the child's internal or external reality and that are formed according to the convention of story writing. The act of writing a story hence involves a lonely, context- independent confrontation with the self, during which the "inspiration" or "idea" for the story emerges. At the same time, however, the act of writing necessarily includes an act of self censorship that will transform the deeply personal ideas into a socially acceptable story. The act of writing is therefore a mentally and emotionally strenuous, lonely and painful process and a fair amount of non-writing behaviour in the form of avoidance, resistance or undermining the lesson can be expected.

The sample taken in the 5th minute of the lesson provides a very interesting insight into the complex web of mental and emotional experiences suggested above. The sample presents the first writing peak where 8 students are busy writing, only three students are observed to be talking to peers, one student is out of the desk and a further student is engaged in an activity that is considered to be a display of aggression (attempting to throw his dirty tissues in a neighbour's desk). The remaining thirteen students of the population are busy with actions that were not sampled, such as looking around, fiddling with pens and paper or stretching etc.

The visual data creates the impression that the class is in the process of settling down and that many children are busy with their task. The noise level, however, contradicts this impression. The class is very noisy. A child is whistling, another

two voices are heard shouting out comments to no one in particular, someone is loudly commenting on the date and there are one or two voices calling the teacher. This contradiction between the observed behaviour and the noise level in the class allows some insight into the anxiety experienced during the mental preparation for the writing task. Most children are communicating at a high pitch and some are making a noise for no apparent reason. Therefore it seems plausible to suggest that many children are experiencing some of the tension inherent in the creative process and that their noise making is an expression of their volatile, anxious state.

A possible explanation for this restless and aggressive behaviour at the beginning of the writing lesson is that the process of writing the story is indeed an emotionally painful and frustrating experience for most of the children. Their intuitive response is to avoid writing (as the cause of this uneasiness and frustration) by talking and fiddling with stationery etc. As more and more children settle down and begin to write, a pattern of aggression emerges. The anxious state experienced by those children who have not yet started the task is enhanced. Their initial uneasiness caused by the prospect of having to write is now compounded by the experience of "being left behind". The acts of aggression that result from this heightened anxiety not only give vent to their inner reality, but also have the effect of disrupting the writing activity of the children around them and thus reducing their loneliness.

As the teacher intervenes, the children who have not yet started are forced to confront their task, and some of these children are unable to face and contain the temporary tension and loneliness it entails. Thus their negative experience is

projected outwards and the inner conflict between the wish to please the teacher and the wish to protect themselves against the pain of writing is once again expressed in the form of a visible, interpersonal conflict provoked by the aggressive behaviour of the child. As the writing lesson draws to a close the uneasiness of those children who have not successfully engaged with the task increases again. The experience of having failed is added to the previous experiences of not being able to cope and of being left behind. The deepening of the inner conflict can be seen as the acts of aggression increase.

An interesting contrast to the above observation of the fifth minute is the sample taken in the eighth minute. The sample presents the next writing peak, with 12 children writing. No children are out of their desks and there is no visible display of aggression. Although 8 children are observed to be involved in a conversation, the noise level in the class has settled to a relaxed buzz. The relative silence in the class is the first of only three samples of a natural, busy quietness in the class. Although 14 out of the 26 children (54%) are still not writing, the atmosphere in the class is very different from the sample discussed above. The tangible tension and aggression in the class has subsided and it seems as if most children in the class have reached a point where they are ready to write and willing to engage with the task set for them during the writing lesson.

The occurrences of the 6th and 7th minute are of particular interest here as they can illuminate the impact of emotions on the writing process and reveal how the children's ability to settle down and engage with the writing task (in the 8th minute)

is directly related to their ability to endure and contain the inner conflict caused by the contradictory demands of the creative writing process as well as their conflicting response (to please and to avoid) to the teacher's demand, as discussed in the 5th minute above.

In the months before the observation was made, I had intuitively introduced the mythical figure of the muse to provide the children with a metaphor for the creative process. The children were told that deep insights and creative ideas cannot be forced from their minds. If the children sat quietly for a minute, the muse would come and gently kiss their cheeks to give them an idea for their project. Thus the story of the muse provided the children with a symbol through which they could contain the tension inherent in the creative moment. The notion of "waiting for the muse to kiss you" enabled me to formalise the inspirational moment in art lessons as well as creative writing lessons without repressing the necessary fluidity of mental energy. The encounter with the muse symbolises an experience of giving up control over the mind in a controlled way. The following sequence (transcribed from the video) illustrates the emotional complexity of this process:

Teacher: Let's look at the picture. There is ....shsh.....[teacher stands back, looks at the class and waits for the class to settle down.]

Class: [Someone begins to whistle, many children are talking loudly, some children are making "sh" noises and one child is imitating the teacher's tone when saying, "there is a boy".

Someone is shouting "shut up"... slowly the children settle down...]

Teacher: Look at the picture. There is ...[one child is calling to another child] sh... there is a musical instrument. And what is that musical instrument called?

Class: [Some children shout out " violin"; others raise their voices again; A child called C shouts out "guitar".]

Teacher: A violin.... and the spelling of violin is this: V I O L I N [writing the word on the board.]

Class: [In chorus is shouting out the spelling with the teacher "V I O L I N". C continues to shout out random letters after the class has finished spelling: "T N M I N P". Someone is shouting "sh, C".]

Teacher: And now, M ..., do you remember the muse? What about the muse?

Class: [M is not given a chance to answer the question. Some children are shouting out "it kisses you", some children are loudly imitating smacking kiss sounds and generally the noise

level in the class is very high.]

Teacher: The muse kisses you. What happens when the muse kisses you?

Class: [A lot of children are calling out responses. One or two people can be heard shouting: "you get an idea".]

Teacher: What about the muse? Will the muse kiss you while you are jumping around, making a noise?

Class: [Someone is shouting "no, Mrs W"; another voice is shouting "No, when you keep quiet"; other shouted comments are, "you get a kiss", "no".]

Teacher: Now,... sh...so, C ..., what I would like you to do ... (several children start talking) M ... what I would like you to do is to give the muse a chance... B ..., please give the muse a chance. For one minute I want you just to sit and...

K: Your first sentence is "There was a boy".

Teacher: Yes, K ... Look at the picture. Look at it carefully.

This sequence offers a very clear illustration of the extent to which the class initially avoids the writing task. The resistance can be deduced from their reluctance to look at the picture and to reflect on it. The teacher's suggestion that they look at the picture is met with a high noise level and undermining behaviour such as whistling. As the class settles, the teacher repeats her request and is immediately interrupted again by two children calling each other across the class. This pattern repeats itself towards the end of the sequence where students start talking immediately after the teacher has begun to explain what they have to do. Student C offers a very interesting example as she engages in more direct and confrontational resistance. She deliberately calls the violin a guitar and then shouts out random letters to undermine the spelling process. She then engages in a loud conversation with peers so that the teacher addresses her directly to force her to participate in the process.

Another strong emotional factor in the sequence is the children's need for personal contact and support at this stage of the writing lesson. It is apparent in the immediate, uncontrolled responses of the class to the teacher's questions. Many children are "thinking aloud" (a form of egocentric speech) when they are shouting out answers to questions and are at the same time creating their personal "dialogue" with the teacher. Although the teacher directs one of her questions at an individual child, this child is not given the time nor the chance to respond. Many other children are not prepared to hold back their own responses and are shouting them out randomly, in an attempt to be heard. The fact that children are spontaneously spelling the word "violin" with the teacher, without being asked to do so, is yet

another indication of their need to create communion with another person in an attempt to overcome the loneliness inherent in the writing process.

The encounter with the muse in the "quiet minute" thus occurs in the context of a restless, uneasy and to some extent uncooperative mindset in the class. The table below is a summary of the children's behaviour during this "quiet minute". The samples were taken every 15 seconds during the minute immediately following the above sequence. As only 23 children could be seen clearly on the video recording, they formed the total size of the group observed. Children who were looking at the picture, or sitting quietly, with a reflective expression on their faces, or children who were lying down on their desks, closing their eyes and/or putting their hands over their ears were all grouped together as "children who are waiting for the muse."

sample taken every 15 seconds	1	2	3	4
# of children writing	3	6	6	9
# of children waiting for the muse	6	6	8	5
# of children talking	10	5	4	7
# of children stretching or moving around	3	6	5	2

A third of the children do in fact respond to the notion of the muse and use the time

to settle down and reflect on the story they will write. A subsequent increase in the number of children writing can also be observed. The number of children who are restless and resistant (talking and moving around) decreases in the course of the minute. There seems to be a qualitative shift in the mental state of the class during this time, as the noise level sinks and more and more children become focused on the task.

My explanation for this change in the class is that the image of the muse is a symbol provided to the class that they can use in order to temporarily bind their mental energy. As the muse is a creative and positive image, the identification with her can strengthen the life force and contain the deeper anxiety experienced by the child. Thus the experience of uneasiness is transformed into one of anticipation. As the conflicting emotions (the need to please and avoidance) experienced by the children are contained (possibly in the "neutral" yet supportive figure of the muse), the children are able to overcome their defensive attitude and attempt the task.

Discussion: The difficulty of keeping going

The initial graph presented as Figure 1 illustrates samples of children's behaviour throughout the lesson. It reveals that even if children have settled into the task and no longer seem to be excessively restless and aggressive, the writing act does not constitute their dominant behaviour during the writing lesson. The maximum number of children writing at any sampling moment was 19. This means that in the

20th and 21st minute of the lesson, when this maximum was observed, only 73% of the class was writing. Only 32% of the samples (8 out of 25 samples) show at least 50% of the class writing.

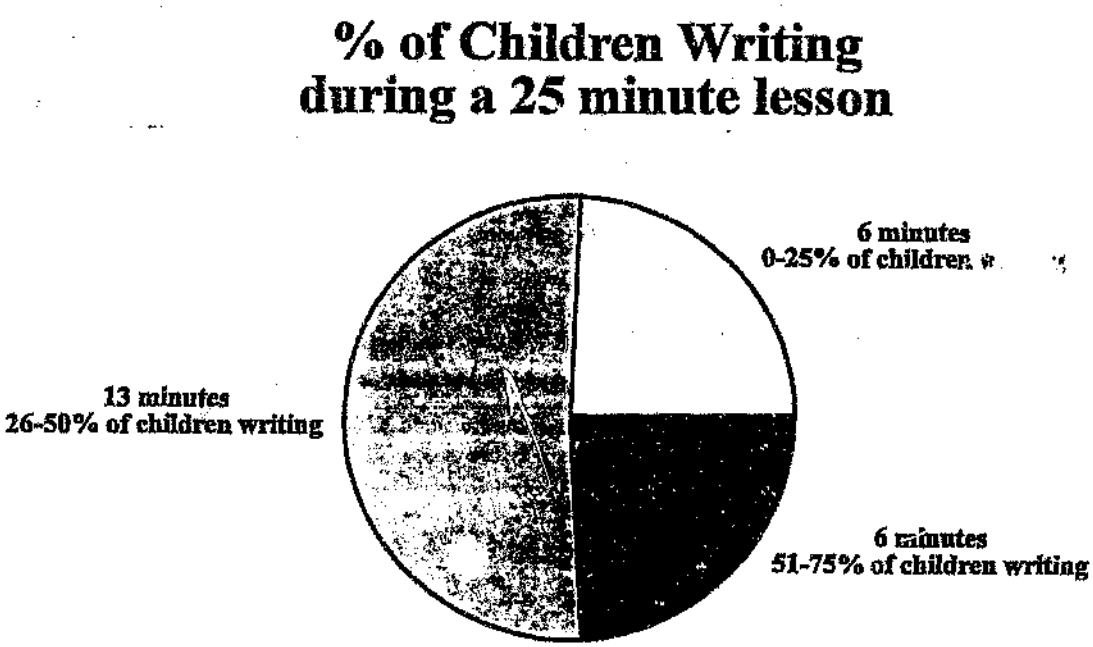


Figure 5

The writing act does not constitute the children's dominant behaviour during the writing lesson.

A clear pattern of behaviour emerges from the data where writing peaks are immediately followed by talking peaks. When the number of "writers" increases, the number of "talkers" decreases. The inverse can also be observed. When the number of "talkers" increases, the number of "writers" decrease. This pattern takes the form of a diamond shape on the graph (see Figure 1, pg.40). It is significant that the diamond pattern repeats itself over time throughout the lesson, as this could point to a self-sustained sequence caused by deeper emotional forces at work. The writing and talking behaviour of the class is not merely a response to an immediate external stimulus, but is also strongly influenced by the children's internal realities.

The same pattern occurs in the context of various external circumstances, and thus it seems reasonable to conclude that the children's talking behaviour that intersperses their writing behaviour is their response to an internal need to talk. In other words, while children are busy writing, they experience a deeper emotional need to establish contact with a visible, real "other" as opposed to the imaginary "other" contained in the writing process. The identification with an imaginary "reader" of their work does not seem strong enough to sustain them throughout the writing task. The lesson begins with a talking peak that lasts about 3 minutes. The children initially are not able to sustain their writing for more than a minute without talking. The regular talking peaks occur on average every 3 minutes, followed by writing peaks of similar length. There is a longer writing time between the 10th and the 15th minute and there is a spurt of writing activity in the 20th and 21st minute, immediately after the teacher set a time limit for the task.

This diamond-shaped pattern clearly echoes the above discussion that learning follows a cycle of feeling in and out of control. The children intuitively protect themselves against their anxious feelings during the writing process by abandoning the task. After abandoning writing most children immediately begin to interact with their peers. Initially these interactions appear to avoid the task, but gradually more and more children can be observed to talk about what they have just written. This general pattern is extended later in the lesson when children are observed to be talking and writing at the same time. It seems as if they have a need to talk as it helps them to manage and overcome the isolation inherent in the writing process and to re-establish the feeling of control during the writing process.

This observation can be linked to the earlier theoretical argument that the psychological process of identification becomes the condition under which an object cathexis can be abandoned and the psychic energy, necessary for the creative process, can be released without losing a sense of reality and control. Contrary to the predictions of the earlier argument, the observation does not show many children seeking identification with the teacher in an attempt to stabilize their inner conflict. Most children in fact turn to their peers (an externalization of themselves) and simply use them to rid themselves of their anxiety, through teasing and laughing and telling their stories.

A closer look at the 16th minute represented on the graph provides an interesting development of the above scenario. It describes a talking peak towards the middle

of the writing lesson, immediately following the longest writing peak of the lesson. On the graph, the 16th minute represents a meeting point of the writing curve and the talking curve. A few children are giggling, some children are simultaneously writing and talking and 6 children seem to tell each other parts of their story as their gestures imitate the playing of a violin, or conducting or alternatively, the children are pointing directly at their sheets of paper. One child can be observed in the process of reading his/her story to the person in the front row.

The noise level fluctuates and reaches a peak during this minute. The sharp rise in the noise level is sparked off by one child laughing loudly into the relatively focused noise of the class. This laughter releases an avalanche of activity such as more loud laughing and talking, stretching, looking around, some teasing and one child is vigorously shaking his writing hand to relax it. There are no visible signs of conflict. The class seems relaxed and many of the children who are talking seem to enjoy their interactions as they are looking at each other and are smiling. Despite the high noise level, the class remains relatively focused on their task. As the teacher gets up and walks around, many children immediately return to writing and the noise level drops rapidly.

The class is clearly engaged in the creative process of making sense of the picture they were given. This means they are complementing their external perceptions of the boy with the violin in the picture with their very personal internal perceptions of the potential learning situation depicted on it. The stories they are telling are the result of their phantasies being activated (during their encounter with the muse) and

of their private meanings becoming attached to the external object of the picture. As it was argued during the muse episode, the process of phantasizing is understood as an important mental mechanism of controlling anxiety. "Filling" the object (in this case the picture) with the anxious feelings experienced at the beginning of the lesson, restricts the feelings to the object and in this sense the children's destructive impulse gets bound and thus their feelings become less threatening. The question arises whether the relaxed, cooperative atmosphere in the class, after a lengthy writing peak is the result of such a process. Have the children bound their tension and anxious feelings to the picture through the story and are thus able to enjoy this part of the writing lesson?

An analysis of the content of the stories written by the children can provide some insight into these considerations. The analysis was done by looking for common images or themes that occurred in the children's stories. These images were then sorted into images expressing anxiety, pleasure or phantastic (unreal) situations. The image clusters are presented in the following table:

The number behind each image indicates in how many stories the same or equivalent image was found.

images expressing anxiety	images expressing pleasure	phantastic situations
* broken violin (10) * anger (4) * no money for lessons (4) * lose parents (6) * run away from home (1) * hate violin (2) * hate violin teacher (1) Total: 28	* boy loves music (9) * learning to play the violin well (9) * the boy works hard and then becomes famous (3) * the boy uses the violin to make money (4) Total: 25	* violin plays itself (2) * the boy becomes famous instantly (10) Total: 12

The endings of the stories were considered separately as they probably were not yet written at this point in the lesson. Every story that indicated the boy's failure to deal with the violin was considered to have a sad ending. The happy endings either depicted the boy as successful or they expressed some direct form of reparation of

the story's problem (wealth, happiness, new violin).

Sad ending	Happy ending
* violin is broken and can't be fixed (1) * the boy dies suddenly (3) * the boy sells the violin for something else (3)	* the boy is rich in a happy family (4) * boy gets a new violin as a gift (4) * boy wins a competition (5) * boy is accepted by others (1)

The most common image expressing anxiety is that of the boy's inability to play the violin. It features in 22 out of 28 stories. It is interesting to note that most images provide external reasons for the boy's failure to play and thus depict the boy as a victim . The violin is broken, or there is no money for lessons, the parents have died etc. This raises questions about the extent to which the children feel victimized when they are forced to complete written tasks at school. The phantastic images are also in some way related to the anxiety expressed above, as fantastic or unrealistic solutions are borne out of feelings of panic and fear. Only children that cannot imagine succeeding at all will need a magic violin to play itself and children who fear the pain of practising (trying again and again) will phantasize about instant fame. This means that the majority of the images projected by the children into their story do in fact express anxious feelings, pain, panic or fear and thus it becomes feasible to suggest that firstly, these anxious feelings were experienced by the children when they conceived their stories and, secondly, the stories have indeed

become symbol formations that contain their anxiety. The object cathexis that results from the binding of psychic energy reduces anxiety and thus creates the conditions for the more positive, relaxed state of mind documented in the 16th minute.

During a later interview with some of the children, further evidence emerged that an object cathexis, linking the picture of the boy with the violin with the children's own anxious feelings about performing their task, has taken place. This interview was conducted by myself as the researcher (R) four months after the initial writing lesson had taken place and the class had no contact with the video material or their own stories since the day the original lesson was held. At the beginning of the interview two children, A and M, were shown extracts of the video made during the writing lesson and were asked to observe themselves and explain what they thought was happening. The content of their stories was not an explicit part of the discussion and yet, towards the end of the interview, the following was said:

R: So did you enjoy that story lesson?

M: Hm...

A: Yah...

R: And A?

A: I enjoyed it, because I was next to K and we were talking, and I did a little bit of my work ... hm ...and I don't think I finished it ... write a little bit ... and I talk...

[Pause]

R: So what happened that you didn't...

A: (interrupting) I was next to K, hm ... and that boy's violin ... **I didn't know ... I didn't know what to write ... how it broke and all** ... Hm ... So then I started to talk.

The significance of this episode is that A recalls the image of the broken violin without being asked to comment on the content of the story at all. The image is not part of a conscious memory. It is an image linked to the unconscious, emotional memory of his failure to perform during that lesson. As there was no external reason for A to mention the broken violin, the only other possible explanation for its occurrence at this point of the interview is that an object cathexis between his insecure feelings and the "object of the violin" had in fact been established. Now, as he is recalling the feelings he felt the day he first encountered the picture (object), and as these feelings have been bound to the image of the broken violin, the image emerges from his Unconscious as well.

There is a second indicator that A's account is drawn from the unconscious, emotional realm of his mind, rather than from his rational conscious memory of the day's events. He "remembers" that he did not finish the story. This memory (of having failed to finish) is a distortion of the actual fact that he did complete his original story during the writing lesson. In his story he even solves the problem of the broken violin when the boy earns some money to have it fixed. All of this A does not seem to associate with the experience of writing the story. Thus this episode illustrates how close is the link between the child's anxious feelings ("I

didn't know what to write") and the image of the broken violin and supports the earlier suggestion that for some children in the class, the picture of the boy with the violin has become the object through which their feelings of insecurity and tension are contained and this in turn allow for a more relaxed mood in the class.

The pain of ending off

As the end of the lesson approaches, the emotional experience of the children appears to undergo a further change and becomes increasingly negative. The following talking peak, which occurs during the 19th minute, once again coincides with a high noise level and presents the class in a very different mindset to the previous discussion. There seems to be a more fluid, unfocused energy in the class, which in turn is expressed as frustration and aggressive behaviour. This emerges from the high noise level and the presence of several aggressive acts. The noise is sparked off by a single child who loudly comments to no one in particular: "Very, very sad." He then drops the pen, gets up, walks around the class, pointing and shouting at other children and eventually is involved in slapping another child. The tension expressed by this child is immediately echoed in the behaviour of other class members. Someone starts singing, another is making squeaking noises, a few children shout across the class, one child loudly calls the teacher, 3 children get out of their seats to stretch and 5 children can be seen showing signs of discomfort, shaking their arms or hands to release physical tension in them. Only two children are reading their stories to each other and one child responds to the conversation

with a neighbour by getting and idea - freezing in mid sentence - and then frantically writing it down.

This episode begins with a very clear and impulsive verbal expression of one child's emotional involvement with the task. The loud, unfocused comment "very, very sad" expresses strong negative feelings. This emotion is initially more closely linked to feelings of unhappiness than to aggression. As the child's comment is not directed at anyone in particular and as it is made while the child is looking down at his own writing, it seems feasible to argue that the words are an externalization of the child's own inner reality projected into the story. The emotional experience at this point must be intense as he does not seem to be able to contain his feelings and thus externalizes them spontaneously. The intensity of his emotions expressed in his words is substantiated by his subsequent aggression, when he gets up, walks around and eventually provokes a fight by slapping another child.

The tension and unhappiness expressed by this child is not an isolated feeling. Many other children in the class can be observed to share this experience as they immediately respond to the emotion and amplify it. His disruption provides the rest of the class with an external situation that reflects their own inner realities and the similarity between the two seems to draw their own experience of tension to the surface. The resulting escalation of disruptive behaviour threatens to undermine the writing process completely and thus, as the teacher, I interfere to silence the class and to set a clear time limit for the task.

Figure 1 (pg. 40) shows that the enforced silence lasts for about 2 minutes before the class once again erupts into noise in the 22nd and 23rd minute. This eruption provides a further insight into their emotional experience toward the end of the lesson as it exemplifies the emotional effect of the increased pressure on the children due to teacher control, and the time limit. As observed previously, the noise level rises suddenly and rapidly. The disruptive behaviour of the children also seems to follow a similar pattern to that of the 19th minute. Once again a child loudly calls the teacher's name, another one is singing and the whistling has started again. A few children are shouting teasing comments across the class. One child can be seen to look at her work and she is wildly beating her arms up and down while reading it over. Figure 4 (pg. 44) also shows that these minutes present the peak of aggressive activity. One child is being hit over the head from behind, another child takes away the picture of a neighbour so that her writing is disrupted, two children get up and angrily discuss some issue while they keep pointing at another child in the class.

These observations present a repetition and intensification of the anxious behaviour recorded in the sample of the 19th minute. The recurrence of disruptive behaviour patterns such as singing, whistling and shouting confirm the earlier suggestions that the heightened aggression at the end of the lesson is an expression of heightened anxiety caused by an accumulation of negative experiences towards the end of the writing lesson. As previous emotional experiences are not lost, but merely repressed, the various "layers" of negative experiences impacting on the child's feelings are composed of the initial anticipation of the difficult task of writing,

mixed with the frustration of capturing an elusive story at the beginning of the writing lesson. Secondly, there is the experience of loneliness and threatened failure during the actual writing process in the main part of the lesson, and lastly towards the end of the lesson, there is the experience of loss that is characteristic of any learning experience. For any child, the end of a lesson means that the familiar pattern of the lesson has to be given up and thus the predictability and hence security of the lesson is lost. For children who have not successfully engaged with the writing task, the end of the lesson also becomes a lost opportunity to do well and to gain approval from the teacher. Finally, all children would experience a sense of loss when they "hand over" their story to the teacher for assessment and thereby surrender their private experience to the social sphere.

The experience of loss remains emotionally the same, no matter what context gave rise to it. Thus the end of the lesson could evoke earlier situations in the children's lives when they experienced a loss and where they were left helpless, abandoned or inadequate. As parting with ("losing") written work is a very common experience in the children's daily lives, the present act of handing in the work could already anticipate previous experiences of failure or of feeling disappointed when the work is returned. The anticipation of such a negative emotion brings out the children's defence in the form of disruptive or aggressive patterns. Thus, although at first glance the emotional reality in the class toward the end of the lesson seems to be characterized by aggression, I would argue that the aggression is the children's defence against their deeper experiences of helplessness and inadequacy towards the end of the writing process.

The behaviour samples of the whole class at the beginning, the middle and the end of the lesson broadly reflect a pattern of anxiety and pleasure that is linked to feeling in an out of control of the writing process. The beginning and the end of the lesson are dominated by open endedness and change and thus with lack of control. The children display restlessness, insecurity and emotional pain most clearly during these times. Although the children remain restless and talkative during most of the lesson, there are some signs of pleasure during the middle of the lesson.

All behaviour recorded in the time samples above was used to establish patterns of behaviour for the class as a whole and these patterns were then used to make some deduction about the children's states of mind during the lesson. Behaviour patterns, however, can not always be equated with the actual experiences. The aggressive patterns, for example, could be seen to be a defence against a deeper, more painful experience of loss and helplessness. In order to gain access to this deeper level of experience, it is important to move beyond the general patterns of the class and to reflect on these patterns in the light of individual children's behaviour and their own perceptions of it. A detailed observation of these children, together with an interview could help us deepen our understanding of the complexity of the children's writing experience described so far. However, the experiences deduced from the detailed observation of individual children will not be generalizable to the class as a whole.

Understanding individual behaviour

The identification and critical description of the children's behaviour patterns during the writing lesson has been useful in that it points to the regular and consistent occurrence of emotionally motivated activity. The children all seem to respond to the writing task in terms of their emotional need for security and stability and therefore become anxious if they feel they are losing control. Some of the external behaviour such as restlessness and aggression could be seen to be an outward defence against a deeper, more painful experience of vulnerability.

In an attempt to understand the more fundamental experiences underlying the children's behaviour patterns, I decided to narrow down my investigation and to observe the detailed behaviour of only a few individuals in the class. A comprehensive observation of five children was made during the first two minutes of the lesson as soon as the children received their paper with the topic picture on it. The children are referred to as W,K, A, M and AL. The children's immediate response to the task is documented in the next few pages.

Child 1: W

Minute 1	W is looking under desk; (teacher places paper on desk) W looks up, glances at picture for 1 second; W turns around and looks at picture of the person (L) behind him; W points to L's picture; L moves hand up and down in front of W's face to shoo him away; W turns back to own desk; W picks up own picture and glances at it; W turns around with picture in his hand; W puts his picture next to L's picture on L's desk; L ignores W, looking at his own picture; W picks up his picture; W turns back; W looks at his own picture for 5 seconds;

Minute 2	W stands up and walks to back of the class; W stops to talk to E at the back; W is waving his hands while talking; W turns around and returns to his desk; W stands next to his desk; W opens pencil case on the desk and takes out a pen; W looks at the pen; W returns the pen to the pencil case; W turns to the front and walks to the teacher's desk; W talks to the teacher; T nods her head; W turns and walks toward the door, skipping once; W leaves the class (to go to the toilet);

W confirms the general behaviour patterns of the class described earlier in the time samples. He is restless, initiates contact with his peers several times and shows resistance to the task. A closer reading of the above observation reveals that W's experience of anxious feelings that are expressed in his restlessness, occur in anticipation of the writing task, rather than in response to it. He merely glances at the picture before turning to his peers and initiating contact with them. By the time he leaves the room to go to the toilet, he has looked at the picture on three occasions for a total of ten seconds only. The most revealing moment of his anxious anticipation occurs when he returns from the back of the class, opens his pencil case, picks up his pen and looks at it. The contemplation of his pen seems to be the

emotional turning point of this sequence. He returns the pen and immediately seeks to leave the room. Thus the thought of having to write a story rouses sufficient anxious feelings for W that he puts up his defence and leaves the classroom before he has reflected on the picture or confronted the actual writing task in any way. The intensity of this emotion is captured in the way he leaves the room. The release from the threatening situation in the class room provokes an instant and intense pleasure which is expressed in the skipping movement on his way to the door.

If W's resistance to the task, his communication with his peers, his physical restlessness and finally his exit from the class are considered to be defence mechanisms, there should be some deeper emotional experience that is sufficiently threatening to him that it provokes them. In W's case this deeper emotion seems to be an experience of fundamental insecurity. He gives the impression of feeling unsure, as his actions are not directed at the task, but rather at confirming his perceptions of the situation. He merely glances at his own picture when he receives it , but immediately points to and looks at the picture of L, the person behind him. When L chases him away, he makes a second attempt to look at his own picture, by moving his picture from his desk and placing it next to the picture of L behind him. Then he looks at his own picture, imitating L. When L ignores him, W gets up and moves to the back of the class to talk to E. All along it seems as if W intuitively seeks support and affirmation in his response to the situation, as he does not feel secure in it.

The feeling of a basic insecurity in the learning situation also seems to influence the behaviour of the other children observed. The behaviour that is recorded in bold print documents the children's actions that create the impression that they feel unsure and experience a need to find support and acceptance of themselves.

Child 2: K

Minute 1	Teacher places paper on the desk; K looks at the picture for 5 seconds; K stands up holding paper in right hand and his pen in the left; **K walks to M's desk;** K stops in front of M and leans over her paper; M looks up and K pokes her face with the pen in his left hand; M lashes out and K laughs ; **K turns and walks to the teacher;** **K points to his picture and talks to T;** T glances at K's picture, passes him and continues to hand out the papers; **K follows T;**

Minute 2	T makes short response to K; K stops, looks down at his paper; **K turns and talks to closest student B;** **K points to his picture;** B points to his own picture and talks; K turns and walks back towards his desk; K approaches M's desk, stops and picks up a pen from her desk; M looks up; K pokes her face (again) and laughs; M puts up her hand, looking toward the teacher; K looks in same direction; K turns, goes to his desk, sits down; K looks at the picture for 2 seconds;

Child 3: A

Minute 1	A looks at picture placed on his desk for a few seconds; A yawns, stretches and leans over to KW; A returns to upright position, puts hands over his face for 1 second; A stretches again, **moving his body forwards and backwards in a rocking motion;** **A leans over to KW and talks for a while;**
Minute 2	A swings sideways and returns to upright position facing his desk; A picks up the paper on his desk and glances at it; **A turns back to KW and talks;** A turns back; A puts his hands in all his pockets and moves them around, looking for something; A gets a pen out of his breast pocket and puts it down on the desk; A looks at the picture for 1 second; **A lifts both hands over his head in a helpless gesture;** A stands up; A opens his desk;

Feeling unsure at the beginning of a lesson seems to be a common emotion, as the children know from past situations that learning is a risky and painful experience. One likely source of insecurity could be the children's limited proficiency in English. As none of the children observed here speak English at home, they are required to perform the writing task in a language that they do not feel entirely sure of. The formal aspects of the task, such as syntax or spelling present them with many obstacles and challenges that enhance the difficulty of the task. Engaging in a creative writing task also means they are taking the risk of attempting something they have never done before. Anticipating this risk could lead to fears of feeling lost and confused. It could also lead to fears about not making sense and disappointing the teacher or being considered a failure in relation to the other children in the class. Creating their own story on the one hand takes away the pressure of understanding and memorizing set work, but on the other hand it forces the children into a situation where they have to "put themselves on the line".

The feelings of insecurity are, however, not limited to children who visibly struggle with the task. Even for children who settle down and start writing immediately, there seems to be some hesitant and anxious behaviour involved:

Child 4: M

Minute 1	M picks up the paper as it is placed on her desk; M looks at the paper for 10 seconds; **M scratches her head** and keeps on looking; M begins to write for about 1 second; **M looks up, looks around;** M writes for about 20 seconds;
Minute 2	M stops writing, still holding the pen; M looks at the picture; M looks up and looks around; M looks down and plays with her pen, looking at it; M looks to the front, **rubbing her face;**

Child 5: AL

Minute 1	AL writes on own sheet of paper. T places picture on his desk; AL ignore picture and continues writing slowly for about 20 seconds; AL looks toward the blackboard, frowns; AL writes again;

Minute 2	AL looks at paper where he has written and **rubs his nose;** AL takes the picture with his right hand and moves it closer to his sheet of writing paper; AL looks at the picture for 2 seconds; **AL looks up and around the class;** **AL scratches his neck;** **AL looks sideways at M;** **AL rubs his neck again and bends forward;** AL looks at the picture again;

One of the fundamental premises of the theoretical framework underpinning this study is that no life experiences are lost to the children and that therefore they will recapitulate some earlier anxiety situations in each new learning situation they encounter. The children's ability to be open to new tasks depends on the extent to which they have developed the inner resources that will provide them with some feeling of security in order to stabilize the insecurity of the new, open-ended learning process. If the ability to provide inner stability in the face of outer unpredictability has not been developed, the children will find new beginnings, such as the beginning of the writing lesson, particularly stressful.

The brief description of the children (refer to pg. 28) involved in this research indicates that many of them have not had a very secure and successful school experience. Living in a South African township in 1994 furthermore is an experience of continuous unpredictability and insecurity. Therefore, when the

earlier theoretical considerations about emotional memories are put into the context of the children's observed behaviour, some important insights emerge from the evidence of aggression, anxiety and insecurity during the lesson. The first is that the emotional needs of children have a powerful impact on their mental preparedness for learning and can therefore also be a significant obstruction to the fulfilment of cognitive tasks. Secondly, the detailed observations confirm the notion that when the act of creative writing forces the children to confront their private sense of themselves, they appear to experience intense feelings of insecurity and emotional pain. However, it is impossible to develop a more differentiated understanding of these emotions without the children's own perceptions of the writing process. I will attempt to describe in the next section, paying particular attention to the way in which the [illegible] my understanding of the experiences of A and M described so far.

Talking to the children

The focus group interview held with 8 children immediately after the writing lesson provides some insight into their own perceptions of their writing experience. The interview was conducted by an outside facilitator (referred to as F in the transcriptions) whose aim it was to discover from the group how they felt when they were writing the stories. He repeated this one question several times and tended to use reflective summaries to encourage the children to elaborate their thoughts.

During the interview with the outside facilitator the children showed many signs of nervousness and excitement. They were very aware of the camera and often looked directly into it. Initially some boys were deliberately showing off, waving and winking at the camera. The children were also very aware of the interviewer as a stranger. They interrupted the interview twice with personal questions directed at him, although he had spent some time before the interview getting to know the group.

There was a lot of laughing during the course of the session. It ranged from an embarrassed giggle to teasing laughs and hysterical chortling. The children often distracted themselves from the discussion by teasing each other or accusing each other of "bad behaviour" during the writing lesson under discussion. These teasing interludes were usually a response to a serious moment of the interview, or the tense silence while some children were struggling to find words to express their feelings. Many of their teasing interactions had the effect of creating an "in group" that excluded the interviewer and temporarily sidelined the discussion he was pursuing. The nervousness behind all of these interactions is most clearly conveyed by the physical restlessness of the whole group. They fidgeted, moved around in their seats, pulled and touched each other and rocked their bodies in regular movements during the whole interview.

Talking about the experience of beginning

F: Tell me about when you wrote the story.

How did you feel?

There are several slow attempts by the children to answer the question directed at them. Suddenly A voluntarily speaks up and makes the following contribution:

A: I was disturbed.

F: You were disturbed?

A: Yes, by K.

There is a lot of confusion as other children in the group laugh, accuse K of selling soccer cards during the lesson and tease K about writing a "joke story".

F: So you were trying to concentrate but you were disturbed?

A: Yes... the muse didn't kiss me during the whole lesson. I didn't know what to write first...

F: The muse didn't kiss you?

A: It kissed me after a few... after a little while.

F: So the muse didn't kiss you. You had to wait for it to happen.

T: It did! [she laughs and imitates loud smacking kisses]

A: I had to wait for it.

F: So how did you feel when you were waiting?

A: Hm...

KW: He was laughing at my jokes.

A: Your jokes are so boring. I had to laugh...

General confusion begins again, with many children shouting out jokes that were made during the lesson and also commenting on some insults that had passed between the children.

F: So then the muse kissed you. How did it feel when the muse kissed you?

A: I was writing, but then we were talking. I was writing and talking. Then I just started to write.

F: The muse kissed you while you were writing. How did you feel when the muse kissed you?

A: Hm...hm... it was a nice feeling. I thought I could write a nice story, but then I just forgot about what... and I just wrote something...

F: You just wrote something. You forgot about what you were going to write?

A: I remembered, but it..., lots of..., not really...

F: What happened?

A: [long pause and sigh] I was too busy talking.

1. Discussion: The need to talk

The children's comments about their experience of the beginning of the writing lesson confirm many of the tensions and anxious feelings that were earlier deduced from their physical behaviour in the class. As argued before, there is evidence to suggest that the children experience a cycle of feeling in and out of control of the writing process and therefore have the need to defend themselves against the recurring threat of losing control. Their defence are often expressed in the form of avoidance behaviour, such as joking, talking or moving around. In the above episode, for example, A expresses his frustration about the fact that he did not immediately know what to write . He felt disturbed by his neighbour, KW, and yet, according to KW, he readily interacted with him and was laughing at his "boring" jokes. Being disturbed by jokes was thus not a solely negative experience for A. KW's joking appears to be as much of a disruption of his concentration as it is an escape from the inner anxiousness of not knowing what to write. It was argued earlier that the alternating phases of writing and talking are caused by emotional forces and that the talking sustains the children in the writing process by helping them to overcome the isolation that is an inevitable part of the process of beginning. A. talks about this experience:

F: So then the muse kissed you. How did it feel when the muse kissed you?

A: I was writing, but then we were talking. I was writing and talking. Then I just started to write.

In a follow-up interview held four months later, A was shown the beginning of the writing lesson on video and when he reflected on his behaviour he expressed his feelings in a very similar way:

> A: I enjoyed it [the writing lesson], because I was next to KW and we were talking, and I did a little bit of my work... and I don't think I finished it... write a little bit, and I talk... I write a little bit and I talk...
>
> ...I didn't know what to write ... so then I started to talk.

The significance of the comments during the later interview is that they point to consistent patterns and perceptions in A's behaviour. Although, on both occasions, A. expresses the feeling of being disturbed by his own talking, the pattern he reflects on displays a continuous alternation of writing and talking. He also consistently reflects upon talking in the context of questions about how he began to write. This raises the question whether the talking could also be a productive force, sustaining him in his writing process.

> A: I was writing, but then we were talking. I was writing and talking. Then I just started to write.

A's comment seems clumsy, yet it captures a sophisticated sequence of events. Initially the talking and writing are referred to as mutually exclusive activities (but),

then they become simultaneous processes (and) and finally he focuses on writing alone. In this sequence, talking intercepts writing and then is phased out as writing becomes the dominant focus of his activity. It is possible that the process of creative writing is not merely a mechanical execution of a preconceived, finished story, but includes "creative talking interludes" during which writing is suspended while A, the writer, allows space for new inner developments to occur. These new developments depend on the binding of A's mental energy to images that will then be included in the story.

This process, as it was discussed earlier in the context of A's object cathexis of the broken violin, remains an unpredictable, elusive aspect of the writing process. Before A can continue to write, he will have to reestablish his conscious control of the symbolic processes within the self. This is achieved when he reaffirms his position as an active, meaning-making subject by engaging in a concrete communication where he is relating to the realities of his inner self in the context of talking to others. Taking active control of internal meaning-making processes through talking, can be seen as a crucial intermediate step for A to help him to anticipate the next writing phase. In this preparatory sense, talking can be understood to have a supportive function for the writing process. Frosch (1989) theorizes the differences between the creative and expressive phases of the process as follows:

> " ...psychoanalysis suggests that the emotionally charged nature of language gives it the power to introduce new meanings into the individual's mental

space; given its cultural embeddedness, this in turn means that language helps structure the mind along social lines." (pg.134)

This was already discussed in the theoretical introduction to the research, where it was stated that the mental demands of the communicative process are in complete opposition to those of creativity. This opposition becomes clearest when communication depends on the medium of creative writing. Creativity is a deeply personal process of charging images with emotion while writing is governed by strict social conventions and therefore has an external, impersonal locus of control. The impersonal nature of conventions makes writing fundamentally different to talking. There is no immediate listener whom A can communicate with as part of the writing process, and as a result writing becomes very lonely. The crucial social element in a written story does not lie in the direct communication with others, but in the assumption that there will be somebody reading the story. Without the internal projection of a reader writing loses its meaningfulness. Thus, through the meaning-making activity of writing a story, A has been forced into an internal struggle for images that leaves him feeling out of control. In addition to that he has to internally provide the audience (reader) for the final outcome of the struggle. Interrupting the writing process to engage in a conversation with a real person can become the sustaining mechanism with which A ensures that his activity remains meaningful and that his story develops along socially acceptable lines. In this sense, the regular pattern of alternating writing and talking peaks throughout the lesson are not only the result of regular attempts to avoid or stabilize the inner conflict between the personal and social aspects of creative writing, but the pattern suggests a deeper

significance. The act of talking not only creates personal conditions for the process of meaning making, but furthermore **helps to structure the mind** along social lines. With this double function of language in mind, it is worthwhile to take another look at the children's comments, to see how the link between language and emotion gives rise to new meanings and also the way in which children socialize their own stories to meet the social demands of the writing task.

2. Discussion: The muse

It has already been suggested that the creation of "meaning" in a story depends on emotions becoming linked to language. This happens in a defined moment of inspiration - when the muse kisses the children - and that is the moment in which they bind the free flowing mental energy to a particular set of images. This binding of energy reduces their inner tension, giving rise to feelings of relief or excitement and leading to a qualitative change in their mental state. This was observed in the difference between the 5th and 8th minute of the lesson (discussed on pg. 47). This experience is now confirmed by the children in their own perceptions of their writing process. They introduced the image of the muse into the interview themselves and talked about her "kissing" as a brief, yet definitive "happening" during the lesson. The sections in bold print highlight their emotional response to the muse.

F: So then the muse kissed you. How did it feel when the muse kissed you?

A: I was writing, but then we were talking. I was writing and talking. Then I just started to write.

F: **The muse kissed you while you were writing.** How did you feel when the muse kissed you?

A: Hm...hm... **it was a nice feeling.** ...

OR

F: So what else can you tell me?

KW: **Once the muse kisses me, I get excited...**

F: You get excited?

KW: Yes.

The fact that the children quoted above have a distinct memory of a change in their emotional experience, and the fact that they themselves give meaning to it by using the image of the muse, supports the above considerations that the binding of mental energy to story images has a significant effect on the children's experience of the writing process. The "kiss of the muse" is the point at which the language becomes emotionally charged and new meanings are introduced into the children's mental space.

However, not all "beginnings" follow the same pattern of tension and relief. M presents a very interesting case, as she relates a more anxious experience despite the fact that she settled down very quickly to write her story; wrote consistently for

most of the lesson; and was the first to finish her story in the 19th minute of the lesson. The following extract from the interview records M's perceptions of the beginning of the lesson. It is interesting to note that she did not relate a "muse episode" and remained uneasy and troubled throughout the sequence. Evidence of her uneasiness is recorded in bold print.

F: When you saw that picture, when you started writing... How did you feel?

M: Hm, I felt that... the boy was looking at it...**I felt something was wrong.** You see, like... I wrote the boy that he wanted a violin and... tomorrow its his birthday and his father did buy him a violin and he... they gave him as a birthday present...

F: How did you feel writing the story?

M: Hm... I felt happy and...

S: ... sad...

M: No!... **I felt happy but I was wondering about something...**

F: You were wondering?

M: ... about this boy,... the boy and the violin...

F: You thought something was wrong you said,...

M: Yes, but then I just wrote the story...

F: You felt something was wrong. **Were you worried?**

M: **Yes,... I wanted to write another story, but not... but then**

I decided it was just ok. I'll just write this one.

F: I see...

KW: I thought that the boy with the violin was waiting for the muse to kiss him so that he... [general laughter]

M's account creates the impression that she wrote a story without containing the energy that was released in response to the picture. She is unable to identify or express her actual emotions when she looked at the picture, but clearly displays her feeling that the story she wrote did not satisfactorily capture nor fully contain her experience of it. She was left wondering about something.

Four months later, when M observed herself on the video and was asked by the researcher (R) to respond to it, she once again displayed strong contradictory feelings, where her unguarded,immediate emotional response is much more anxious than her considered, reflective account of the event:

R: What do you think about it, now that you see it?

M: ... hope that we'll never ever see it again... hm...[long pause]

R: If you had to tell... let's say you told your mother that you saw this video about you writing the story, what do you think you would say to her?

M: [a short laugh] I'll say to her... hm... I concentrated a lot about my story and ... hm, I thinked a lot and, but some of

the people were disturbing me because they were making jokes and laughing.

These interviews with the children furthermore provide an insight into the contradiction between the dreamlike flash in which children "know " what they want to write and the slow, open ended process of constructing the initial conception of the story into a socially acceptable unit. Although finding a story is a deeply personal and emotional experience, sharing it by writing it down still requires a painful process of "spelling it out" and children express their difficulty with doing that and their sadness in accepting that the final product is often very different from the initial idea. In the episode discussed above, A's comments in bold print illustrate this very clearly.

F: The muse kissed you while you were writing. How did you feel when the muse kissed you?

A: Hm...hm... it was a nice feeling. **I thought I could write a nice story, but then I just forgot about what... and I just wrote something...**

F: You just wrote something. You forgot about what you were going to write?

A: **I remembered, but it..., lots of..., not really...**

F: What happened?

A: [long pause and sigh] I was too busy talking.

Later in the interview A came back to these experiences:

A: Sometimes you think of such a long story and then you write it... **but then you say "oh its going to take too long" so you just shorten it...**

F: How do you feel when that happens?

A: Ah... I feel... [pause]

F: Tell us how you feel.

A: Ah, I don't know... **it's bad...**

F: A bad feeling?

A: I don't know... **maybe a bad feeling...**

In the follow up interview held four months later, A once again expresses the tension between finding a long story and feeling unable to write it down, because it is too long:

R: And sometimes, do you enjoy writing more than talking?

A: Sometimes...

R: Like when?

A: ...**when you get a big idea in your mind and you want to write it down** ... then you write... then you write it ... sometimes you can just think of something, then you write it down, **but it takes a long time... to think of it and...**

M also expresses similar feelings about not being able to express the story she really wanted to write:

M: **Yes,... I wanted to write another story, but not... but then I decided it was just ok. I'll just write this one.**

F: I see...

KW, too, mentions a tension between the personal experience of finding a story and the social performance of writing.

KW: The muse kissed me while I was on my second paragraph...

F: How did you feel then?

KW: **Ah... I just wanted to get finished with my story because...**

A: But he only wrote a joke story...

General laughing and joking about KW's behaviour in class starts again.

This confirms the earlier theoretical considerations that the personal and social demands of writing are not compatible and that a fruitful writing experience depends on successful transformation of the emotional impulse into a formal, structured unit through the process of self-censorship. All the above comments in bold writing

constitute such an act of self censorship, where the original experience of finding a story is moderated and restricted in the interest of the "task". A's and KW's self-censorship is driven by the principle of completion, as they ignore their personal attachment to their" real" stories and simply write "something" with the aim of finishing off. M's self censorship also suppresses the story that symbolises her strongest emotional link to the picture, although she does not really tell us why she chose not to write that story.

In either case, the suppression of the original symbol formation essentially amounts to a compromise of the self, as the "real" story can not be told and a moderated "false" story takes its place. If the story is abandoned because of the child's limited ability to express it ("it's going to take too long"), the false story is compounded with an experience of failure. They are left with a bad feeling that they wrote the wrong story and that their personal reality has been lost in relation to the social demands placed on them. Their inner selves are not good enough and must be repressed. The overall effect on the children's emotional state is that they give up the possibility of happiness and rather choose strategies to avoid pain. As a result, they struggle to identify with their final story and thus the emotional foundation of hiding the "real" story and presenting "just something" constitutes an experience of alienation.

The discussions with S illustrate this process of alienation; his emotional response shifts from excitement to dejection as he is confronted with his own mistakes. The themes of loss and alienation in the writing process also feature in S's story, where

he wrote about the boy getting rich by pretending to play his grandfather's magic violin after his grandfather died.

F: Tell me about when you wrote the story.

S: Hm... [very long pause]... It was normal.

F: Normal?

S: Yes... [long pause] ... I felt like writing a story.

F: You felt like writing your story?

S: Yes... [long pause]

F: Were you excited? Were you happy?

S: I was excited...

Later:

F: How did you feel when you were rewriting the story?

S: I felt... [long pause]

General confusion and laughing...

F: Give S. a chance.

S: I felt... hm... I felt I made many mistakes.

F: Mistakes?

S: Yes... I felt like... when I saw my story... I felt the second

story... It wasn't... it wasn't the right story...

F: So you found a lot of mistakes and you felt it wasn't the right story?

S: Yes... [long pause] ... that's all.

Later:

S. is making wild writing movements with his hands and then suddenly bursts out:

S: I wrote 50 mistakes.

F: How did you feel when you wrote 50 mistakes?

S: Hm... [giggle] ... it wasn't 50 mistakes.

F: Oh.

A: Maybe it was 70 or 81. [2]

The extent to which the children are alienated from their own writing experience became apparent, when M and A looked at some extracts of the video showing themselves writing the story. In the course of the discussion following their viewing of the video, their failure to identify with the events they had been part of was

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[2] In reality Siphiwe had only been confronted with 7 minor mistakes in his original story. His distorted recollection of the actual event points to a very deep insecurity about his writing ability. This insecurity is confirmed in the image of the magic violin.

remarkable:

R: What were the things you thought of while you were watching it now?

A: Hm... lots of things... hm... for one I thought that ... hm... I couldn't remember what happened there... and... couldn't remember everything that happened that day.

R: And M, how do you feel?

M: [laughing] It's not me!

A: Ah... yes...

R: Just explain...

A: You look and say: "Was that me? Was that me?" [both A and M laughing]

M: I didn't think that I would do such a thing like that in class, because sometimes I like to talk.

R: Hm... Do you think I should show the video to the other children in the class?

A: [laughing] No!

R: Why not A.?

A: They'll even be embarrassed, shy and all...

R: About seeing themselves?

A: I think so.

M: ... themselves they will say "that's not me".

Talking about rewriting the story

One of the methodological principles that I have emphasised during the writing lessons with the class is that editing is part of the writing process. An editing phase is built into the structured lesson time, if the class writes a piece of work. The editing usually happens a few days after the original story was written and after I have read the first draft and have made some comments about how the children can improve the formal aspects of their story. On the day the research data was collected, I managed to give them very brief feedback on their stories. The children were then given a chance to rewrite their stories before the focus group interview took place. During the focus group interview the children were asked to comment on their experience of rewriting the story:

F: How did you feel when you were rewriting the story?

S: I felt... [long pause]

General confusion and laughing...

F: Give S. a chance.

S: I felt... hm... I felt I made many mistakes.

F: Mistakes?

S: Yes... I felt like... when I saw my story... I felt the second story... It wasn't... it wasn't the right story...

F: So you found a lot of mistakes and you felt it wasn't the right story?

S: Yes... [long pause] ... that's all.

KW. then takes the initiative and comments:

KW: I thought I wrote a better story the second time.

A: Yes, yes! Same here.

There are many comments thrown out as children talk to each other and then A's voice emerges loudly..

A: ... mine was very short, so then I just made it longer when I was rewriting it .. a bit longer...

F: Yes...

A: I wanted to put in an extra paragraph.

F: Yes...

A: I wrote...

The general noise of the group once again drowns distinct comments. The general discussion centres around details of mistakes they made [" I forgot an s"] and then moves on to a speculation if the video cameras were on in class and if yes, if the parents would see the video and how they would react.

F: Now how do you feel about rewriting the story?

A: I felt it was better...

T: It was a lot of work.

M: I didn't like it.

A: You correct all your mistakes.

T: Yah... you correct your spelling...

KW: Mine was much better...

A: Much better... much, much better...

M: I still don't like it.

F: So how do you feel?

A: Lucky.

T: Yah, lucky, because you can change it...

F: Lucky?

A: Yeh...hm... because Mrs.W is actually spoiling us by letting us write again.

F: Spoiling you?

T: Yah... you can fix your mistakes and you can change it.

A: ...because you can forget words... like I forgot two...

Laughter, general noise while the children once again share details of their mistakes that they had made...

F: B., how was it for you to rewrite the story?

B: I felt happy, because my first one had mistakes... the second one... I had mistakes so Mrs. W was showing me... there I made r 'takes... so the second story it was nice.

F: The second sto was nice?

B: Yes.

F: You felt happy?

B: Yes.

M. then volunteers this contribution:

M: The second time I did rush.

F: You did rush?

M: Yes, because I was tired. I wanted to colour in... drawing... but not... because my finger was getting tired...

For most children in the episode, the experience of editing the story was clearly an experience of making reparation. They were given a chance to make good their personal incompetence by correcting the spelling, syntax and structure of their stories. KW changed his "joke story" and felt he improved his work. B also felt

happy about correcting her mistakes. For A, who had earlier admitted that he had just written "something" to avoid having to write his long story, the editing lesson was a chance to "make it longer" and to correct his mistakes. This left him feeling that his second story was much better. A's experience strongly resembles Klein's (1988a) classic description of making reparation:

> "At the same time, in our unconscious phantasy we make good the injuries which we did in phantasy, and for which we still unconsciously feel very guilty." (pg. 312 - 313)

He had done injury to his original story which "the muse had given him" and which had contained his emotional reality and now he is able to repair it by making this story longer. For A this process was more than he thought he deserved. He felt spoilt by being given another chance. Further evidence of reparation processes can be found in T's comment that she felt lucky to have a chance to rewrite her story, because she could change it. For her the editing lesson was a reprieve, a chance to escape judgement as she could change her story and improve it.

Klein argues that making reparation is a mental process that supports the child's life instinct which is always in search of the perfect relationship. Thus it is a process that is borne out of feelings of guilt, loss or sadness and that is driven by the child's desire to rebuild what has been damaged. The evidence that the children experience the rewriting of their stories as an act of reparation confirms earlier suggestions that their first writing experience was an experience of alienation or of being broken and left them feeling a sense of loss. Without these destructive feelings, reparation would not have been possible. They are the foundation of the rewriting process

which has put them in a more positive mental state.

S and M present slightly different experiences. They did not express any emotions that would support the assumption that they were making reparation. S. saw how many mistakes he had made and suddenly felt that he had written the wrong story. M on the other hand was adamant that she did not like rewriting her story (bold print). The only reason she gave for these feelings is that she was tired, her fingers were getting tired and she wanted to draw or colour in instead.

F: Now how do you feel about rewriting the story?

A: I felt it was better...

T: It was a lot of work.

M: I didn't like it.

A: You correct all your mistakes.

T: Yah... you correct your spelling..

KW: Mine was much better...

A: Much better... much, much better...

M: I still don't like it.

M: The second time I did rush.

F: You did rush?

M: **Yes, because I was tired. I wanted to colour in... drawing... but not... because my finger was getting tired...**

M's experience of writing that has been traced throughout this work can provide some insight into her reasoning. M is a competent writer who makes very few formal mistakes. She was the first to finish during both writing sessions. During the first minutes of the lesson she was observed to display hesitant, anxious behaviour. She looked around a lot, scratched herself and often rubbed her face. She presented unresolved fe lgs when she talked about her first writing of the story, as she kept wondering about something to do with the picture and eventually suppressed those feelings and wrote another story. Months later she still expressed strong contradictory feelings about her own writing. Her "gut response" to the video was very negative, but then she gave a more positive, rational account of her own writing behaviour. All of this was understood to be indicative of a fundamental, unresolved contradiction in M's experience of the writing process. She has the language ability to be in control of the formal aspects of writing and is also able to use her own rationality to control her feelings. Yet she was not able to establish control over the mental images aroused by the picture and therefore abandoned the attempt and wrote "another story". This process leaves her with very little to repair. She is faced with a well written, yet unsatisfactory story and therefore does not like rewriting it and rushes to finish it. The point at which the "injury in phantasy" was done and which has to be made good is at the beginning of her writing experience. She lost the story before she had even found it. The real reparation in her situation would be to take a new look at the picture and search for the repressed, unconscious images she abandoned right at the beginning of the whole writing process. Even if it were successful, this would be a long and painful experience.

The overall value of these interviews is that they present the children's perceptions and memories of their own experiences. The focus group interview that immediately followed the writing lesson reflected their perceptions of their writing experiences, while the later interview based on a viewing of the video revealed the children's emotional memories of the task as well as their own projections of themselves as writers. The children's comments support the findings of the class observation that the children experience times of feeling in and out of control of the writing process and that they regularly escape into talking if writing becomes too difficult. The interviews also confirmed the experience of an inspirational moment as nearly all children related an episode involving the music.

Finally, the interviews have added to the understanding of the children's emotions during the writing lesson by highlighting two experiences that could not be deduced from the children's behaviour as such. These are their experience of alienation during writing and their need to make reparation for failing to write what they mean.

CHAPTER 5

MY PEN WON'T TALK, BUT I WILL

The earlier descriptions and reflections on the children's experience of writing fulfil one of the aims of the research project, as the affective factors that impact on the writing process of the children have now clearly been identified. Another aim of the project is to reflect on the impact of the emotions identified above on a cognitive task such as writing. The investigation of the children's experience (in particular that of M, A and S), reveal that the anxious emotional state of the children distorts their perception of their own activity to the point where they are completely alienated from it. The experience of alienation through writing in turn undermines any rational attempt by the children to learn how to express their personal realities in the written medium. Their initial response is to avoid writing and they struggle to pay attention to the formal aspects of writing while they are preoccupied with formulating their story. Once the story has been formulated, some of the children could focus on the formal demands of the writing task during their rewriting session. The cognitive, formal aspects of the writing task do not occur as a separate process, but are experienced as part of the emotional difficulty of "making sense".

The cognition and execution of writing conventions therefore do not have a neutral starting point, but occur in the context of words and images that are already invested with personal affect. Writing rather represents a process during which the children engage in a rational and voluntary manipulation of existing, emotionally significant

symbol formations. The outcome of the writing task is not the result of a process of cognition and reflection of an external, social reality, but rather involves the cognition and externalisation of their internal projections of this reality. In this sense the emotional state of the children cannot be separated from their cognitive activities as their affective resources determine the condition of their mental "raw material" needed for cognition.

The cognitive theories presented in the introductory section of the report affirm the notion that cognition occurs in the context of personal, pre-existing knowledge. Children progressively construct their own knowledge by bringing what they already know to bear on new information in order to extend or modify their initial understanding. This process of knowledge construction is understood to be essentially social in nature, as the interaction with signs, tools and relationships in society become the cultural material that regulates the internalization of the material in the process of knowledge construction. However, as the children are active participants in the internalization process, their resulting knowledge is not a copy of the external realities, but a new personal construction of it.

Cognitive theorists, however, do not go on to elaborate the personal aspects of knowledge construction and therefore fail to fully problematize the affective origins of the distortions and discrepancies between the children's individual knowledge of the same phenomena. The personal features of knowledge are recognized as a possible obstruction to the social aspects of cognitive development and hence the notion of intersubjectivity is employed to define the conditions under which learners

successfully communicate with and participate in a shared understanding of the reality with others. By sharing in the meaning systems provided by more experienced members of the society, the children extend their mental activity and develop their cognition. Shared meanings are by definition social meanings and thus the act of sharing meaning, i.e. the act of communicating with others is the activity that transforms personal meanings into social knowledge. The notion that the communicative intention is the force that can transform affective images from unconscious private realities to conscious social symbols attaches new significance to the continual talking of the class during the writing lesson and raises the question whether the dialogic function of the children's talk is in fact a thinking device that supports their writing (Wells, 1992).

The preceding data analysis reveals that the children are talking throughout the writing lesson. No time sample is without talking children and the noise level in the class is high during 19 out of 25 minutes. The diamond shaped pattern of the time samples also shows that the children immediately start talking when they stop writing and this pattern repeats itself throughout the lesson. Their talking, however, does not necessarily model their writing task nor does it engage them in the language conventions they need to imitate. Their talking episodes rather reflect a general pattern of feeling in and out of control of the writing process. Therefore children can be seen to talk to avoid the task. They talk because they feel isolated and lonely. They talk because they need somebody to listen to their ideas. They talk because they feel tense and want to get rid of this feeling by teasing others. They talk because they do not know what to write. They talk because they don't want to

lose ideas and it takes too long to write them down. They talk because they need help with spelling and vocabulary. They talk because they are responding to other children talking. It was argued above that the consistency in the talking patterns, the absence of an explicit link to the task and the frequent lack of external "causes" for the talk support the notion that most of the talk during the writing lessons is caused by internal, emotional factors rather than changes in the external context of the lesson.

The children's talking during the writing lesson seems to have two key functions that are integral to the creative writing process. The first function is to externalise the children's inner experiences and by externalising them, to contain them in a socially meaningful form. They externalise their tension, aggression, helplessness and their excitement in the way in which they relate to each other and in the stories they create. The second function is to maintain the purpose of the writing task for the writer. While the children are chatting about their stories during the lesson they talk about their ideas in the context of real communicative settings, i.e in the context of a real audience, and this helps them to internalize their identity as a writer and to project their potential readers into the act of writing. Without this projection the act of writing becomes meaningless. The cognitive activity embedded in the writing process therefore can only be experienced as significant if the children are able to link their emotions to the language they use in the context of real or imagined interpersonal relationships.

Purely intrapersonal symbol formations will remain repressed and socially

meaningless until they are attached to social signs. Vygotsky pointed to this phenomenon when he suggested that signs are mediated to the children in the context of relationships and these signs have then become internalized when the children are able to make use of these signs independently of a real relational context. The children's continual talking described above seems to fit in with Vygotsky's notion of interpersonal and intrapersonal development of signs. The children are learning to be writers and as they are not yet able to internally maintain the relationship to their potential readers they engage in a real, interpersonal communication to support them.

However, the children's behaviour and reflections reveal that they do not experience a smooth transition from the interpersonal to the intrapersonal level of shared meaning. In order to maintain the social nature of this meaning, they have to introject the person of the reader. Here it is important to distinguish the process of internalization of language and concepts as part of a sign system from the internalization of the "other", the reader, who makes the act of writing meaningful. Introjection of relational objects such as the reader fundamentally affects the identity of the children as they no longer communicate with a real person, but have to internally redirect their intention to communicate by splitting their subjectivity into two roles, that of the active writer and that of the projected reader. The separation of meaningful communication into the roles of "I" and "you" happens naturally in speech, but in writing this separation becomes part of the formal demands for explicitness and structure in the text. When the internalization of the "writer - reader" relationship occurs, the mental image of the reader is endowed with the

meanings provided by the social convention of writing for an audience as well as the emotions the writer experiences in response to such an audience.

The reader is not a neutral figure, but is the recipient and judge of the written outcome and therefore provokes feelings of insecurity and fear of rejection in the writer. The strong emotional content invested in the image of the reader is responsible for the distortions and misconceptions that interfere and make an effortless internalization of the writing conventions impossible. Thus the children's personal identification with a potential reader during their writing activity is more than a linguistic and structural adjustment to an abstracted and internalized form of communication. It changes the children's subjectivity from that of a participant in a dialogue to that of an author. An author's social function is to anticipate dialogue by creating and sharing meanings in an explicit and permanent form. As "authorship" is a mental construct, it is not permanent and the children only remain authors as long as the writer - reader relationship is maintained.

One of the central assumptions underlying this investigation has been the notion that the social and personal symbol formations in writing do not occur as separate mental processes. They occur simultaneously and thus one provides the context for the other. In other words, the cognitive (socially regulated) mental processes occur in the context of emotional (personal) understandings of a situation, while the emotional processes rely on social signs (cognitive language activity) for processes such as introjection and projection that bind the free flowing mental energy. Talking seems to be the point in the lesson at which these two processes coincide and interact as

the communicative intention behind it transforms each mental process by bringing the other process to bear on it. This means that the act of talking socializes the affective symbol formations that form the basis of the creative process of making new meanings. This happens when the fluid mental energy that determines inner experiences is contained in words provided by and shared with society.

At the same time, talking personalizes the writing conventions as the interaction with real people gives a purpose to the task and becomes part of the process of identification with a reader without which the writer can not share meaning. The most significant mental process during creative writing that structures and maintains the writing act is the intention to communicate. It is this intention that motivates the writer to employ socially acceptable signs systems in an attempt to establish intersubjectivity between the writer and the reader. Intersubjectivity, understood as the possibility of sharing meaning, forms the foundation of authorship and it relies on both affective and cognitive processes simultaneously as there can be no "meaning" without affective content and there can be no sharing of this meaning without social processes of language and cognition.

When children are expected to perform a creative writing task, they are expected to internalize the dialogic structure of communication by splitting their subjectivity into the role of the writer and the reader. If children are unable to internally balance and contain the tension caused by such a polarization of mental energy, their writing process will become an extremely painful experience. Writing will then compromise their intentional self and this will result in an experience of loss of control. The

children seem to experience this compromise of themselves and the resulting lack of control, as feelings of frustration, alienation and insecurity. The experience of frustration is the result of an inability to control and personalize the writing conventions and this is experienced by the children as an inability to write what they mean. The experience of alienation is rooted in their inability to internalize the dialogic structure of authorship and this is experienced as isolation and alienation due to an inability to establish intersubjectivity while writing. In both cases, the children's inability to establish and maintain control over the writing process give rise to feelings of fundamental insecurity. All these emotions are not only painful, but also experiences of social meaninglessness. They cause children to "hate writing".

"My pen won't talk, but I will" captures the central concerns of the children's need to talk as it reflects the children's alienation and frustration with a medium of communication that lacks the basic requirements of dialogue. The above reflections show that the children not only talk to contain and socialize their inner experiences, but also to maintain the purposefulness of writing by providing the external structure of dialogue that is absent in the written medium. The children can create internal conditions of dialogue by splitting their subjectivity into that of a reader and a writer. As we have seen this causes a build up of tension and anxious feelings. The impact of these emotions on the cognitive aspects of the writing task is significant in that the emotions are part of a polarization of mental energy that is aimed at creating intersubjectivity between the writer and the reader. Without this process, shared meaning in the form of a story would be impossible. Thus the affective

process becomes the driving force behind the writer's ability to engage in authorship and to fulfil the cognitive tasks involved in writing. It is crucial to acknowledge that the affective and cognitive aspects of writing can not be separated into isolated processes, but that the experience of writing is determined by their interaction.

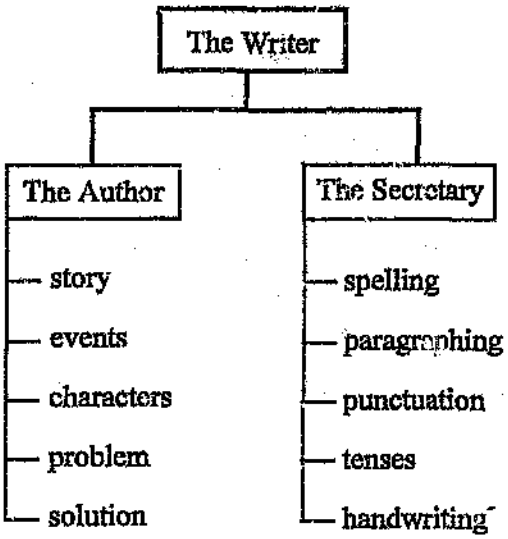
CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS FOR METHODOLOGY

The final aim of this project is to suggest practical ways in which writing programmes can explicitly support children in their emotional needs during the learning process. The emotional needs are defined in terms of the children's difficulty to bridge the gap between the personal and social demands of creative writing. Thus writing programmes need to explicitly address and limit experiences of frustration and alienation as well as building children's confidence in their ability to share their personal meaning. The brief methodological considerations of this section are derived from my teaching practice and are based on methods that the children under investigation have positively responded to.

Developing authorship

It is important to acknowledge the gap between talking and writing as well as how difficult it is to "say what you mean". The children's identity as writers must be developed explicitly and this means that the conventions and procedures of writing must be communicated and practised. As reflected in the children's repeated use of the image of the "muse", it has been a useful tool to formalise the children's shift in identity from being students to becoming authors. The following representation has also proved to be very useful when reflecting with children on what it means to be an author:



A writer assumes two roles: Those of the author and the secretary.

Developing editing skills

In any context other than school, writers have the opportunity to edit their work themselves or to have it edited by somebody else. Introducing the concept of editing to the writing process in school allows the children the freedom to focus on the story without having to worry about the formal aspects of the task at the same time. This freedom helps to control their feelings of frustration as they can make several attempts to capture and express their thoughts. It also builds their confidence as writers as they can correct and improve their work before it is judged. The children's positive comments about rewriting the story in the preceding interviews support the effectiveness of this method.

Making writing purposeful

As the experience of alienation is closely linked to the meaninglessness of the writing task, it is essential to have a clear and explicit purpose for all writing tasks. The most successful writing projects done with the class have had a real readership and therefore a real communicative intention. On one occasion the class wrote and illustrated little story books for younger children in the school and then visited their class and read the stories to them. On another occasion, they wrote the story for a play they improvised and performed. As the children are given a real, communicative setting for which they are writing, they find it easier to project and maintain the dialogic structure of this setting in their own writing.

Guided writing

When the children are expected to master a specific aspect of the writing conventions, they need to be supported in other aspects of writing so that they can focus their mental energy on the learning task. This support can take the form of providing vocabulary, providing a writing plan, presenting a model or example of the task, presenting the content and giving guidelines on how to express the content in a particular form, etc. Non-fictional writing can be very useful too, as the non-fictional content minimizes the anxious feelings aroused when children have to share of themselves.

Focused feedback

As the emotional and cognitive aspects of the writing process are intertwined, it is important to respond to the emotional content of the children's stories as much as to their formal aspects. This differentiated response acknowledges the authorship of the writers and affirms their intention to communicate. At the same time it allows the teacher to clearly isolate and address formal difficulties that undermine the meaning-making process.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research has been to understand the creative writing experiences of primary school children. As the investigation of writing experiences addresses more than the purely cognitive aspects of writing, theoretical constructs from the psychoanalytic tradition were used to define the theoretical basis of this research project. The central notions that have guided the investigation of the children's "experience" are firstly, the assumption that all children experience the ebb and flow of conflicting psychic energies (life and death instinct) as pleasure or anxiety and that they instinctively seek to avoid a build up of anxiety.

Secondly, it was argued that no life experiences are lost to the individual child, but are stored as emotional memories in the child's Unconscious. The memories of the Unconscious can be projected into current experiences and this process of projection is the beginning of the child's symbolic function, where external reality is given a meaning that reflects the internal reality. This function can also be directed inwards, as external images are introjected to maintain their influence in the absence of the real objects themselves. The mechanisms of introjection and projection, furthermore allow the child to mentally repair an image previously "damaged" by its destructive psychic energy. Thus the child's relationship to reality and phantasy are both the result of "making meaning" by linking the internal and external realities through projection and introjection. As a result perceptions of phantasy and reality influence each other and might cause distorted understandings of external realities.

The third premise of the report has been the claim that the cognitive symbolic function has the same psychic origin as the affective symbolizations, and that therefore a cognitive task such as writing necessarily involves an encounter with the pre-existing personal, emotional meanings of the learning situation. In this research report, therefore, creative writing is no longer conceptualized as the primary, rational construction of a story, but rather as a complex process that involves both cognitive and affective symbol formations. It is not understood as a process of inventing new meaning, but as the creation of a new composition of symbols through the separation and "reconstruction" of reality and phantasy in the Conscious and Unconscious respectively.

On the basis of the above assumptions, the creative writing experience at the centre of the research is understood as an act of formalised social communication which demands of the children that they create new meanings by linking their internally and externally experienced realities in a socially acceptable way. However, the demands of the writing process are in complete opposition to those of creativity. The creative process of constructing new meaning is rooted in the children's personal need to repair repressed images and experiences and in this sense it is rooted in the conflicting and often socially "unacceptable" facets of the children's experience. Writing on the other hand, is governed by strict social rules that are imposed by an external reality and which put the child under immense pressure to communicate the inner conflict in a highly prescribed and coded ritual of writing conventions. Thus the experience of creative writing centres around a gap between what exists internally for the writer when the story is conceived and what is actually

expressed through language when the story is written. This gap is a product of renewed censorship and repression of images by the writer in order to conform to the norms of writing.

In an attempt to understand the emotional experience underlying these conflicting demands of creative writing, the children's behaviour was observed and recorded during their writing lesson and the children were later given a chance to talk about their experience of the lesson. After four months some children were shown the video of the writing lesson and were asked to explain what they thought was happening in it. All three interventions were aimed at identifying the affective factors that impact on the writing process of the children during a creative writing task. The initial analysis of the data reveals that writing is not the dominant activity of the writing lesson.

The children's noise, restlessness, resistance and aggression at the beginning of the lesson was interpreted as evidence for anxious feelings in anticipation of the writing task. In the course of the interviews, the children confirmed this interpretation as they expressed feelings of uneasiness, helplessness and insecurity about beginning the writing process. The "kiss of the muse", where the children suddenly knew what to write, emerged as a critical point of the writing lesson. At this point the children experienced a qualitative change in their emotional state as well as their behaviour. Many children settled into the task and remained focused on it for some time and they also talked about feelings of excitement and pleasure during this part of the lesson. The end of the lesson once again brought out many aggressive or anxious

feelings, as the children anticipated handing their stories to the teacher and being judged on them. In their reflections, the children mentioned feeling bad about making mistakes, being dissatisfied with their stories as they did not effectively express themselves and feeling frustrated and under pressure. Thus negative, anxious emotions dominated their accounts of their writing experience.

The children's reflections on their writing lesson, in particular their response to seeing themselves on video, provided additional insights into emotions that could not directly be deduced from their behaviour during the lesson. These "hidden" and more complex emotions were feelings of insecurity and alienation caused by the formal aspects of the writing task which required them to repress parts of the story they identified with. In contrast, the opportunity to rewrite and improve the story after it had been returned by the teacher was accompanied by positive feelings provided it satisfied the children's need to make reparation. The relevance of this deeper, unconscious level of emotion which emerged during the children's reflections is that these feelings are not caused by external factors, but by the actual process of constructing a written story. The opposition of the internal and external demands made on the writer in the course of the writing task generates a flow of psychic energy which the children predominantly experience as anxiety. The release and rebinding of this fluid energy in the course of creating meaning gives rise to the wide spectrum of emotions described above. These emotions are part of the writing process, but not necessarily part of the story. Thus the gap between the emotions and meanings that exist internally for the writer while s/he is writing, and those that can consciously be shared with the reader can only be bridged through the

reconstruction and socialization of the existing personal meanings.

The gap between personal and social meanings, however, cannot be presented as the dividing line between affective and cognitive mental processes for the writer. The cognitive aspects of the writing task are experienced as a part of the difficulty of establishing control over meanings and of making sense. Therefore the emotional state of the children during their writing task cannot be separated from their cognitive activities, but the two processes have to be understood as occurring simultaneously where one forms the context for the other. The symbol formations that form the raw material for cognition are invested with emotional content and this means that the process of bridging the gap between personal and social symbol formations is closely related to feelings of being in and out of control of the writing process.

The mental process that moves the private meanings into the social realm is the intention to communicate, i.e. the intention to establish intersubjectivity between reader and writer. As the act of communicating is an act of sharing meaning it necessitates the transformation of personal meanings into social knowledge. The written medium, however, does not provide children with the dialogic structure that is naturally part of oral communication. The writing act therefore lacks the foundation on which intersubjectivity is built and the children have to internally provide this structure by projecting a potential reader into their act of writing. They are thereby redirecting their intention to communicate from an interpersonal level

to an intrapersonal one as they are simultaneously taking on the role of the writer and that of the reader. The children experience difficulty with this, as the internal provision of a communicative setting demands a shift in identity from being a writer to becoming an author. The internal process is painful, as the establishment of an internal opposition between the reader and the writer causes inner tension and increases the experience of losing control. This split in subjectivity is the cause of alienation, frustration and insecurity.

The children's difficulty with the process of reconstructing their personal meaning along social lines was traced in their need to talk throughout the lesson. The two main function of the talking seemed to be firstly, to externalise and contain their inner experiences and secondly, to maintain the purpose of the writing task for the writer. As children are not able to internally maintain the image of the reader, they engage in real interpersonal communication to help them maintain the direction and purpose of the communicative intention. The children experience talking as more meaningful than writing as it presents them with a communicative setting. Thus talking socializes their personal meanings by forcing them onto a social, interpersonal plane. It also personalizes their writing task, as the identification with a listener gives purpose and direction to it.

The central conclusions of this research report focus on the impact of children's emotional reality on their writing activity. In summary these are:

1. The experience of creative writing cannot be separated

into cognitive and affective components, as the one forms the context for the other. The emotional experiences of the children not only interfere with their writing, but limit their ability to confront the writing task.

2. The children's experience of writing is dominated by anxious emotions relating to their experience of struggle while they are attempting to establish control over the symbolic material that forms their inner resource for the meaning-making process.
3. The medium of writing does not provide children with a communicative structure and thus it presents many children with an experience of isolation and meaninglessness. If the children fail to internally provide a purpose for their task, writing becomes an experience insecurity and alienation.
4. The role of talk in the writing process does not have a cognitive significance. Its primary function seems to be to control affective forces and to maintain the personal purposefulness of the writing task.

These conclusions challenge any methodological approaches to writing that do not explicitly address the children's emotional reality as part of the writing process. Teaching creative writing involves more than teaching writing skills. It forces

children into an encounter with their personal, psychological history and this can be a very painful process. Writing lessons therefore have to be aimed at supporting children in this confrontation with themselves by developing their identity as authors, by engaging them in purposeful and guided writing tasks, and by providing them with structured reflections on their writing performance.

For me, personally, the value of this research project has been in the confirmation and theoretical elaboration of an intuitive understanding of the children's difficulties with written tasks. Central to this has been the notion that the theoretical nature of the school environment cannot escape the reality of the children's daily experience and that the personal reality of each child influences their openness to cognition. When these theoretical considerations are put into the context of the children's observed behaviour, two important, yet unanswered questions emerge about the evidence of aggression, anxiety and insecurity during the lesson: firstly, to what extent are the children who are unable to tolerate the initial frustration and tension of the writing process, victims of traumatic experiences? and secondly, to what extent does the often unstable, violent and traumatic nature of the current South African society determine the children's incapacity for inner security and hence have a direct influence on their learning difficulties? The answers to both questions could add richness to our understanding of the current crisis in South African education. The questions are, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this research report and will have to be pursued in separate studies.

In relation to future research, *if my pen won't talk, who will?*

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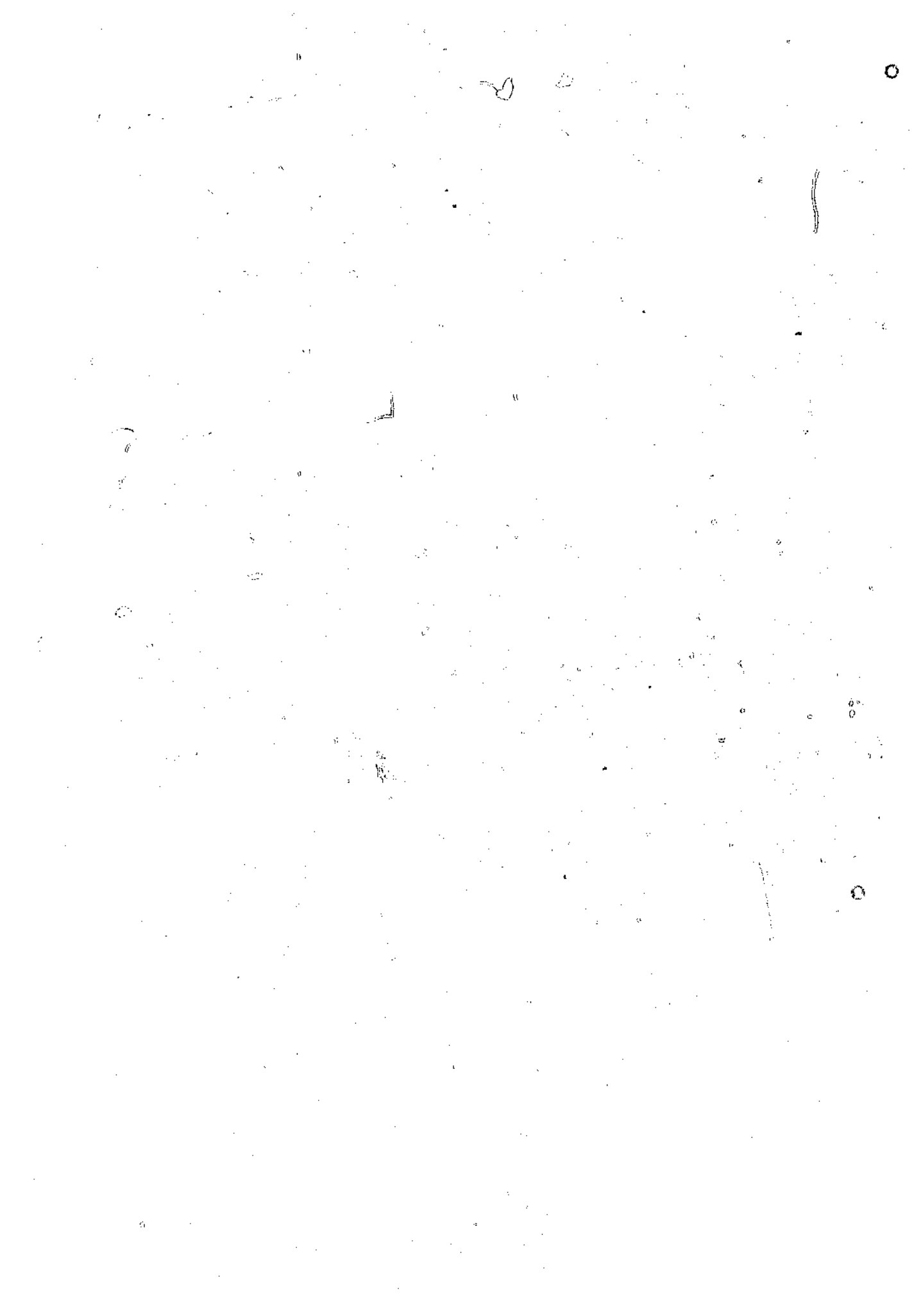
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