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The Elusiveness of Imagination:

A case study of five teachers' conceptions and enactments of imaginative writing pedagogies in Gauteng classrooms

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in fulfilment of the academic requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between teachers' conceptions of imagination and imaginative writing and how they enact these ideas in the classroom. The three primary research questions are (1) how do teachers conceptualise the imagination and imaginative writing? (2) how are these ideas and beliefs enacted through classroom writing practices? (3) what is the relationship between teachers' conceptions of imaginative writing and their enactment of imaginative writing pedagogy in the classroom?

I argue that imagination and imaginative writing have been sidelined in South African educational discourses and that a narrow view of imagination prevails. Drawing on Vygotsky's work on imagination, writing pedagogy theorists and philosophical ideas, I argue for a nuanced model of imaginative writing which synthesises higher-level thinking, affect and creativity.

This study uses a multiple case study methodology. In order to answer the first research question, I conducted in-depth interviews with five intermediate phase teachers. I then observed their English classes, two weeks per teacher, to gain insights into the second and third research questions. I also gathered and analysed samples of learners' writing to explore the impact of teachers' pedagogies on learners' writing. Thus, enactment of imaginative writing pedagogies is explored from various angles.

The findings suggest that there is a complex relationship between teachers' personal writing histories, their conceptions of imaginative writing and classroom practice. One of the central findings of this thesis is that teachers' personal writing practices have less of an impact on their imaginative writing pedagogy than one would expect. Teachers' conceptualisations of imagination and their related beliefs and attitudes have a more significant impact on their pedagogy than their personal writing practices. However, values and beliefs that embrace imaginative writing, while a necessary precondition for productive practice, are not necessarily enough. These need to be coupled with a well-developed pedagogy and implemented in institutional contexts that are conducive to imaginative writing.

Teachers draw on a range of different discourses to construct their ideas about imaginative writing and their practice. While the discourses articulated in the interviews were

significant, at times there were tensions between teachers' espoused and enacted practice and in some instances contradictory discourses operating in the interview and in their classrooms. The findings of this thesis highlight the importance of key elements of practice working together, pulling in the same direction and being framed by reinforcing discourses. At times all five teachers drew on imaginative discourses (i.e. discourses that value imaginative writing and thinking, and that regard it as central to learning), and strove to promote imaginative writing. However, the ultimate effectiveness of this was largely determined by the manner in which imaginative discourses were sustained and integrated with other discourses.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own original work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted previously for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Belinda Mendelowitz

_____ day of _____, 2010

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Chapter One: Introduction

1. Aims

The aim of this study is twofold. Firstly, I want to investigate a cross-section of teachers' conceptions of the imagination and imaginative writing in Gauteng schools. Secondly, I want to explore how teachers enact these attitudes, beliefs and ideas about imaginative writing in the classroom. The relations between teachers' conceptions of imaginative writing and enactment of their espoused practice will be a central concern. The study has been conducted within a national context where the underdevelopment of learners' writing skills has been recognised as a significant problem that needs to be addressed (Department of Education, 2005).

There is much support for the assertion that teachers' classroom practices are shaped, to a large extent, by their "conceptions of practice" (Freeman, 1996). This term refers to a combination of personal knowledge, beliefs and implicit theories, institutional influences and how these factors shape practice. The use of the term "conceptions of practice" signals a focus on cognition, affect and the personal in socio-cultural contexts. In a landmark article, Johnson foregrounds the "socio-cultural turn" within teacher cognition research (2006).

The relationship between "conceptions of practice" and enactment of practice is seldom straightforward and I will explore, amongst other things, the slippage between ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and practice. How are teachers' ideas, knowledge bases and beliefs about imagination shaped? What histories and identities do teachers bring to the writing classroom? What "tensions" (Freeman, 1996) might interfere with the teacher's translation of ideas into action?

Danielewicz (2001) has interesting ways of defining and explaining the notion of enactment, which is congruent with my broad philosophical framework, especially regarding her emphasis on the personal, and on identity work.

She argues that:

> In its boldest sense, enactment entails a full investment of my self (person, mind, spirit) in the act of teaching and learning alongside my students. … How I behave in the classroom and what I ask students to do are enactments of my beliefs and self, the teacher I am at the moment (174).

In addition, I am interested in the way the teachers' professional identities are shaped by broader institutional, social and educational discourses. Hence I am working with a notion of the self and teachers' beliefs and practices as being socio-culturally situated.

2. Research question

This research sets out to answer the following three overarching questions:

- How do teachers conceptualise the imagination and imaginative writing?
- How are these ideas and beliefs enacted through classroom writing practices?
- What is the relationship between teachers' conceptions of imaginative writing and their enactment of imaginative writing pedagogy in the classroom?

This will entail consideration of the following sub-questions:

1. What are teachers' attitudes towards the imagination, imaginative writing and teaching imaginative writing? What histories and identities do teachers bring to their own writing and the teaching of writing? How are teachers' ideas about imagination and imaginative writing shaped by broader institutional and educational discourses?
2. How do their "conceptions of practice" (Freeman, 1996), including subject knowledge and values and beliefs, impact on their approach to teaching imaginative writing?

Equally important, how do their institutional and the broader socio-political environments shape and reshape their practices?

3. How do teachers conceptualise the role of imagination across different genres of writing? Do teachers view imagination as separate and distinct from higher level cognitive writing work or do they work with an integrated view of imagination as playing a role in different genres of writing?

4. What kind of discourses are prevalent in the various classroom research sites? How are these discourses played out in the teachers' work with imaginative writing?

5. What is the relationship between the teachers' practices, classroom discourses and the kinds of writing produced by the learners?

This research focuses on English as subject area in Grades 6 and 7, cutting across the intermediate phase (Grades 4–6) and the senior phase (Grades 7–9).

3. Rationale for the research:

The rationale for this research draws on my personal and professional experiences as well as local and global contexts. I begin by providing a brief personal background to this study, and then proceed to professional experiences, and national, global educational and research issues.

3.1 Personal and professional background to the research

I've been writing ever since I could hold a pen, filling up countless scribblers and journals with thoughts and stories. For me, writing has always been a way of creating a safe and empowering space; a space for self-expression; a space for imagining becoming something or someone else; a space to discover ideas; a slow unfolding of a story, an insight. While at school, my engagement with writing was a completely private endeavour, happening outside the confines of school. There was very little in the seventies school curriculum that promoted the development of imaginative

writing beyond the quarterly essay that was submitted to the teacher, returned with a mark, a brief global comment and never revisited (i.e. a typical product approach to writing).

As a high school English and History teacher, I was always interested in promoting students' imaginative writing, with varying levels of success. In retrospect I provided interesting writing prompts but not enough time, space and input for "fragments of ideas" to take shape and be reshaped through sharing and feedback (McCallister, 2008). My attempts to implement aspects of process writing such as peer feedback and self-evaluation were largely ineffective, with learners reporting that they did not feel equipped to evaluate their own writing or the work of their peers. In addition, the broader institutional context of the school privileged summative rather than formative assessment. Perhaps not surprisingly, my most productive work with imaginative writing emerged in informal and extra-curricular courses for children and young adults, which I ran at various Gifted Child Centres and at the Daveyton Enrichment Programme in the early nineties.

Until this point I had been working largely intuitively. However, commencing postgraduate studies (Honours in Applied Linguistics) in 1996 marked a turning point as I began to engage with research and ideas about writing in relation to the questions and dilemmas that I outlined in section 3. In my first Honours essay I began to grapple with pedagogical theory and my interest in writing pedagogy deepened. I encountered the work of process writing theorists such as Vivian Zamel (1987), and Peter Elbow (1981) for the first time.

The move away from high school teaching to teacher education, both in-service and pre-service, sharpened and focused my interest in personal narrative and imaginative writing. More specifically, this research was triggered by my work with pre-service teachers on creative writing courses at the Wits School of Education. At the outset of this course, students were required to write a brief history of themselves as writers.

Despite the introduction of outcomes-based education and an emphasis on process writing in the curriculum documents, the issues raised in the students' writing histories indicated that the new curriculum principles were not being translated into practice. Recurring themes in these writing histories included: the red pen assault, writing on meaningless, teacher-imposed topics, disappointment and limited guidance on how to improve (Mendelowitz, 2005: 18). I began to wonder about the link between these experiences, attitudes and skills and schooling. In particular this prompted the development of two questions:

- What is happening in schools in terms of writing pedagogy and practice?
- Why are students not being empowered and enabled to write competently, coherently, imaginatively, and fluently?

In order to answer these questions, I decided to shift from researching my own practice at tertiary sites towards classroom-based research in primary schools. This research thus returns to the source of the problem and explores what is happening in five Grade 6 and 7 teachers' classes as regards classroom writing practices. More specifically, I want to find out how teachers view imaginative writing from personal and pedagogical perspectives, as research suggests that there is a strong relationship between teachers' own writing practices and attitudes towards writing and the way they teach it (Hairston, 1982 ; Crowhurst, 1988; Winer, 1992).

3.2 The broader educational landscape in South Africa

3.2.1 National and international literacy studies in South African schools

Research on the quality of learners' writing skills in South African schools provides a disturbing picture. The findings of a joint Department of Education (DoE)–UNESCO–UNICEF study on levels of literacy and numeracy (in English) of Grade 4 learners in South Africa were as follows: only 24% of the learners tested had writing skills appropriate for Grade 4 (Strauss, 1999).

The findings of the Grade Six Intermediate Phase Systemic Evaluation Report (DoE, 2005) confirm Strauss's (1999) conclusion. Language achievements were grouped according to the key learning outcomes of the Revised National Curriculum Statements (DoE, 2005). Learners scored slightly above 50% in reading and viewing. However, the average scores for the other learning outcomes were well below 50%. The average score for writing was 31%, the lowest score of all the learning outcomes. The researchers concluded that the low achievement levels "could be attributed to the majority of learners having taken the tests that measured these learning outcomes in a language that was different from their home language" (DoE, 2005: 79). While the study has its limitations (DoE, 2005: 24), the evaluation does articulate with the findings of other similar studies that preceded and followed it.

Over and above the exceptionally low average score for writing, another related trend was noted with concern by the researchers:

> Across all learning areas and provinces, learner scores were extremely low for items that required learners to construct and provide their own responses (i.e. in response to open-ended questions) compared to responses to multiple-choice questions. (DoE, 2002)

This finding implies that learners are unaccustomed to extended writing, and constructing their own responses and ideas in written form. I will return to this point in discussion of the PIRLS report (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, 2008).

The PIRLS research, an international study of Grade 4 learners' reading skills in 40 countries, was conducted between 2004 and 2006. South Africa was one of the participating countries, and the South African component of the study was extended to include Grade 5 learners. The findings on reading skills were even more disturbing than those of the DoE systemic evaluation. South Africa was ranked bottom of the 40 participating countries despite the fact that there was a strong alignment between

the items tested by PIRLS and the revised curriculum statements (RNCS) regarding reading skills. Furthermore, the tests were offered in all official languages, hence learners could answer questions in their vernaculars, if preferred. However, the results of the tests indicated that over 80% of learners tested in African languages did not attain "basic reading and writing strategies" (Howie et al., 2008).

The results for English and Afrikaans first language speakers were better than those for African learners, but largely below international benchmarks. Howie et al. concluded:

> Only 17 to 18% of English and Afrikaans learners in either Grade could reach the High and Advanced International Benchmarks, rendering this small group the only South African Learners who could be considered competent readers. (2008: 29)

The implications are stark and shocking: the majority of learners do not have basic reading skills and strategies to manage academic tasks. This finding suggests that the overriding problem cannot simply be attributed to a first and second language divide and socio-economic factors, but must also point to issues of teachers' methodologies, training and other broader contextual issues.

Although the focus of the study was on reading skills, the findings have significant implications for the current scenario regarding literacy levels in South Africa, including learners' writing skills and writing pedagogy. Picking up on the concerns raised by the DoE report (2002) about the significant discrepancy between written answers and multiple choice, one wonders what role poor writing resources contributed to the PIRLS results, and whether this was factored into the analysis. Unfortunately, this issue is not explicitly dealt with in the 2008 summary report. The following questions are thus pertinent but remain unanswered: how much could learners understand but not articulate in written form? And what does this suggest about writing pedagogy at schools? In addition, reading and writing are inextricably

linked and, as stated in the RNCS, reading provides a foundation for the development of writing (DoE, 2002 : 22).

While this contextual discussion is necessarily broad, the role of imagination and imaginative writing will be explicated in the chapters that follow. One of the key findings from the PIRLS research coincides with some of the findings of this thesis, albeit from a different angle. There is clearly a substantial gap between the official South African curriculum policies, as reflected in the Revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS), and the way teachers implement the curriculum statements. Howie et al. conclude that "these policies … may not be explicit enough to provide the level of support that teachers require to guide their classroom reading instructions" (2008: 9). If this is the case for reading instruction, one can be sure that this is equally the case for writing, which is the subject of less detailed attention in the RNCS. However, the point which I want to make here relates to the limited application by teachers of the curriculum statements. Howie et al. conclude that South African intermediate phase teachers assess and monitor learners' progress in reading at low levels of cognitive challenge, and do not foreground the kind of exercises that are present in PIRLS (Howie et al., 2008: 58). I will make a similar argument in relation to imaginative writing pedagogy: i.e. when teachers perceive learners as struggling, a common reaction is to reduce learning to the lowest common denominator (back to basics), rather than find creative ways of challenging learners within a manageable framework (see Chapter Eight).

A similar point is made in the international literature on second language writing pedagogy. In a comprehensive review article on identity and the writing of diverse students, Ball and Ellis point to a crucial link between teachers' deficit assumptions of linguistically diverse learners and the use of "low level drill-and-skill instruction", which in effect perpetuates limited writing development.

They pose the following question:

> Why are most culturally and linguistically diverse students in poor and urban schools continuing to receive low level drill-and-skill instruction when the research confirms that instruction that builds on students' background knowledge, builds a sense of community, is interactive and meaningful, and requires extended writing, reflection and critical thinking is most effective with all students? (2008: 507)

The issue of deficit constructions of learners as regards imaginative writing is one that will be discussed in forthcoming chapters, in relation to the data (Chapters Five, Seven and Eight) and the literature (Chapter Three).

3.2.2 The impact of English as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT)- implications for teachers and learners

The above research points to a major problem with students' writing in English but provides limited clues as to the reasons for these problems in a South African context. How does one account for the problem students experience with writing in a South African context? To answer these questions, I'll need to consider pedagogical issues, and the gap between language policy and implementation, particularly the impact of English as the de facto language of learning and teaching (LoLT). This issue is raised in the preceding studies, but requires further elaboration in relation to writing.

The research of Heugh (2000) and Hendricks (2005) point to serious pedagogical problems in the teaching of writing. Heugh's observations of Grade 3 classes in Western Cape township schools reveal that Grade 3s are seldom asked to produce anything more than occasional three-word sentences. She concludes that there is no extended writing, and no attempt to encourage experimentation or development of writing. In addition, pupils in the intermediate phase are not writing letters or stories either and do not have enough English words to write in English (30).

A related concern raised by Heugh is that teachers (mostly English additional language speakers) themselves fear writing in English. She poses the following question:

> How can there be development of writing when the teachers themselves fear writing and believe that the pupils should only write in a language in which the teachers themselves are not comfortable writing? (2000: 30)

This is a key problem and has been borne out in international research (Hairston, 1982 ; Crowhurst, 1988; Winer, 1992). Researchers consistently find that it is difficult for teachers to teach writing effectively if they don't engage with writing themselves. The problem is complicated in a South African context where the majority of teachers are teaching in a second or third language and were themselves probably taught by teachers who were not comfortable with English, within the 'Bantu education' system. My own recent work with in-service teachers has reinforced this point powerfully. On a personal writing course, the teachers' resistant and terrified responses to the task of peer editing revealed their own deep-seated fears about writing in English and being judged by colleagues. One wonders then how these attitudes are enacted in the classroom.

The cycle of disadvantage thus perpetuates itself, even in a transforming education system. Heugh also makes the related point that the quality of writing pedagogy is spread unevenly across different schools. She argues that in privileged schools children are writing stories and letters and doing independent research project by Grade 4.

Hendricks (2005) analysed the classroom writing of Grade 7 learners in their additional languages at four Eastern Cape Schools. Her findings concurred with Heugh: that learners write relatively few extended texts, and "these are mainly personal expressive texts which are unlikely to develop the ability to write abstract, context-reduced genres" (ii). Hendricks's contribution to the field of South African

school writing research is valuable. However, her findings, as cited above, point to one of the issues that I will problematise in this thesis: i.e. a tendency to binarise expressive, creative writing, on the one hand, and writing that develops higher-level thinking, on the other. I will be developing this argument, with a focus on imagination, throughout the thesis but in specific detail in the literature chapters (see Chapters Two and Three).

It is clear from the above discussion that the pedagogical problems are intertwined with language policy and medium of instruction issues. While the South African constitution and the language in education policy (LiEP) affirm all official languages, the practice across a wide range of public sites is a different matter altogether (Desai, 2001). Although the language in education policy document articulates a strong commitment to additive multilingualism, the view from the ground is a very different one. English is the 'de facto' language of learning and teaching (LoLT). Yet for the majority of teachers and learners, English is a second or third language. This factor, together with inadequate writing pedagogy, goes some way to explaining the writing crisis in South African schools and universities. At the same time, this problem cannot be reduced to binaries of 'privileged' versus 'under-privileged' schools and first language versus additional languages students. It is important to keep in mind that this notion of privilege is not a fixed one and is constantly shifting, as schools are fluid, transforming sites in terms of learner and teacher demographics.

While I have foregrounded key problem areas (such as pedagogy and English as LoLT) as explanations for the 'writing crisis', it is likely that these are simply the tip of the iceberg. One of the aims of this research is to identity other factors that are inhibiting the development of writing, and, equally, to identify practices that create environments that are productive spaces for imaginative thinking and writing to flourish.

3.2 3 Curriculum documents

In this section I will read and interpret the curriculum document with this key question in mind: how does the Revised National Curriculum statement (RNCS, DoE, 2002) position imagination and imaginative writing? In a broader perspective I will assess the role that the curriculum documents play in the evolution of a diluted version of imagination in South African writing pedagogy. This will be read against the historical circumstances out of which the post-apartheid curriculum emerged.

One of the most urgent tasks facing the newly elected democratic government in 1994 was to address the massive racial inequalities in education. The apartheid education system had been geared to maintain and reproduce a racially and economically stratified society. There had been nineteen different education departments, and the curriculum of each was designed to reinforce inequality. In particular, 'Bantu Education', the name allotted to education for black learners, was designed to keep blacks in their place at the bottom of the apartheid hierarchy, and to prevent them from imagining possibilities politically, vocationally and economically beyond the status quo. Black learners were subjected to low-level, rote learning, under-resourced and low quality education. While schooling for white learners was well resourced, it was designed to present a version of reality that perpetuated notions of white superiority, entitlement and compliance with apartheid ideology, ultimately focusing on the (re)production of conformist, compliant, uncritical citizens.

Directly after the 1994 elections, curriculum change in post-apartheid South Africa began, with a commitment to establish an outcomes-based curriculum. By October 1997, the National Curriculum statements (Grade R–9) were published and in 1998 the outcomes-based approach, alongside the new curriculum statements, was introduced in South African schools. This was known as curriculum 2005. In 2000, a ministerial committee conducted a review of Curriculum 2005 and the end result was a streamlining of the curriculum and the production of the RNCS. which first

appeared in the Government Gazette (DoE, 2002), followed by publication of RNCS Teacher's Guides for the development of learning programmes, Grades R–9 (2003).

The primary curriculum document is the RNCS, which outlines critical and specific outcomes for each Learning Area as well as assessment standards per outcome, per grade and per phase (i.e. foundation, intermediate, senior phase and further education and training). The critical outcomes, generic outcomes that apply to all Learning Areas at all grade levels, focus on problem-solving, critical thinking, team work and effective communication. The first critical outcome makes specific mention of creative thinking alongside critical thinking as tools for problem-solving and decision-making. However, creative and imaginative thinking is not foregrounded as a goal in itself.

In the discussion of the purposes of the Languages Learning area, seven purposes are listed. These include: personal, communicative, educational, aesthetic, cultural, political and critical. Imagination is incorporated in the aesthetic purpose of language as follows:

> Aesthetic purpose of language – to create, interpret and play imaginatively with oral, visual and written texts. (DoE, 2002: 17)

This is accompanied by a discussion of how the Languages Learning Area contributes to the curriculum as a whole. The conceptualisation of imagination as an aesthetic tool continues, and imagination is presented as something distinct from critical tools, critical understanding and access to other views (DoE, 2002: 18). Hence, the conceptualisation of imagination/creativity is somewhat narrow and tends to keep imagination in its 'play-pen' rather than synthesise the aesthetic, cognitive and ethical dimensions of imagination. In Chapters Two and Three I draw on theories that synthesise these various elements of imagination.

Having established the discursive framework in which imagination is positioned within the curriculum documents, it is necessary now to examine the specific outcome that applies to writing and the related assessment standards.[1] The specific outcome for writing across all grades and phases is as follows:

> Learning Outcome 4: Writing
>
> The learners will be able to write different kinds of factual and imaginative texts for a wide range of purposes. (DoE, 2002: 19)

3.2.3.1 Grade 6 home language assessment standards for writing (LO4)

In this discussion, I will focus on Grade 6 and 7 home language. I will begin with the Grade 6 home language assessment standards (AS) for writing. There are three main headings for the assessment standards. These include (i) Writing different kinds of texts for different purposes (ii) Developing and organising ideas through a writing process (iii) Presentation skills and applying knowledge of language at different levels (i.e. word, sentence and paragraph). Creativity and imagination is foregrounded in the first assessment standard (i.e. writing different genres for different purposes) as follows:

> The learner writes for personal, exploratory, playful, imaginative and creative purposes. (DoE, 2002: 37)

Interestingly, the genre included in this assessment standard is the argumentative essay, suggesting that imagination can cut across a wide range of genres, and is not necessarily restricted to poems, myths, journals etc. The assessment standard also specifies creative use of language in the design of media texts, both visual and verbal.

[1] A learning outcome is a description of what learners should know, demonstrate and be able to do, while an assessment standard describes the level at which learners should demonstrate their mastery of the outcome, and the associated depth and breadth.

An entire assessment standard is devoted to spelling out the different components of the writing process, drawing heavily on the process approach to writing (Zamel, 1987b; Graves, 1983; Calkins, 1986). This is then followed by an assessment standard that focuses on the application of knowledge of language. Hence an emphasis on both the writing process and the application of linguistic features are incorporated. However, at this phase (intermediate), there is not a specific focus on mastery of genre conventions. In the Senior and Further Education and Training (FET) phases, an emphasis on the specifics of genres is developed incrementally.

LO4 and its related assessment standards certainly provide teachers with opportunities to engage their learners in a range of imaginative writing tasks. However, it is problematic that learners at Grade 6 level are not expected to produce more than a paragraph. This restricts the amount of extended writing and thinking likely to happen and undercuts the development of imaginative writing. Local research on school writing in the intermediate phase consistently concludes that there is a problem of teachers focusing on sentence-level work (Heugh, 2000; Hendricks, 2005; DoE, 2002). The curriculum documents should close that gap and raise their expectations of learners and teachers.

3.2.3.2 Grade 7 home language assessment standards for writing (LO4)

The Grade 7 assessment standards for LO4 (writing, home language) consolidate and complexify the assessment standards of the previous grade. Learners are expected to expand their writing repertoire in terms of quantities, range of genres and depth of knowledge and understanding of genres. The focus on a process approach to writing continues, with a stronger emphasis on collaboration and reflection. The assessment standard on writing imaginative texts is developed in interesting ways:

The learner writes a selected range of imaginative texts:

- To express imagination, ideas and feelings about self and others;

- To explore the creative and playful use of language by means of narrative and descriptive compositions, diaries, friendly letters, dialogues, poems, cartoons, limericks and songs (DoE, 2002 : 39).

Imaginative writing in this AS is linked directly to the development of ideas and thinking about the learner's inner world (affect, feelings) and the outer world. However, it is unclear whether this refers to others, as in family members, friends etc. or the world beyond the confines of the learner's own borders and constraints. Certainly, the lack of specificity makes it possible to prise open that space if teachers are inclined to read it in that way. This is followed by an AS about producing a range of 'factual' and multimodal texts, still falling under the broad imaginative writing category, including eyewitness accounts and advertisements, but separated typographically from imagination as personal self-expression.

3.2.3.3 First Additional Language LO4 assessment standards

Imagination is further downgraded in the first additional language LO4 assessment standards. Functional writing is foregrounded, while there is a brief AS about writing stories, play scripts and dialogue. The term 'creative writing' is explicitly used in the Grade 6 AS but not in the Grade 7 AS. The implication is that teachers should focus on the basics with First Additional language learners (at the Grades 6 and 7 levels), and that creativity/imagination is not a central part of the process of acquiring an additional language. As will be shown in the data chapters (Chapters Seven and Eight), this idea permeates some of the teachers' conceptions of imaginative writing and their classroom practices.

3.2.3.4 Concluding comments about curriculum documents

In conclusion**,** the curriculum document does create space for imaginative writing, and even briefly opens a space for critical imaginative work, in the home language AS. However, the predominant positioning of imagination and imaginative writing is as an aesthetic tool.

The assessment standards that point beyond this are implicit and can easily be overlooked if the teacher does not have the interest, the training, and the skills, to read beyond the doc.

Ultimately, the curriculum document is just a starting point and a guideline for teaching. Much of its impact depends on how it is mediated through in-service training (INSET) and pre-service training (PRESET), and other curriculum tools (such as DoE learning guides etc.). One of the key challenges facing teacher training institutions is to enable teachers to turn these principles into practice in meaningful and substantial ways. A starting point would be a radical reconceptualisation of imagination and its implications for writing pedagogy.

3.3 Gaps in local and international research

Where is imagination and imaginative writing located in the South African context? A recent survey of locally published educational research over a ten-year period (1996–2006) indicates that there has been little research done on imaginative education (Osman, 2008). More specifically, fourteen entries in the 11500 database include the word 'imagination', and 30 entries include the word 'creativity' in the title and the abstract. None of these focus on imaginative or creative writing. Presumably questions of imagination and imaginative writing are embedded in research articles on other topics, but have not been the sustained focus of investigation. This finding is disturbing but not surprising and reinforces the urgency of this research and other such local research that aims to reconceptualise imagination in an educational context.

Imaginative education may have been partially retrieved from the black hole internationally through the work of the Imaginative Education Research Group (IERG) at Simon Fraser University (Egan et al.) and others (Jagla, 1994 ; Craft, 2003; Grainger et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2008), but in South Africa it is clearly still hovering on the margins, awaiting some much-deserved attention.

How does this positioning of imaginative discourses translate itself into the ideas and beliefs of teachers and their corresponding classroom practice? If imagination is hovering on the edges of South African educational discourses, what are the implications for teacher training and classroom practice? I will be attempting to answer that question through the analysis of interview and classroom observation data in Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight.

Where does imagination stand in international writing pedagogy research? Despite immense development in the breadth and depth of writing pedagogy research, from the seventies to the present, there is limited (if any) serious conceptualisation of imagination in pedagogical research on writing pedagogy. Although imagination is implicit in much of the research, it is a 'taken for granted' background element, rather than a central issue. This is evident in two recent compendiums on writing research: *Handbook of Writing Research* (MacArthur et al., 2006) and *Research on Composition* (Smargorinsky, 2006). None of the compendiums contain articles with a focus on imagination. There is no reference in the context index to imagination in the former, and one index reference to imagination in the latter, in the context of teacher research in writing.

I believe that this project has the potential to investigate a critical problem impacting on South African schooling and universities, and that the findings will make a valuable contribution to this area of knowledge and practice.

4 Outline of Chapters

Chapter Two traces a genealogy of the imagination from Western philosophical perspectives. It covers shifting conceptualisations of the imagination from Plato through to postmodernism. The work of the philosopher Richard Kearney (1988; 1998) on the ethical imagination is central to this chapter and those that follow.

Chapter Three reviews key ideas about education and imagination. The central theorists of this chapter are Lev Vygotsky (1962; 1978; 1991; 2004) and

contemporary Vygotskians (Smolucha, 1992; Gajdamaschko, 2005; John-Steiner & Meehan: 2000). This chapter also provides a review and synthesis of ideas about writing pedagogy and imagination.

In Chapter Four I discuss the methodology, paradigms and parameters which frame the research. I explain my motivation for using a multiple case study research design, the data collection techniques, the profile of the research participants and research sites. I also reflect on the research process and critically interrogate my role as 'participant observer' in the classroom observation. Finally, I explore the challenges of the writing process, and the choices that I made about writing style, methods of data analysis and organisation of data.

In **Chapters Five and Six**, I explore teachers' conceptualisations of the imagination, imaginative writing and pedagogy. The underpinnings of teachers' conceptualisations of imagination are related to various theoretical frameworks, first introduced in Chapters Two and Three. These two chapters provide answers to the first part of the research question. The recurring theme of Chapter Five concerns three teachers' ambivalence about, and at times opposition to, imaginative writing, as well as notions of learner deficit. Chapter Six focuses on two teachers for whom teaching imaginative writing is a creative act.

In **Chapter Seven and Eight**, I answer the second part of the research question by focusing on teachers' enactments of imaginative writing pedagogy. Chapter Seven is an in-depth analysis of the enactment of two teachers' imaginative writing pedagogy, while Chapter Eight is a comparative analysis of three teachers' enactment and its consequences for learners' writing.

In Chapter Nine, the concluding chapter, I highlight the most significant findings of this research from empirical and theoretical perspectives. Finally, I examine the implications of these findings for teacher education and writing pedagogy.

Chapter Two: A historical and theoretical overview of imagination

This thesis contains two literature review chapters. The purpose of this first review is to trace a genealogy of the imagination from philosophical perspectives. The central themes that emerge from this chapter provide a broad framework for understanding the more specific ideas on education and imagination explicated in Chapter Three. These two chapters in turn provide a combined framework for analysing the data.

The two literature reviews in this thesis are not endeavouring to be comprehensive or exhaustive. As a researcher one has to make difficult decisions about the inclusion and exclusion of relevant theory. Ultimately, I have selected theories and ideas that facilitate the development of this specific inquiry, and attempt to bridge the knowledge gap that has been identified in Chapter One. In particular, a central concern is the absence of any rigorous conceptualisation of imagination in pedagogical research on writing pedagogy. Although imagination is implicit in much of the research, it is a 'taken-for-granted' background element, rather than a central issue. The absence of a conceptualisation of imagination is a symptom of a broader malaise in writing pedagogy research – a lack of theoretical rigour in its formulation and the tendency to draw on theory implicitly and in diffuse ways. This problem has been noted by various literacy researchers. McCallister (2008: 466) comments on the theoretical vacuum at the centre of much writing pedagogy research, while Kress argues that the research done on this area is generally flawed, and does not engage sufficiently with linguistic processes and the substance of writing (1994: 6).

Hence, a key theoretical aim in this thesis is to develop a substantial, nuanced and finely-tuned lens for conceptualising imagination and imaginative writing pedagogy, with a clearly delineated trajectory of philosophical ideas that ultimately culminates in a Vygotskian approach to imagination and imaginative writing synthesised with

writing pedagogy research. An appropriate theoretical framework has been selected on this basis.

1. Introduction: Overview of key theoretical issues

Although I will be dealing with ideas from the two fields (i.e. philosophical and educational) in separate categories across Chapters Two and Three, I will cross-reference across categories in order to explore how the philosophical and educational perspectives on imagination speak to each other. More broadly, I will attempt to answer the following questions: What are the key themes running through these different debates? What are the relationships between the different ideas on imagination, and how have these been reshaped over time? How do they build on or react towards each other?

The history of conceptions of the imagination is testimony to the human capacity for imagining and reimagining over time, being appropriated periodically by different discourses. It is intimately bound up with the history of philosophical, literary, psychological and educational ideas and thoughts. The notion of imagination has been debated and its meaning has constantly shifted from ancient and medieval times to the present. It cuts to the very essence of humankind's search for new meanings and understandings. Even more significantly, a historical overview of debates about the imagination in different fields reveals a fascinating record of the history of ideas about human consciousness and what kind of thinking has been valued or marginalised at different times.

In the history of the Western intellectual tradition, rationality has frequently been valorised and defined in binarised, elitist ways that sideline imaginative, creative, narrative and affective pathways towards finding and constructing new 'truths' and insights. As Egan points out, the development of ideas about imagination is not a neat, linear storyline. He comments as follows:

> In as far as imagination is assumed generally to be a good thing, it is far from clear that it is more fully exercised, more evidently life-enhancing, more socially beneficial now than at the beginning of human history. We have difficulty denying that in the mythologies of the world there is evidence of imaginative life of a vivid power rarely encountered in the Western intellectual tradition today. (1992: 9)

In the above statement, Egan (1992) argues that imagination has been sidelined in Western intellectual traditions. As discussed in the introductory chapter, imaginative discourses are even more problematically sidelined in South African educational research and curriculum documents. Hence, one of the overriding concerns of this research is to shift imaginative discourses from the periphery towards the centre of South African educational discourses.

The diversity of fields to be drawn on illustrates Egan's point that imagination is a complex concept that consists of accumulations of meanings drawn from different fields. The parts of the whole do not always cohere (1992: 9). However, there are specific themes running through these debates across fields and time. So before I begin a detailed discussion of the philosophical *genealogy of the imagination*, I'd like to provide a brief overview of what those key themes are.

A recurring theme is the relationship between rational and imaginative thought. As will be shown, these two modes of thinking have frequently been portrayed as binary opposites, while other social theorists have attempted to synthesise these two modes of thought. Rational, reasoned thought has frequently been associated with serious intellectual work, while imagination has been constructed as peripheral. Rorty sums this up as an ongoing tension between those philosophers who believe that truth can be discovered only through scientific work and those who argue that truth is actively made and constructed by humans (1989: 3). Rationalism is thus associated with a scientific paradigm, and a sense of certainty about truth and

knowledge rather than a notion of knowledge and truth as being 'under construction' and shifting. The latter view creates scope for the synthesis of rationality and imagination.

An important aspect of this debate is different perspectives on the relationship between affect and cognition. Do affect and emotion pollute rational, objective thought or can they enhance the process of knowledge production? As will be shown, this debate plays itself out in interesting ways and still continues into the twenty-first century.

Another key issue is the debate as to whether the human capacity for imagination is simply reproductive or, on the other hand, productive. Finally, the question of the imaginative as an individual or social act and the social context of imaginative work is important. This is where Vygotsky distinguishes himself from other theorists in his focus on the social aspect of learning and thought.

Social justice is a major concern underlying my own work, and is something I believe should contribute to social change and equity. How can we train teachers who will nourish a new generation of imaginative and critical thinkers and writers? At the same time, one should guard against overstating claims about the transformative power of the imagination, as there are various versions of the imagination, not all of which would necessarily contribute to social change. Thus it is necessary to specify that what one wants is the development of an ethical and critical imagination.

2. Imagination and philosophy

What follows is a historical overview of the trajectory of ideas about imagination. It is not intended to be an in-depth analysis of the contribution of each philosopher. Rather, I intend to pull out the key themes and debates to build a theoretical and historical understanding of imaginings about imagination.

2.1 Classical views on imagination: From Plato to Aristotle

In the classical Greek world, Plato was the first philosopher to provide a systematic, explicit and critical account of imagination, an account that moved beyond myth towards 'reason'. While mythologies embodied values, lessons and ideas, Plato sought to articulate his ideas through the more direct vehicle of systematic analysis (Kearney, 1988: 87). In selecting this form of knowledge, rather than mythic narrative, he was already making a statement about how knowledge and truth could best be realised. Plato thus made a significant contribution to the development of ideas about imagination by getting the debate started. However, much of what he had to say was extremely negative, paradoxical and dismissive of the role of the artist in society and the function of imaginative works of art.

Plato focused on the development of rational, reasoned thought. He argued that through reason one could gain "secure knowledge" about what was real and true about the world. From his perspective, imagination was subordinated to reason and *should* not move beyond mimicry, imitation and reproduction. Plato viewed poets as being potentially disruptive of a republic that should be run on rational grounds, and imagination as a form of deviance. For the most part, Plato believed that a work of art could at best be a copy of "the original creative acts of the gods", but could not move towards abstract ideas and provide a pathway to discovering truth (Egan, 1992: 14). From this perspective, the creation of an image is by definition an imitation and by implication the artist is false and deceptive. The exception to this, Plato acknowledged, were visionary images delivered to the chosen few by God (Kearney, 1988: 90).

At first glance, from a twenty-first-century perspective, this may seem like an unreasonable claim. However, like all other ideas, Plato's arguments need to be situated in the context of his broader metaphysical worldview and his world. Plato created a metaphysical hierarchy for human existence, that of *being* and *becoming*. As the names suggest, *being* was associated with goodness and access to divine

reason, considered the highest form of existence, while *becoming* was situated at the bottom of the hierarchy and was considered tainted by engagement with the material world, and a possible source of evil. It is also associated with the vagueness of *opinion* rather than the firmness of knowledge. Within this hierarchy it is clear that "reason alone has access to the divine ideas. And imagination for its part is condemned to a pseudo-world of imitations" (Kearney, 1988: 88). In tandem with the hierarchy of being, Plato uses the analogy of *the divided line*, which situates reason at the top and imagination at the bottom (Kearney, 1988). In terms of the overall trajectory of this chapter, it is here that we see the beginnings of the binary between imagination and reason, which would be synthesised only after the lapse of many centuries. Indeed, it is debateable whether such a synthesis has ever been fully integrated into Western intellectual thought.

A fundamental aspect of Plato's ideas was his religious commitment to God as a supreme being and an underlying anxiety that imagination and images could undermine human faith and God's supremacy. For example, he was concerned that the production of mimetic images could result in idolatry. But his concern goes beyond idolatry to a greater concern that humankind was overstepping its own limits by creating images, and in the process thinking itself capable of doing God's work (Kearney, 1988: 88). What emerges from this discussion is an indication of the extent to which religious faith constrained and stifled the development of intellectual thought. This was to be the case until the Enlightenment, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In *The Republic*, Plato uses the very images he critiques to mount an argument for the expulsion of the artist from the polis. He develops his elaborate cave metaphor to reinforce the binary between imagination and reason. Those inside the cave live inside a twilight zone, a world of shadows which represent ignorance. They are trapped in a world of man-made images and shadows of objects which are cast on the cave wall. In contrast, the world of light outside represents "the transcendental

realm of spiritual being", reason and goodness (Kearney, 1988: 91). Reason is thus the only route to truth and spiritual transcendence. Those who choose to linger in the shadows are doomed to a life of illusion and spiritual deprivation. The Platonic project sets about forcing people who are trapped in the "twilight zone" away from the shadows and towards the sunlight.

Plato also develops his critique of the mimetic imagination further by outlining four major objections, some of which have been touched upon. *Three* criticisms of the artistic imagination pertain to ignorance, irrationality and idolatry. Firstly, the artist is accused of ignorance because his work is not based on substantial knowledge of his subject. In addition, his work is at a third remove from reality – he simply imitates what has been made by God and the craftsman in the first place. Secondly, the artistic imagination is also accused of irrationality because it appeals to the baser human instincts such as erotic and animal desires. It dilutes reason and sound judgement, generating conflict, instability and contradiction in the human psyche (Kearney, 1988: 91–94). Such feelings need to be kept under control.

Plato's third criticism, regarding idolatry, has already been addressed. However, what I would like to focus on is the fourth criticism pertaining to *didacticism*, as this idea is directly related to this specific research project. Plato argues that the work of the imagination is non-didactic. In other words, it does not have educational benefits and cannot make a really useful contribution to the public sphere (the polis). At best, it can only produce appearances. There is a fundamental emptiness beneath the shimmering, magical surface of imaginative works. He argues that the imagination can serve as a mediator between sensible experience and the rational mind but must be used as a means to an end, not an end in itself (Kearney, 1988: 100). In other words, it can be used as a pedagogical tool but not anything more significant, remaining "within the confines of private fantasy" (Kearney, 1988: 93). The private and the personal are clearly regarded by Plato as falling outside the parameters of the search for knowledge and truth. This includes affect and opinions.

These debates were clearly constrained by the prevailing social conditions in which they were produced and are interesting examples of how new knowledge can be stillborn when prevailing circumstances are not conducive. Even more striking is how difficult it is to think outside the dominant paradigms of each historical moment. Aristotle took a significant leap forward in this regard.

Aristotle disagreed with Plato that the artistic imagination simply *reproduces* copies of objects or experiences in the world. Instead, he argued that the artist tries to *represent* aspects of human experience in order to highlight through the particular image a more general truth about society, what he termed the "representation of universals" (Aristotle, cited in Cocking, 1991: 21). Aristotle regarded imagination as an aspect of intellectual activity, and mental images as the link between our *sensations* of the world and our reason. Cocking explains that imagination was regarded as "a faculty which translated sense impressions received from the outside world into mental images" (1991: viii) from Aristotle until Kant. The focus was clearly on its receptive powers, rather than its productive powers, its role as messenger between sensation and reasons (Cocking, 1991: viii) rather than initiator. Although Aristotle took the concept of imagination further than Plato, moving the focus from reproduction to *representation*, he still ultimately regarded imagination as occupying a lower level of intellectual activity than rational thought or reason.

Furthermore, Aristotle considered imagination in its most productive and creative form (fantasies, dreams and hallucinations, for example) to be at best misleading, at worst dangerous. Here he concurred with Plato that there were ethical problems with *phantasia* (the Greek word for imagination) and that it could lead to good or bad deeds, while the dominance of reasons would underpin "the good life" (Cocking, 1991: 25). These ideas, in turn, were underpinned by the Socratic precept that 'knowledge is virtue'. Thus it was, according to Aristotle, important to keep *phantasia* or imagination in its place. It must be noted here that the term *phantasia* has its own history and does not translate into the equivalent of the modern

meaning of imagination. It refers to 'appearances' and 'how things appear' – by definition suggesting that imagined things are removed from truth.

Finally, Aristotle's work had significant implications for those who were later to take up the cudgels of poetry and to defend its position in Western intellectual history, culminating in Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*. This will be explored in detail in the section on the Romantic poets. However, it is interesting to note in this brief philosophical overview the extent to which poetry and the notion of the poetic imagination became a vehicle for broader debates about the imagination (Cocking, 1991: xi–xii).

As has been shown in the discussion so far, one of the main limitations of philosophical thought on imagination is the way it has been tied to imagery and image formation. This fixation on images prevented philosophers from exploring a broader more synthesised understanding of imagination in relation to the functioning of the mind (White, 1990: 6). The problem with this focus on images was that philosophers restricted their conceptualisations of the imaginative process to sensory imagination that produced "weakened originals or copies of the original" (White, 1990: 4).

During the Middle Ages there were no significant shifts in conceptions of imagination from those developed by the Ancient Greeks and Hebrews. Rather, there was a continuation of similar themes with a higher level of concern expressed by the church that imagination could pose a threat to spiritual life and God's supreme power (and by implication the dominance of the church). Interestingly, though, on the ground and in popular culture the imagination was celebrated through witchcraft, folklore, and occultism (Egan, 1992: 17).

2.2 The Enlightenment imagination: From mirrors to lamps

The development of the Enlightenment, spanning the seventeenth and eighteenth century, signalled a loosening of the church's control over thought and thus presented fresh opportunities to reignite the debate about imagination. However, it would take some time before significant shifts happened.

Descartes (1596–1650) reasserted the importance of the rational and analytic mind. He had a limited view of imagination as peripheral to the essence of humankind, and a potential obstacle to rational thought and sound judgement (Egan, 1992: 18–10). Rather than perceiving it to be the originator of new ideas, he associated imagination with image formation, and as such incapable of generating understanding beyond a very limited range (White, 1990: 20). This period saw the beginnings of modern scientific inquiry and aggressive rationalism. Through this lens, anything that was not scientifically proven could not be taken seriously. This aggressive rationalism also needs to be seen in the context of the historical moment, possibly as a backlash against the dominance of the church and religious thought. However, Descartes also introduced another significant facet to philosophical thought – the notion of human subjectivity as the source of meaning rather than "the objective world of reality or transcendent being" (Kearney, 1988: 161–163). He thus asserted the centrality of human subjectivity, an idea that was to be taken up and radically transformed by Kant.

Critics of rationalism began to find a voice and develop alternative ideas about imagination. The mirror slowly became a lamp (Abrams, 1953). According to Cocking (1991), the eighteenth century was a turning point in the history of Western aesthetics. Abrams (1953) explained this shift effectively through the use of two metaphors of the mind. He argued that prior to the eighteenth century the mind was seen as a mirror that simply reflected reality. This was replaced during the eighteenth century by a view of the mind as a lamp that radiates its own inner light

onto the object it perceives. The metaphor also allows for individual and personal interpretations of experiences and ideas.

This seismic shift from the image of the human mind as mirror to lamp heralded the beginning of *humanism* as a dominant paradigm. It differed from the Christian humanism of the Renaissance period by placing humankind squarely at the centre of the universe. Central aspects of humanist thought included the notion of the autonomous subject having agency, a belief in the inevitability of historical progress (history as a series of 'grand narratives'), an idealised notion of humankind as a 'free and sovereign artificer' determining its own identity without consideration of social constraints (Kearney, 1988: 360). Humanism embraced the notion of the imagination as a source of totally original ideas, one that could create "anti-worlds out of its own solitary subjectivity" (Soper cited in Kearney, 1988: 387). Humanism also embraced the notion of universal truths. Its paradigmatic reign continued until the mid-twentieth century, when it was thoroughly dismantled by postmodern philosophers such as Foucault and Derrida. This will be explored in more detail in the section on the postmodern imagination.

In the second half of the Enlightenment new ideas began to reverberate through the work of Burke, Hume and Kant. Of these three philosophers Kant's contribution remains the most significant. Kant and the German idealists brought about important new conceptualisations of imagination as central to human understanding. Building on the work of Burke (1967) and Hume (1888), Kant (1933) argued that the possibility of knowledge depends on the synthesising power of the imagination. He attributed to the imagination the capacity to order and classify our experiences, at some *unconscious* level, according to rules existing in the mind independently of the external world. This early interest in the unconscious workings of the mind can possibly be seen as a precursor to Freud and Jung. Certainly, a distinction between the conscious and unconscious mind was implicit in Kant's work, and was later developed by Schelling and Schiller.

Kant's new conception of imagination focused attention on the internal workings of the mind, which were considered as sublime as anything that one might contemplate (Warnock, 1976: 63). Related to this move inwards, Kant and Hume both noted the affective and emotional component of imagination and the process of imagining.

The major shift brought about by Kant was the belief that "imagination is no longer simply a 'reproductive' faculty which forms images from pre-existing phenomena but a productive or creative power which autonomously frames and constructs its own images of reality" (Cocking, 1991: viii). Kant argues that:

> We could never find them in appearances, had we not ourselves, or the nature of our minds, originally set them there. (1933: 147)

He accords the mind its own initiative and agency, moving the focus of imagination from passive recipient to active initiator of ideas. The imagination is no longer simply a processing and organising device, creating coherent images out of incoherent perceptions. Rather "what we can perceive and know, is predetermined by our imagination" (Egan, 1992: 21). It facilitates knowledge acquisition and meaning-making. Imagination was now seen as emanating from the internal workings of the human mind, in sharp contrast notion to the classical notion that imagination emerged from a source external to humankind – i.e. a model of the soul in dialogue with itself which ultimately originates from God. However, although Kant and Hume reconceptualised imagination as a central aspect of the human mind they still regarded it as a separate faculty.

These ideas were challenged by the Romantic poets and it is to their groundbreaking ideas that I now turn. Conceptually, most philosophical texts on imagination incorporate the Romantics at length. In fact, in many respects they were way ahead of earlier philosophers in the scope of their ideas and their willingness to enter the domain of the personal and affective unreservedly.

2.3 Imagination and the Romantic poets

> Reason is to the imagination ... as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance (Shelley, 1821)
>
> Poetry is reason in its most exalted form (Wordsworth, 1805)

With these two statements, Shelley and Wordsworth – two of the leading English Romantic poets – begin a radical reconceptualisation of imagination, poetry and the imagination's relationship to reason. From this moment on they mounted a major challenge to many of the ideas that preceded them. Furst sums up this paradigmatic shift as follows:

> In abandoning the certainties of Rationalism, Romanticism threw the doors wide open to searching of every kind, in aesthetics, in metaphysics, in religion, in politics and social sciences as well as literary expression. It is a movement that begs questions, questions that are often without answers. (1969: 58)

In her book *Romanticism*, Furst (1969: 36–38) argues that although Romanticism was a movement that lacked coherence, the most powerful defining feature of Romanticism was its evaluation of imagination, and its focus on a new way of seeing – through "the eye of the imagination" (37). The quest for finding "the ideal in the real" (49) was central to Romantic work, and symbolism became an important technique for making this possible (50).

Hence, Furst concludes that it is appropriate to refer to Romanticism as a revolution, despite its slow development during the eighteenth century. Until the late eighteenth century, pre-Romantic ideas had been slowly bubbling their way to the surface but the Romantic poets burst onto the philosophical and literary stage, declaring their ideas with passion, conviction and quasi-religious zeal. Imagination and poetry, the penultimate expression of imagination, was now the path to the sublime, the good, the beautiful and the ideal. In the discussion that follows, I focus

on Shelley's ideas articulated in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), as the power of imagination is one of the central themes of the text (Furst, 1969: 38).

Shelley gives new meaning to the phrase 'waxing lyrical' in *A Defence of Poetry*. It is lyrical and poetic as well as polemical. He enacts many of the ideas that he proposes through his poetic use of language and particularly his use of vivid metaphors. He writes of the powerful impact of skilled writers on the reader:

> It is impossible to read the compositions of the most celebrated writers of the present day without being startled with the electric life which burns within their words. (1821: 53)

This image stayed with me as I reread his words, still leaping to life three hundred years after he wrote them. At times, though, his claims are totally overblown and contradictory. His conviction seems to stem partially from his belief and intuition rather than a carefully scaffolded argument.

It is not surprising that Shelley begins his essay with a discussion of reason and imagination, given the long philosophical history of the subordination of imagination to reason. Shelley intends to collapse this binary and show how reason and imagination are two different but interrelated modes of mental action – different sides of the same coin. He argues that reason is relational – the mind's contemplation and analysis of the relations between one thought and another – while imagination is about the "mind acting upon those thoughts" (1821: 9), making sense of the thoughts through interpretation and perceptions, and generating other thoughts in the process. Imagination is thus portrayed as the engine of thought. He concludes that reason and imagination are inseparable but at the same time he accords imagination the more spiritual, sublime dimensions. Reason seems to be associated with the outer world, outer layers of meaning, while imagination is the internal world once the surface layers have been peeled away. He has thus reversed the neo-classical order of things: imagination, and not reason, is now the magic

pathway to the spiritual and the good. Reason has been thrown off its pedestal. He continues to develop his conceptualisation of imagination throughout the essay.

Shelley regards perceptions and the process of perceiving as central to imagination and the imaginative process, unlike Sartre, who later made a clear distinction between perceiving and imagining. Shelley claims that poets understand the relationship between existence and perception, and between perception and expression. The poet is able to see deeply, beneath the surfaces and beyond appearances, and turn these insights and perceptions into works of art (1821: 13).

However, it is in Shelley's discussion of the role of the poet and poetry in society where his conceptualisation of imagination is developed most fully. This makes sense when one considers that Shelley regarded poetry and imagination as having a symbiotic relationship: poetry, he argued, is made possible by the imagination and at the same time the process of writing poetry enlarges the breadth of the imagination (22). He also implies that the imagination of readers is enlarged by their engagement with poetry, hence the educational value of poetry and the poet. Thus the comments he makes about poetry and poets are fully applicable to imagination.

Shelley believed that poets had an elevated role in society, in terms of both prophetic and legislating functions. Because the poet's insights are so profound, and because he is able to partially apprehend the invisible, he has a significant educational role in society. He is teacher as well as lawmaker, artist and prophet. He can thus identify gaps and absences as well as illuminate the intensity and inner life of what is present (13). The poet's insights thus enrich the present and point to the future.

These ideas embody some interesting commonalities and points of difference with Sartre, who will be discussed in more detail in section 1.4. Shelley's interest in the poetic imagination's capacity to create poetry out of absence resonates with Sartre's idea of the freeing of consciousness to create from scratch. However, Shelley also

views the transformation of the ordinary into something sublime and beautiful as a key role of the imagination. His notion of the imagination is thus more inclusive and synthetic than that of Sartre.

Shelley's notion of the prophetic aspect of poets introduces another of his key ideas: universality and infinity. This is where some of his ideas become particularly contradictory as well as overly idealistic. He argues that poetry is universal, containing 'eternal truths' that endure across time in ways that prose narratives do not. On the one hand he claims that the minds of poets are shaped by their societies:

> ... and the pleasure resulting from the manner in which they express the influence of society or nature upon their own minds, communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from the community. (12)

On the other hand, and with far more conviction and reiteration, he argues that poetry endures across time and place precisely because poets write beyond the specifics of time and place. In this comment, he makes a strong case against the inclusion of a moral or political dimension. He concludes that:

> A poet therefore would do ill to embody his own conception of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations, which participate in neither. (22)

From a twenty-first-century perspective, and from my own socio-cultural perspective on imagination, he is asking for the impossible. It is impossible to be beyond time and place. At best one may be slightly ahead of one's time, able to find cracks and spaces in the dominant ideology. From an ethical perspective, Shelley's ideas collapse into a bundle of further contradictions. He makes claims about the ethical and moral value of poetry. Some of these ideas resonate momentarily with elements of postmodern ethics (Levinas, 1969; Kearney, 1988) but then sharply diverge onto their own idealistic, contradictory route. He claims that the morality of poetry is about love, empathy and going beyond the self. In order to be a moral human being,

one must imagine intensely and comprehensively (21). Shelley elaborates on the importance of empathy as a key ingredient for goodness:

> He must put himself in the place of *another* and of many *others*; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. (21-22)

He is stating explicitly that poetry is the vehicle of the imagination and it is through poetry that morality is articulated. Yet the poet writes at a distance from the immediacy of time and place. He should not take up moral issues explicitly. But in his notion of imagining beyond the self, he is picking up concerns later taken up by Levinas (albeit from a totally different paradigm) and Vygotsky, as will be shown in Chapter Three.

Shelley's socially decontextualised theory also becomes apparent in his conceptualisation of the poet as solitary genius. The following quotation illustrates this idea in illuminating ways:

> A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet song. (19)

Here the poet is portrayed as writing in isolation for himself. It is a very individualistic notion of the writer. In the same vein, the inspiration to write comes from within, and Shelley describes this process as having deep spiritual dimensions. He declares that:

> Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. ... for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconsistent wind, awakens to transitory brightness ... but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to

> the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet. (46)

The moment of inward inspiration, likened to the moment of conception, is the most powerful one. By the time the poet starts composing, inspiration is on the decline and the final product is no more than "a feeble shadow" of the flash of inspiration, of what it could have been if the "transitory brightness" could have sustained itself. This image certainly provides an interesting contrast to Plato's notion of imaginative work as the bastard child handed over to foster parents. There is also an implication of an unconscious process at work – that poetic inspiration cannot be summoned at will. Instead one has to wait for a visit from the muse. Here Shelley cites Milton's comment that the muse 'dictated' "Paradise Lost" to him (47).

The writing process is thus rendered totally mysterious, as the most significant part of the process cannot be explained. Implicit in this ethereal description is Shelley's belief in the superiority of poets as the selected few who experience 'visitations of thought and feeling', associated with alternatively the internal and external world, always arriving unexpectedly and leaving at will. The notion of 'visitations' has distinct religious connotations, elevating the poetic experience to a religious and spiritual plane. Shelley's (and other Romantics') mystification of the writing process endured for a long time and still surfaces in the popular imagination. However, it is ultimately a highly problematic and elitist notion of writing, which is not helpful in an educational context. More importantly, it does not take into account the cognitively generative nature of writing, and the way ideas take shape as one writes. It contradicts another idea expressed by Shelley elsewhere in his essay, where he comments that the process of writing poetry enlarges the breadth of the imagination (22). Shelley shows how the process of creating poetry creates "a being within our being" (49), by enabling one to transform the ordinary and mundane into something wonderful and unfamiliar. He elaborates on these ideas as follows:

> Its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its form. ... It purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of being. (49)

Here he is suggesting that the imagination works magically on our mind and our inner being, which suggests that one is reshaping the self, affectively and cognitively, through writing. The imagination returns us to a childlike state where each encounter with the world is novel and revealing. This view is in sync with the broader Romantic notion of childhood as a time of intense responsiveness and vision.

Dooley expands on the Romantic view of childlike states:

> The term "childlike" comes into the language in the short-lived Romantic attempt to preserve and validate certain kinds of imaginative ways of seeing and knowing that they perceived as central to making art (1990: 247).

In identifying these contradictions, I am arguing that Shelley's legacy to educational views of writing is ambivalent and contradictory. On the one hand there is the mystifying, elitist view of writing and inspiration. On the other hand, the seeds of expressive writing are evident in Shelley's work. During the neo-classical period, writing, like other artistic endeavours, was expected to follow the 'laws' of aesthetics. There was a 'recipe mentality' about writing: if the rules of writing were followed, a correct and necessarily good composition would be guaranteed (Furst, 1969: 16). The Romantics dismantled this set of expectations, and instead viewed writing as an intensely personal, individual and emotional quest for meaning. The notion of subjective transformation was central to this new idea of writing on two levels: transforming ordinary experiences and objects into poetry, which in turn became vehicles for reflection and new insights, transforming the self in the process. Nature was no longer in the background of the poetic process but became a deep

source of inspiration and a vehicle for the expression of moods and feelings. Writing thus began to take centre stage in the domain of the personal. Many of these ideas shaped the notion of expressive writing, which became a significant part of the English curriculum in the 1970s (e.g. Britton, 1970).

In exploring the educational legacy of Romanticism, Willinsky (1990: 1) discusses the process of "intellectual transfer" of various elements of Romanticism to educational thinking and practice. He argues that Romanticism provided a vision and discourse that has contributed indirectly to the creation of major educational alternatives to mainstream schooling. Dooley's essay in this collection focuses on the implications of Romanticism and women's writing for contemporary writing pedagogy. Egan (1992) also draws on Romanticism in the conceptualisation of an imaginative education curriculum in fairly similar ways to Dooley but with a cross-curricular focus. The impact of Romantic notions of imagination on teachers' thinking and practice will become evident in Chapters Five (2.3) and Seven (1.2)

Romanticism burned brightly in the early nineteenth century but by 1830 it had began to burn out. Kearney argues that its idealistic, extravagant claims for humankind's creative powers were unsustainable. The unrelenting rise of monopoly capitalism and its accompanying industrialisation and mechanisation of society led to an erosion of the humanist hopes of both the Enlightenment and Romanticism.

Kearney concludes that "Imagination soon found itself, like Napoleon after Moscow, beating a reluctant retreat" (1988: 185). However, some ideas may be sidelined by the endless fashion parade of ideas, but refuse to die. I have shown that Romanticism still has an impact on education and the English curriculum. In addition, Furst argues that Romanticism "has been far-reaching in its significance", triggering a "re-orientation in aesthetics" and inspiring a renewed interest in creative writing (1969: 65).

2.4 Imagination in the modern period

Modern philosophers continued to build on Romantic notions of imagination. Sartre, Wittgenstein, and Ryle challenged the idea that the imagination is a separate faculty or part of the mind that needs to be explored but rather viewed it as an integral part of intellectual functioning. Egan sums up the position of Sartre and his contemporary I. A. Richards:

> Both Sartre and Richards agree, however, that we will not get a clear grasp on the powers of the imagination if we focus on a part of the mind's functioning; rather imagination is understood better as a way in which the mind functions when actively involved in meaning-making, in its generative mode. (1992: 29)

Modern philosophers have also questioned the connection between imagining something and "seeing" a mental image, and have attempted to move the debate about imagination to a more metaphoric level so that the notion of 'seeing' an image can be read in broader terms. Warnock suggests that although there is still a tendency to fall back on the notion of mental images in modern philosophical discussions, this is not as problematic as it seems. She comments:

> It seems to me in fact that such vocabulary is steadily becoming more innocuous as we more and more clearly recognise it as metaphorical. (Warnock, 1976: 196)

Sartre's insistence on differentiating between perceptions and imagination provides insights into his view on imagination, and his focus on absence and detachment as a necessary condition for imagining. He argues that perception 'receives' its objects while imagination generates them. Imagination is thus associated with objects that are non-existent or unreal while perception entails contact with the real in the world. To imagine something is to invoke objects as if they are present, while being aware that they are not. From this perspective, imagination is a more intuitive process than perceiving.

Taking this idea further, Sartre argues that the ability to imagine entails the ability to *detach* ourselves from our actual situation, to envisage situations which are non-actual. Sartre provides the example of a spectator looking at a painting. The painting is a mental analogue of the artist's vision but it will be appreciated and viewed as an analogue of something other than itself, depending on who the spectator is. Both the artist and the spectator detach themselves from the world to think of certain objects as signifying something other than what is most immediate and obvious (the artist does this while constructing the painting, the spectator while looking at the painting and trying to make sense of it). He gives the specific example of a person looking at a portrait. The subject of the portrait is not present but our imagination enables us to feel as if that person exists and is looking back at us from the canvas (Warnock, 1976: 196–197).

Sartre argued that imagination has the capacity to create conditions of possibility for intellectual freedom and autonomy. Also implicit in his view on imagination is the notion of human agency, freedom over and beyond the constraints of time and space. He declared that the imagination's capacity to intentionally make its own meaning is crucial. He spelt out the implications of this freedom for human consciousness in the following way:

> Imagination is not an empirical and superadded power of consciousness, it is the whole of consciousness as it realises its freedom. (Sartre, 1972: 270)

Sartre's conceptualisation of the imagination as generating totally new ideas free from societal constraints is liberating and inspiring to some extent. By this I mean that he has liberated the concept of imagination from the narrowness of the philosophical tradition and the notion itself is liberating for humankind. But, rather ironically, in other ways, by being so absolute about the idea of creating something out of nothing he has narrowed down other imaginative possibilities as well.

While imagination can entail creating something out of nothing, one can also transform something mundane into an extraordinary thought or image through combinatorial imaginative work. This is an idea explored by Shelley and which Vygotsky develops at length. I would argue that this is an important aspect of the freedom of consciousness.

While the notion of transcendental consciousness and humanism began with Kant, Sartre's work marked its endpoint. Towards the end of his career, the postmodernists were waiting in the wings, about to rupture ideas of the autonomous subject and the related notion of the productive imagination. Kearney concludes:

> The Sartrean project would be dismissed as man's last gasp, the defiant death-rattle of the anthropological era. Viewed from the postmodern perspective, the demise of imagination would be deemed inseparable from the demise of man. And neither would be regretted. (1988: 248)

It is to these ideas that I now turn. Although postmodernism is a broad church and by its very nature it is hard to pin down, the leading thinkers are Lacan, Althusser, Foucault, Barthes and Derrida. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss each philosopher's take on imagination in specific ways. Instead, I provide an overview of the crux of postmodernism as a springboard for a more detailed discussion of the ethical imagination.

2.5 Postmodernist views on the imagination: Through the looking glass

> After the holocaust of the second world war, Adorno asked who can write poetry. After deconstruction, we may well ask, who can write philosophy? (Kearney, 1988: 295)

The postmodern notion of the imagination's demise needs to be seen in the context of the movement's broader rejection of humanism and its central underpinnings. The notion of individualism and the autonomous subject was savagely attacked and replaced with a notion of the decentred subject. Identity is no longer seen as coherent and unified, but rather as fluid and fragmented. The humanist notion of individual subjectivity was superseded by notions of the socially shaped self, determined to a large extent by external forces such as gender, class and race (though the extent of determinism varies across different theorists). Thus humankind is no longer seen as being at the centre of meaning-making and in charge of its own individual destiny. In the same vein, knowledge is no longer fixed and stable. Truth becomes a relative concept. This in turn suggests that history is not linear; it is not necessarily a narrative of progress. Instead, it is a narrative of false starts and repetition. After the horrors of World War II (and the subsequent horrors of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries), it is impossible to hold onto the notions of inevitable progress.

Postmodernists challenged the concept of origin, debunking any notion of the human imagination as a source of original creation of meaning. Instead, meaning is deconstructed into an endless play of linguistic signs, which relate to each other in a parodic circle. Language no longer refers to some 'real' meaning external to language. Language simply refers to itself and generates an endless cycle of mimesis and parody (Kearney, 1988: 252–253). In terms of images, we have seen the move from the imagination as mirror (imagination beyond the self) to lamp (humanist notion of imagination within the self). Kearney describes the central metaphor of postmodernism as the looking glass.

The postmodern paradigm is typified by the metaphor of the looking glass – or to be more precise, of an interplay between multiple looking glasses which reflect each other interminably. The postmodern paradigm is, in other words, that of a labyrinth of mirrors which extend infinitely in all directions – a labyrinth where the image of the self (as a presence to itself) dissolves into self-parody (253).

This metaphor brilliantly sums up the meaning of points of origin – or rather the absence of points of origin. The multiple looking glasses throw back an endless series of repeated images and the originating image is lost. Instead the viewer is swamped by the experience of looking, in the same way that we are swamped and saturated in the twenty-first century with "pseudo–images", which become "more real than reality" (Kearney, 1988: 252). The looking-glass metaphor conjures up an image of a sterile and alienating postmodern world, a void with flashing neon lighting. There is none of the warmth and comfort of the lamp, nor the individualism and sense of solitude.

While at first glance postmodernism seems to return to the classical notion of mimesis, further investigation reveals major differences. Postmodernists are no longer concerned with the imitation of pre-existing truths. Instead they argue that there is only imitation of imitation. The copy does not refer to a prior truth. It is simply "a copy with no reference to anything other than a pseudo-world of copies" (Kearney, 1988: 245).

In keeping with the notion of multiple truths and shifting ideas, there are also many different versions of postmodernism, some versions tending towards overdeterminism and others which generate new possibilities and "room to manoeuvre" (Chambers, 1990) within broader societal constraints.

Rorty (1989) offers a valuable alternative perspective on postmodernism that allows one to capitalise on the imaginative and disruptive capacity of language. He highlights the disruptive power of imaginative discourse, which in turn can generate

new forms of thought. Rorty argues that we are not trapped in a prison house of language and story. Rather, language can generate opportunities to combine ideas creatively with ethical possibilities. In particular, the process of storytelling opens up possibilities for a renewed sense of agency.

Debates about agency have important implications for conceptualisations of the imagination. Both Sartre (1972) and Vygotsky (1987) make explicit connections between imagination and freedom of action and thought, albeit from different perspectives (i.e. the former from philosophical perspectives and the latter from developmental psychology perspectives). The human *subject* in Foucault's earlier work is subjected to the play of power, like an insect caught in a convoluted spider web (Schaafsma, 1998). By implication, the imagination is entrapped in the web of power and dominant discourses. However, in Foucault's later work (1980), he acknowledges that "the human capacity for resistance to domination and the capacity for *self-creation* are possible, although there are social and political limits to the exercise of these capacities" (Schaafsma, 1998: 257). Certainly, his acknowledgement of "limited self-creation" could suggest possibilities for rehabilitating the imagination project.

The fluid reconceptualisation of the self with a measure of agency opens up new possibilities for selfhood, and for relationships with the 'other'. The fluidity can prise open a space and facilitate imagining beyond the self and beyond one's own world. There are opportunities for renewed work with imagination in this conceptualisation, but with a reconfigured understanding of imagination that moves beyond the limitations of humanism.

2.6. The ethical imagination

While Kearney (1988) acknowledges the need to dismantle the more naive aspects of the humanist notion of imagination, he points out the danger of the postmodern obsession with the demise of imagination and raises a key question in this regard:

> If all that remains is active nihilism, "can such a programme of lucid disruption and disillusionment really serve as a *guideline for meaningful thought or action*?"(360)

This key question will guide the discussion that follows and I will draw on Kearney (1988), and Levinas (1969) to answer this. If the human imagination is devoid of ethics and creativity, what do we have left? What is the purpose of existing in a void?

Kearney argues that there is a need for a reconceptualised postmodern conceptualisation of imagination that draws on the strengths of the postmodern critiques of humanism but moves beyond its nihilism and endless pessimism. The limits of deconstruction need to be recognised and acted upon. In particular the notion of the ethical imagination needs to be reinstated. This is not the same as reinstating a moral imagination which has echoes of humanist individualist thought and notion of absolute truth. Rather it is about the relationship between self and other and the capacity to respond to the Other 'face to face' (Levinas, 1969), realising that "beyond the mask there is a face" (Kearney, 361). This notion of ethics suggests a personal and social responsibility to others. There are moments in everyone's lifetime where one is obliged to make an ethical decision to take a stand.

> Here I stand
>
> Here we stand (Kearney, 1988: 361)

It is that moment when the faceless parade of suffering to which we are frequently desensitised comes into sharp focus, becoming a particular person – a real human being – who has hopes and dreams, loved ones, a life to be lived. It is the moment of reading the front page of *The Citizen* (18 May 2008*)* and seeing a photograph of the

last moments of a Mozambican refugee, Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuave, burned to death by a mob raging with xenophobia – themselves victims of poverty. He is tied to his blanket and burned. My reaction is not the usual anaesthetisation. I feel that I know this man, that I could imagine his last hours, clinging to his blanket, the last remnants of comfort, of home. But his object of comfort becomes an aid to his killers. I know this man. He could be Nhamo – the Zimbabwean teacher who participated in my research project. He could be one of my foreign students. He could be anyone. *Beyond the mask there is a face.* I phone Nhamo to find out if he is okay. He says he's okay: he lives in a gated, guarded townhouse complex beyond the reaches of the 'raging mob'.

But is that moment of connection, of empathy, of solidarity sufficient? Is it a call to action? What does the ethical imagination really mean? Or rather how do we make it meaningful? It is probably composed of a continuum of responses from the affective and attitudinal to very direct action. One wonders if all of these responses would be considered credible aspects of the ethical imagination. In Chapter Eight (4.4), I explore the meaning of the ethical imagination in relation to texts produced by learners about xenophobic violence.

Kearney elaborates on Levinas's notion of the resistant ethical relation of the 'face to face':

> We do not know what the 'face' is. Its epistemological status remains undecidable; but our inability to grasp the other on our terms i.e. in our cognitive projects, does not prevent us from acknowledging, ethically, that we are being addressed here and now by another – a person with concrete needs – in and through the image of the face. (362)

Kearney is suggesting that our ethical response precedes knowledge and ontology – it is beyond being and knowing. Where then does the ethical response emanate from? I would argue that affect, empathy and emotions must play a role in

facilitating an ethical imagination. For example, it was precisely because of the strong emotional response evoked by the reporting of the xenophobic violence that thousands of ordinary people (usually apathetic) were moved to action as one human being to another, 'face to face'. In other words, the notion of the ethical imagination needs to be broadened to incorporate affect and narrative. From a narrative perspective, the ethical imagination enables us to move beyond our own individual narratives to other worlds and other narratives. At the same time empathy and emotional connectedness to others may not be sufficient without a critical lens. Kearney (1988) emphasises the importance of a critical ethical imagination that is discerning in its responses. He differentiates between our unconditional response to a holocaust victim and our response to a ruthless dictator like Hitler or Stalin (362). We need to hold onto our critical lens to ensure that our ethical purpose and empathy is not manipulated for unethical reasons.

Kearny concludes that the escape route from the limits of deconstruction towards a reconfigured ethical imagination lies in "... the face which haunts imagination: the ethical demand to imagine *otherwise*" (364). He argues that postmodern culture and media images, frequently berated for dulling our senses, can play a constructive role in expanding the human imagination and taking us beyond the limitations of our own worlds, facilitating "a relationship between the self and the other" (363).

While the discussion of the postmodern ethical imagination takes the notion of imagination further, there is still a gap. Imagination cannot only be about the soberness of ethics, even with the incorporation of affect and narrative into the conceptualisation. If that is all it is, the whole business of imagination loses its creativity, playfulness and pleasure. It also could become a space that is too self-righteous, too rigid. Kearney argues that a reconceptualised postmodern imagination must also incorporate the poetic dimension of existence. He uses the term poetic in a broad sense, to refer to the process of creative work. He makes an interesting point about the relationship between play and ethics as follows:

> The imagination, no matter how ethical, needs to play. Indeed one might say that it needs to play because it is ethical – to ensure it is ethical in a liberating way, in a way which animates and enlarges our responses to the other rather than cloistering it off in a dour moralism of resentment and recrimination. (1988: 366)

Here Kearney is reclaiming the notion of play from the deconstructionists with a view to rediscovering the poetic dimensions of our world and its capacity for broadening the imagination and its conditions of possibility. He is providing a synthesis of ethics, play and the poetic and showing how they can work symbiotically. He seems to be suggesting that the poetic imagination can facilitate the ethical imagination (and possibly not the other way around). It is through the textured meanings of poetic works, particularly narratives, that the space for the ethical imagination is enlarged. Barak Obama's victory speech (4 November 2008) is an interesting example of the synthesis of the ethical and poetical imagination. While the themes of his speech are about change and inclusion, the tone is emotional, and the style and use of language alternates between rhetorical devices and individual and collective narratives. It is this synthesis that made it such a powerful speech.

Kearney sums up the possibilities of poetics as follows:

> Poetics is the carnival of possibilities where everything is permitted, nothing censored. It is the willingness to imagine oneself in the other person's skin, to see things *as if* one were, momentarily at least, another, to experience how the other half lives. (1988: 368–369)

In his synthesis of ethics and poetics, Kearney – to some extent – provides an answer to the dilemma of the postmodern imagination. However, as I pointed out earlier, the self and affect are not sufficiently interwoven into his proposal. In order to have a changed relation with the other, one needs to work on and rework the self. Surely there is scope for 're-imagining the self' that happens on its own terms, not

necessarily as a precursor to imagining the other but as an end in itself, without completely slipping back into a humanist conceptualisation of selfhood and imagination.

In the final four pages of his book, Kearney does begin to address this issue through a discussion of "narrative identity" as an ongoing task of imagination. The notion of "narrative identity" suggests that the self has a certain level of agency, as (re)reader and (re)writer of his/her own life. Thus the "narrative self" is engaged in revision, reinterpretation and clarification of his/her own story in the context of larger narratives (395). An account of affective processes is still lacking in this view of "narrative identity" and imagination. This is an idea that loomed large in Romanticism and will be explored in the following discussion of Vygotskian theories of the imagination.

Having traversed Plato's cave, mirrors, lamps, a looking glass and the carnival of possibilities, I now move to a discussion of education and imagination, using Vygotsky's ideas as the focal point. I discuss Vygotsky's ideas in relation to the philosophical and literary ideas that preceded and followed him. If Vygotsky is the key theorist underpinning this thesis, then it is important to trace how his ideas draw on ideas that precede him. And, equally, it is important to explore how later ideas draw on Vygotsky.

Chapter Three: Imagination and Education

In the previous chapter, I provided a historical overview of philosophical ideas about imagination, from Plato to postmodernism. In this chapter, the lens through which imagination is discussed becomes more focused and specifically related to education, writing pedagogy and imaginative writing. Where relevant, I will make connections between educational ideas on imagination and traces of specific philosophical ideas.

Lev Vygotsky is the central theorist in this work. His contribution is both philosophical and highly applicable to educational contexts. His work assists one to move from the abstraction of the philosophical works already discussed to a more specific formulation of how the imagination works to enrich, deepen and transform the internalisation of knowledge and thought. In this chapter I also draw on the work of contemporary Vygotskian theorists who have worked to synthesise, unpack and reconstruct Vygotsky's theories of imagination and creativity (Gajdamaschko, 2005; John-Steiner & Meehan, 2000; Smolucha, 1992; Lindqvist, 2003; Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008).

Finally, this chapter provides a review and synthesis of ideas about writing pedagogy and imagination, beginning with a brief overview of key trends in writing pedagogy, past and present. However, the bulk of this section consists of a focused synthesis of work on writing pedagogy and imagination, and the key elements thereof. It constitutes a theoretical framework that is applied directly to the analysis of my classroom data (Chapters Seven and Eight), alongside the contemporary work on Vygotsky.

This chapter is divided into the following sections:

1. Vygotsky's theory of imagination and creativity
2. Contemporary Vygotskian work on imagination and creativity: synthesis and reconstruction

3. Writing pedagogy and imagination

It should be noted that there is some overlap between the concepts discussed in sections two and three. For example, scaffolding and mediation are discussed in both. However, my justification for separating these two sections is that the discussion in section two deals with concepts in a general learning context, while section three moves into the specifics of research on scaffolding and imaginative writing. These two sections build on each other, moving from the general to the specific.

1. Vygotsky's theory of imagination and creativity

1.1 Vygotsky's work in context

This section focuses on the 'excavated' contribution of Vygotsky to imagination and creativity. I use the term 'excavate' to indicate that this body of work has not received much attention in the Western intellectual world. The limited attention paid to Vygotsky's work on imagination should be seen in the broader context of the selective uptake of his work in the West. In a study of Vygotsky referencing in the seventies and eighties, Valsiner (1994: 4) refers to the two-book formats publication: *Thought and Language* (1962) and *Mind in Society* (1978). The two-book format meant that his work was frequently understood in simplistic ways and that some of his central concepts (such as internalisation and the zone of proximal development) were crudely applied. I mention this upfront, as a nuanced analysis of these concepts will be necessary to unpack his theory of imagination and creativity.

Although Vygotsky's context was early twentieth-century Russia (1896–1934), it would be a mistake to assume that he drew exclusively on Soviet philosophical, educational, literary and psychological works. He read widely across diverse fields and geographical borders. He was significantly influenced by the philosophical visions of Marx and Engels and their antecedents (Hegel, Spinoza, and Feurbach). Specifically in his work on imagination there are traces of Romanticism and the philosophical

debates that preceded him, particularly the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant and Dewey. He challenges the classicist notion of the reproductive imagination, he locates imagination in the centre of intellectual human development, and he represents imaginative work as the product of a dynamic dialectic between the individual and the social, foregrounding the "exceedingly rich emotional aspects" (1987: 347) of imaginative activity. Vygotsky talks back to the philosophical tradition of associating imagination with "visual, imagistic and concrete activity", arguing that elements of abstract thinking are always present in imaginative activity (1994: 274). However, he makes few direct references to any of the abovementioned philosophers. He draws directly on the work of Ribot (1901), Buhler (1933) and Blonskii (1964). While he acknowledges Piaget's contribution to developmental psychology, he critiques his narrow 'primal' conceptualisation of the imagination.

One of Vygotsky's strengths as a scholar was his capacity to synthesise diverse, even oppositional, ideas and traditions. He created new ideas through a process of "dialectical synthesis" (Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991: 390). It is therefore not surprising that at times his work contains contradictory strands and traditions. Wertsch argues that Vygotsky's work embodies traces of Romanticism and rationalism (2000: 22, 25). Rather than seeing this as a problem, Wertsch argues that the co-existence of these contradictory strands reflects the "intellectual heritage of two grand traditions in the history of philosophy that provide the intellectual context in which he, as well as the rest of us, live in the 21st century" (25). The translation of Vygotsky's work from Russian into English is another consideration to bear in mind when reading his work. His work was originally published in Russian in the 1920s and 1930s, and translated into English from the 1960s to the present time. At times it is unclear whether he has shifted position on a particular issue or whether seemingly contradictory stances from one article to another are the result of different translations.

1.2 Vygotsky's conceptualisation of imagination

Vygotsky's work provides a very valuable lens for understanding the nature of imagination, the relationship between imagination, affect and higher-level thought, and the relationship between imagination and reality. Interestingly, Vygotsky uses the terms imagination and fantasy interchangeably.

Vygotsky (2004) argues that imagination is the basis of all creative activity and is central to the production of new ideas and inventions in all areas of cultural life. He views imagination as being closely connected to human intellectual development and higher-level thinking as well as emotional development. Thus from the start Vygotsky presents imagination as a mental function that synthesises cognition and affect.

Vygotsky reinforces the connection between imagination and abstract thought by drawing on studies of patients who suffer from aphasia. Through these studies he illustrates how humans behave when the capacity for speech and conceptual thinking is damaged. He concludes that the aphasics in his study could not think or imagine outside the confines of concrete reality (1994: 269). In contrast, the capacity for conceptual thought is closely related to "freedom and purposefulness of action" (2004: 269). Hence, Vygotsky draws strong connections between conceptual thinking, imagination and freedom.

Vygotsky differentiates between two types of human activities that have significant implications for human survival as well as education. The first type of activity is reproductive, closely linked to memory. Such actions do not create anything new but are based on the repetition of something that already exists. The second type of activity is creative or combinatorial. This entails the creation of new images or action, the creative reworking of past experiences to generate new ideas and behaviours. Vygotsky argues that this capacity for creative reworking is essential for human adaptation to change and new experiences.

In his 1994 article on adolescent imagination, Vygotsky places more emphasis on the concept of freedom in his conceptualisation of the imagination as follows:

> Imagination and creativity are linked to a *free* reworking of various elements of experience, *freely* combined, and which, as a precondition, without fail, require the level of *inner freedom* of thought, action and cognizing which only he who has mastered thinking in concepts can achieve. (1994: 269)g

It is difficult to know whether these different emphases are a result of shifts in his thinking, different translations or a combination of both. Whatever the case, the result is a more layered conceptualisation of imagination.

Having established the critical importance of human imaginative capacity, Vygotsky then discusses and critiques the everyday understandings of imagination. Although Vygotsky was writing in the 1920s, the myths that he outlines are still very applicable in the twenty-first century. In everyday discourse, imagination or fantasy refers to something that is not actually true, something that does not correspond to reality in any meaningful way. If this were indeed the case, then imagination would not have any serious practical significance. It would also have limited significance for education. However, Vygotsky challenges this view in a number of convincing ways. Firstly, he explores the shifting role of imagination at each stage in human development, from childhood through to adulthood. Secondly, he explores the complex and layered relationship between imagination, fantasy and reality.

1.3 The role of imagination in different stages of human development

His first argument concerns the role of imagination at different stages in human development. Vygotsky argues that:

> [Imagination] does not develop all at once, but very slowly and gradually evolves from more elementary and simpler forms into more complex ones. At each stage of development it has its own expression, each stage of childhood has its own characteristic form of creation. Furthermore, it does not occupy a separate place in human behaviour but depends directly on other forms of human activity, especially accrual of experience. (2004, 12–13)

Thus the development of imagination is not fixed, static or limited to childhood, but rather a lifelong process of development, shifting its form at each stage. Equally important, Vygotsky regards imagination as an integral part of human functioning and development, rejecting the ideas of earlier philosophers (including Kant and Hume) who compartmentalised imagination.

This idea poses a major challenge to the widely held belief that children are more imaginative than adults and that as children move into adolescence and adulthood their capacity for imaginative thought is replaced by more realistic and sophisticated thought processes. In fact, Vygotsky provides convincing counter-arguments to this belief. He argues that adults have much more highly developed imaginations than children, as they have accrued more experiences and cultural-linguistic resources on which to draw, which form the basis of imagination. In other words, the imagination develops in tandem with the development of abstract thought and intellect. From this perspective, it makes complete sense to view adults as having a more developed imagination than children (2004: 14–15). Vygotsky views the evolution of imagination from childhood through to adulthood as a process facilitated by the gradual freeing of the mind from the constraints of concrete thinking. However, he

acknowledges that even some adults remain trapped in the realm of concrete thinking (1987: 274).

Vygotsky argues that children's fantasy play is an integral part of linguistic and cognitive development. The existence of the capacity to imagine during play allows a child to build a world independently from what is immediately visible. According to Vygotsky the development of speech plays an important role in imaginative development.

> Speech frees the child from the immediate impression of an object. It gives the child the power to represent and think about an object that he has not seen. Speech gives the child the power to free himself from the force of immediate impressions and go beyond their limits. (Vygotsky, 1987: 346)

Reading this idea in the context of Vygotsky's position on imagination, speech facilitates imaginative development and the development of abstract thought and the products of these imaginative activities generate further linguistic development (for example, children's storytelling and drawings). This reiterates the idea that the products of imagination alter and reshape reality. Vygotsky concludes that the development of the child's imagination is linked to the development of speech in its broader socio-cultural context including the "basic forms of the collective social activity of the child's consciousness" (1987: 346).

Vygotsky argues that there is a revolutionary imaginative shift during transitional, middle school years (adolescence) and that this shift "profoundly impacts students' intellectual development, personality, behaviour and ways of understanding and making sense of the world" (Gajdamaschko, 2005: 14). Vygotsky draws on Ribot's developmental model (1902) to develop his conceptualisation of the development of adolescent imagination. He argues that the "convergence of intellect and imagination" is a significant feature of adolescence. However, this convergence "does not signify a complete absorption of fantasy by thinking. Both functions

approach each other but they do not merge" (1994: 275). The synthesis between abstract thinking and imagination only becomes truly complete and productive in adulthood. It is clear though that conceptual thinking becomes an important feature of adolescence, which in turn facilitates the release from concrete thinking towards creative fantasy (Vygotsky, 1994: 282). This has implications for creative writing and will be elaborated on in 1.5 (category 3).

Finally, he poses a challenge to elitist views of imagination as the domain of a few selective geniuses. While he acknowledges that few people have the capacity to imagine great works of art or scientific inventions, he insists that imagination plays an important role in daily life for all human beings (2004: 37–38).

1.4 The relationship between imagination and reality

His second argument concerns the complex and layered relationship between imagination and realistic thinking. There is a strongly reciprocal relationship between imagination, reality and the construction of ideas. Imagination is an essential, integral part of realistic thinking, and any "cognition of reality" (1987 : 349) requires imaginative elements. Yet imagination requires a detachment from reality and a momentary flight of consciousness away from the constraints of the immediate environment. Put another way, in order to develop new ideas, one needs to stand outside the existing ideas for a period of time. The highest level of imaginative activity is that which results in the creation of images/ideas not found in reality. Vygotsky terms this transformational imaginative work, as opposed to the creative reworking of existing ideas, images or materials (1987 : 349).

According to Vygotsky there are four ways in which the operation of imagination is associated with reality.

The first association concerns the relationship between imagination and experience. Vygotsky argues that imaginative creations are always based on elements from reality, drawn from previous experiences. He uses the example of fairytales to

illustrate this point. Fairytales are combinations of elements extracted from reality that have undergone the transformational action of our imaginations.

Vygotsky emphasises that the richness of a person's imagination will depend on the richness of experience that they can draw on. He also writes about the importance of access to cultural resources and tools and how this differential access will shape a person's capacity to imagine (2004: 14–15). In a South African context learners have varied access to linguistic resources and literacy tools and experiences such as books and reading. Put another way, South African children have differential access to the experiences and social tools necessary for the development of the imagination. Certainly, the PIRLS report (2008), discussed at length in Chapter One, concludes that access to books and other home literacy practices have a significant impact on South African learners' literacy development.

The question of strongly oral African cultural practices vs. more textual Western cultural practices also needs to be taken into account in a South African context. All of these factors come into play when one invites learners to create fictional/fantasy narratives. This is an issue I will explore in more detail in Chapters Five, Seven and Eight.

Vygotsky is explicit about the educational implications of this idea. He argues that 'we' need to broaden the repertoire of experiences that children are exposed to in order to develop their imagination. It is likely that 'we' refers to more capable adults (including parents and teachers) who are able to mediate the socialisations and learning of children. He makes a number of specific references to the role of schools in mediating the development of conceptual thinking and imagination (1987: 346). Gajdamaschko (2005: 21–22) examines the implications of Vygotsky's ideas for the development of curriculum material that would facilitate the growth and mastery of children's imaginations. She concludes, along with Egan (1992), that stories have the potential to serve as a powerful cognitive tool for engaging children's imaginations.

The second association between imagination/fantasy and reality refers to the capacity of imaginary products to broaden one's worldview and alter the way one engages with the world. According to Vygotsky there are two types of imaginary writing. The first type is unreal – for example, a fairytale. The second type of writing corresponds to some real phenomenon – for example, imagining the experiences of ordinary people during the French revolution or the experiences of victims of xenophobia in South Africa. Both are products of the imagination but produce different kinds of imaginary texts and engage the mind in different processes.

The first kind of imaginary writing entails creating an imaginary world that bears little or no resemblance to the real world. This is the type of writing that is most commonly understood as imaginary writing, the kind of writing that Jane, one of the interviewees, named "the fairy in the garden." Although the product of this writing does not correspond to reality, Vygotsky argues that in the process of constructing this story we draw on experiences and rework these experiences to create something new. The imagination facilitates this experience (2004: 13–15).

The second type of imaginary writing, writing that corresponds to the real world, entails a different process and has a powerful impact on mental processes. It is this kind of imaginary writing that I am particularly interested in, and yet it is frequently not associated with imaginary writing. This kind of imaginary writing is made possible through exposure to the experience of somebody else – for example, a diary entry, a letter or a newspaper article (2004: 16–17).

Vygotsky makes the following comments about the importance of real world imaginary writing:

> In this sense imagination takes on a very important function in human behaviour and human development. It becomes the means by which a person's experience is broadened because he can imagine what he has not seen, can conceptualise something from another person's narration and

> description of what he himself has never directly experiences. ... In this form, imagination is a completely essential condition for almost all human activity. (2004: 17)

It is clear from Vygotsky's comments that he regards this second type of imaginary writing as being extremely generative in terms of empathy, identification and expanding one's mind beyond the confines of direct experience. This relates to ideas about 'narrative imagination' and begins to make very valuable connections between narrative and imagination along the lines of Kearney (1988; 1998; 2002) and Rorty, (1989) discussed in Chapter Two. Ehrenworth (2003) works with narrative and imagination in the second way outlined by Vygotsky (i.e. it corresponds to some real phenomenon). Her work is important because she brings together aesthetic appreciation, affect and cognition. The affective component of imagination is also crucial and it is to this issue that I now turn.

The third association between the functioning of imagination and reality is an emotional one. While emotion has been implicit in the previous two categories, Vygotsky unpacks it in this third category. He argues that emotion influences our capacity to imagine at a given point in time but that imaginary constructs also influence emotion. In other words, it is a two-way relationship: one's mood influences how receptive we are to enter somebody else's experience or the capacity to rework experience to construct something new. In the same way, every imaginary construct has an effect on our feelings, even if it does not actually correspond to reality. Vygotsky provides the example of reading a novel or watching a movie, and the extent to which one can be deeply moved by a character's experience, even though they are not real. Ribot (cited in Vygotsky, 2004: 19) argues that "All forms of creative imagination include affective elements." Although Vygotsky focuses this discussion on emotion, I would add beliefs and values to the notion of how affect influences our capacity to imagine. Beliefs and values can facilitate or block the creative imagination on particular issues (2004: 18–20).

While foregrounding the importance of affective dimensions of imagination, Vygotsky rejects the widely held philosophical and psychological assumption that the primary component of imagination is affective. He talks back to this binary by showing that both imaginative and realistic thinking are characterised by high levels of affect. Furthermore, some forms of imaginative activity are associated with stronger affective dimensions than others. For example, daydreaming is high in affect, while a scientist working on an invention may be more focused on realistic thinking. In contrast, a revolutionary studying a political situation may be imbued with passion and emotion (1987: 347–348). The problem with this discussion is that at times Vygotsky seems to slip back into the very binaries that he is trying to avoid.

The fourth association between imagination and reality brings the discussion full circle – to a consideration of the impact of imaginary constructs on the material world and how these can reshape reality/society. A construct of fantasy that represents something substantially new may not exist in reality but once it is created it begins to exist in the real world and have an impact. Vygotsky explains that through this process "imagination becomes reality" (2004: 20). One need only think about cellular phones and how they have transformed the lives of ordinary people, particularly in South Africa where people in rural areas and from lower socio-economic groups never had or had very limited access to telecommunication prior to cell phones. This invention has altered social and economic realities.

Vygotsky gives examples of imaginary constructs from the world of science that impact on our external worlds and products from the world of art that influence our internal worlds. Works of art have significant influences on our internal worlds, thought and feelings as much as technical/scientific inventions influence the external world. Such artistic work has the power to generate 'internal truth'. At moments like these, Vygotsky's voice strongly resonates with Romanticism (2004: 20–21).

1.5 Delineating and differentiating genres of imaginative writing

Having established Vygotsky's broad conceptualisations of imagination, I now explore the implications of Vygotsky's ideas for imaginative writing. In this section, I delineate three strands of imaginative writing and relate these to Vygotsky's ideas, particularly his ideas about the relationship between imagination/fantasy and reality.

The three strands/categories are as follows:

- Fictional/fantasy narratives where one is inventing an imaginary world and imaginary characters (though it must be noted that even this kind of writing draws on the self, experiences, people in one's life).
- Narrating other lives: writing that encourages learners to engage with issues in the world with a social justice agenda (e.g. Ehrenworth, 2003), imagining the realities of others. Perhaps it requires the greatest imaginative leap to put oneself in someone else's shoes (Witherell et al., 1995).
- Narrating the self: writing and rewriting the self, reimagining the self through retelling, generating new perspectives and insights (Prain, 1996; Kearney, 2002; Mendelowitz, 2005).

  I will discuss the third category (narrating the self) in more detail than the other two categories, as these have already been introduced in the previous section (1.4).

1.5.1 Relating the three categories to Vygotsky's theory on imagination & writing

Category 1: Fictional/fantasy narratives

According to Vygotsky the process of creating fictional/fantasy narratives are substantially different to the process of creating writing that corresponds to the real world – what I have called 'narrating other lives'. The process of creating imaginary words is based on elements from reality and drawn from previous experience. Ideas

drawn from experience are combined with ideas from the imagination and reworked to create fictional or fantasy writing (2004. 13–15).

Category 2: Narrating other lives

The process of narrating other lives (or imaginative writing that corresponds to some real phenomenon) entails the reverse operation of writing fiction/fantasy. While writing fiction/fantasy draws on experience to create an imaginary world, the process of narrating other lives is made possible through exposure to other people's experiences. The writer's imagination is harnessed in order to understand, visualise and empathise with somebody else's experience (via oral interview, letter, diary, newspaper article). An imaginative leap is required to enter somebody else's experience.

Vygotsky elaborates extensively on the impact of such imaginative writing, many of his ideas linking to work done on the educational value of narrative work. He argues that this type of writing has a powerful impact on mental functioning, broadening a writer's worldview and enabling him to move beyond "the narrow boundaries of his own experience" (2004: 17). This has important implications for understanding social and historical experiences.

Category 3: Personal narrative/narrating the self:

Vygotsky does not specifically discuss personal narrative writing as a separate category in his discussion of the relationship between imagination and reality. He does suggest that all writing draws on personal experience in some form or other, even if it entails drawing on secondary experience (the experience of another person). However, in his discussion on literary creativity in school-age children he makes a number of pertinent comments about personal writing and the relationship between play and children's (personal) creative writing. He argues that children's written language always lags behind their spoken language and that this is exacerbated at school when children are compelled to write on teacher-driven topics

that fail to engage their interest, emotions and interior worlds (2004: 46). Vygotsky cites Blondskii as arguing that: “The child must be taught to write about what he is deeply interested in and has thought about much and deeply, about what he knows and understands well” (Blondskii, 1964 cited in Vygotsky, 2004: 46). Vygotsky and Blondskii also underline the importance of helping the child develop a strong interest in the world around him/her. Hence, the personal, the social and the emotional dimensions are synthesised in this discussion of creative writing. In many ways this perspective prefigures the process writing movement that took off in the 1980s, the major difference being that Vygotsky does not advocate drafting.

Vygotsky provides a survey of various studies done on the creative writing of children, including street-children and semi-literate peasant children (Tolstoy, 1964 ; Giese, 1922; Grinberg, 1925). He draws on Grinberg’s comments about her autobiographical writing project with adolescent street-children:

> These stories ... show the main feature of all creation of this sort. There is something built up inside a person, that painfully attempts to get out, demands to be expressed, strives to be expressed in words. When a child has something to write about, he writes with great seriousness. (Grinberg, 1925 cited in Vygotsky, 2004: 52)

Vygotsky builds on this point by underlining the critical role that creative writing can play for adolescents. In the context of adolescents’ increased intensity and volatility of emotion, Vygotsky views the role of language in the adolescent’s life to be as follows:

> Language enables him to express complex relationships, especially inner language, with much greater facility than drawing. Language is also better able to express the motion, dynamics, and complexity of some event than is a childish, imperfect, and uncertain drawing. This is why drawing ... is replaced

> by language as the favoured means of expression, corresponding to a deeper, more complex, interior attitude towards life and the world. (2004: 55)

Vygotsky views adolescence as a phase when one's inner world is created and when a strong need emerges for the expression of subjective fantasies (2004). He differentiates between the objective and subjective fantasy of the adolescent. Objective fantasy focuses on elements of the external world, while subjective fantasy uses emotional experience as its subject matter (Smolucha, 1992: 56). Vygotsky argues that both these traits can be found in adolescent writing, with the following difference: "Some children may be more concerned with the past, while other children may be focused on imagining the future" (2004: 68). The ability to plan and visualise an imagined future is an example of the directed, focused dimension of adolescent imagination.

Finally, Vygotsky makes explicit connections between children's play and creative writing and it is here that he unequivocally states the importance of creative writing, particularly with a personal dimension. Just as play is critical for children's cognitive, emotional and social development, so creative writing is important for developing "the child's powers and latent strengths" (2004: 65).

Despite the immense value of Vygotsky's work on imagination and creativity, there are inevitably gaps and questions remaining – not least how to apply this theory meaningfully in the twenty-first century. Vygotsky provided a framework for understanding imagination but did not fully unpack what this would mean in practice. How *does* the imagination work to transform ideas into something new? How *does* the notion of transformation relate to other key concepts such as internalisation, mediation and the ZPD? It is with these questions in mind that I turn to the work of contemporary Vygotskian theorists.

2. Contemporary Vygotskian work on Imagination and creativity: synthesis and reconstruction

It needs to be stated at the outset that the terms imagination and creativity are slippery and frequently used interchangeably in educational research. Vygotsky worked with both these terms but foregrounded imagination as the act of mind that generates creative activity. In some cases, as will be seen below, theorists work interchangeably with the two concepts. Some theorists foreground creativity but work with it in ways that convey my working definition of imagination. In this thesis, imagination refers to the capacity of the mind to combine, transform and create anew while creativity refers to the external products of imaginative mental processes.

2.1 The role of play and inner speech in the development of imagination

In the previous sections (1.3–1.5) I discussed the developmental aspect of imagination and the different forms it takes in childhood and adolescence as well as its implications for imaginative writing. Drawing on Smolucha's synthesis and the original texts, I will now discuss her interpretation of the developmental aspect of Vygotsky's work, particularly the role of play and its implications for the imagination. Smolucha (1992) reconstructs Vygotsky's theory of creative imagination on the basis of three of his key papers: "Imagination and Development in the Adolescent (1921/1994), "Imagination and its Development in Childhood" (1932/1987), and "Imagination and Creativity in Childhood" (1930/2004).[2] Between 1984 and 1986 she translated these papers from Russian into English and is thus both synthesiser and translator.

[2] There are various translations of Vygotsky's papers. I have cited the dates of the versions I am working with which differ from the dates of the versions that Smolucha translated.

Smolucha foregrounds the following two issues in her synthesis: Vygotsky's notion that imagination develops out of children's play and their inner speech and the characterisation of the adolescent imagination through the collaboration of imagination and thinking in concepts (Smolucha, 1992: 49-50).

Vygotsky regarded children's play as an integral part of linguistic and cognitive development. Smolucha interprets Vygotsky's ideas about play to mean that the creative imagination originates in symbolic play. Vygotsky acknowledges that children's play includes a significant amount of reproduction and imitation of what they have seen and heard from adults but ultimately entails a certain level of creative reworking (Vygotsky, 2004: 11). He elaborates:

> He [the child] combines them and uses them to construct a new reality, one that conforms to his own needs and desires. Children's desire to draw and make up stories are other examples of exactly this same type of imagination and play. (2004: 11–12).

Two important insights emerge from this idea. Firstly, it is easy to completely dismiss imitation as an undesirable part of development and learning, but here Vygotsky reminds one that imitation can be a first step towards learning, with "creative reworking" (2004: 11) as a second step. Secondly, Vygotsky reiterates the connections here between creative writing, play, drawing and imagination. Smolucha claims that the juxtaposition of these four processes allows for the emergence of a theory in which imagination develops "from the collective social activity of children's play" (Smolucha, 1992: 52). In line with the rest of Vygotsky's ideas, imagination emerges in socio-cultural contexts through engagement with social tools.

Smolucha argues that although Vygotsky did not specify the mechanisms through which creative imagination develops to a higher level, the explanation is embedded in the rest of his writing. She concludes that "inner speech is the mechanism that raises imagination, like the other higher mental functions, to a higher level" (1992:

52). Inner speech refers to moments when the child talks to him/herself, when the speaker and listener are the same. While Piaget regarded this as 'egocentric' speech that did not serve a significant cognitive function, Vygotsky regarded inner speech as serving a very important function in children's planning and problem-solving (John-Steiner, 2007: 138).

Matuga (2004, cited in John-Steiner, 2007: 140) introduces another interesting angle on inner speech and imagination. In a recent study she found that children used more inner speech when involved in drawing make-believe objects than realistic ones. This increased use of inner speech relates to the increased level of challenge in the make-believe task. John-Steiner concludes that inner speech provides a focus for these more challenging tasks as children generate more novel solutions. Matuga and John-Steiner seem to be suggesting that inner speech is used more frequently for challenging tasks and that it facilitates the generation of more imaginative thinking – perhaps because it frees the child from any constraints of audience and allows for unlimited exploration.

What is abundantly clear is that Vygotsky regarded the development of speech as a very powerful impetus for the development of "thinking in concepts and therefore in the development of the imagination in children" (Smolucha, 1992: 60). While language provides the child with a tool to express him/herself and to think symbolically, it is in the arena of play that the child has a space to explore symbolic representations and to imaginatively transform objects for his/her own purposes. Furthermore, play provides children with opportunities to imagine an object present when it is not and to use language to name the absent object.

In terms of the overall developmental trajectory, during childhood play is the central space for the development and enactment of imagination, while during adolescence the imagination becomes internalised, private and hidden from view. The adolescent

is no longer reliant on external objects but begins to think metaphorically (Vygotsky, 1994: 283).

While the discussion so far has focused on Smolucha's interpretation of the developmental aspect of Vygotsky's imagination theory, I would like now to move towards a discussion on the implications of Vygotsky's theory of imagination in a teaching/learning situation, as this is really the focus of my research.

2.2 The role of imagination in the construction of knowledge

Vygotsky's work on imagination has been of particular interest to socio-cultural scholars**.** John-Steiner and Meehan (2000) focus on the role of imagination and creativity in the construction of knowledge. They develop this argument by working with Vygotsky's concept of internalisation in relation to imagination and creativity.

Vygotsky viewed the capacity for creative reworking as a central dimension of the imaginative process but never specified the mechanisms of this process. John-Steiner and Meehan (2000: 34–35) fill this gap, to an extent, by developing a detailed account of the relationship between internalisation, imagination and creativity. They argue that the process of internalising knowledge suggests a blending between the internal and external, the socio-cultural and the individual in the learning process. The external factors include the teacher as mediator and peers as well as the social tools available in the broader society. The learner thus begins to integrate knowledge, understanding and ideas into his/her knowledge system through these interactions. Knowledge is thus internalised through a negotiated, interactive process, not through transmission. Internalised learning has a very different shape, form and lifespan to knowledge that has been transmitted to the learner (like a satellite beam) and memorised for a specific purpose such as a test or exam.

This dynamic tension between the individual and the social contributes to "learning, internalization and the construction of the new" (John-Steiner and Meehan, 2000: 35). Once knowledge had been internalised deeply and transformed into something

new it is fed back into the social environment, thus perpetuating the dialectic between the individual and the social. John-Steiner and Meehan then explore the implications of this insight for creative work.

This dynamic and dialectic view of internalisation facilitates a focus on the transformation of ideas and the communication of those transformed ideas back to its source, the social environment. To put is another way, internalisation works from the outside in and then back again. The emphasis on transformation generates a further discussion about creative activities, suggesting "a view of internalization as part of a sustained endeavour, a sufficiently deep familiarity with what is already known to be a constituent part of the dynamic of its transformation" (John-Steiner and Meehan, 2000: 35). This comment is embedded in debates about internalisation and writes/talks back to the critiques posited by some constructivists (e.g. Cobb and Yackel, 1996) who view internalisation as a glorified transmission model in which the active role of the individual is undermined. However, John-Steiner and Meehan make a strong argument that internalisation is a far more dynamic process which facilitates the construction of new knowledge and understanding.

An important aspect of this argument is the connection made between the creative combining of ideas and internalisation. This is where John-Steiner and Meehan's contribution is particularly helpful. Clearly not all learning leads to deep internalisation and a productive combination of ideas. It is thus helpful to differentiate between shallow and deep internalisation of knowledge and its impact on the quality of the combination of ideas and the potential for transformation of ideas. John-Steiner and Meehan explain as follows:

> Shallow internalization leads to a facile combination of ideas. In contrast, working with, through and beyond what one has internalized and appropriated is part of the dialectic of creative synthesis. (2000: 35)

My own reading of this is to link shallow internalisation to memory and rote learning while deep internalisation reflects a substantial level of engagement on the part of the learner and a sense of ownership of the learning process – an attempt to make the knowledge one's own by relating it to one's own ideas and knowledge systems as well as multiple external sources which could include other texts, peers and mentors.

This notion of multiple external sources inevitably leads to a discussion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and its implication for generating creative reworking. Vygotsky defines the ZPD as:

> the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (1978: 86)

Hence, according to this formulation, the more competent assist the young and the less competent to reach intellectually higher ground from which to reflect more abstractly about the nature of things. The notion of collaboration and negotiation of meaning with peers or an adult mediator is a key aspect of the ZPD. One of the tasks of the mediator is to scaffold the learning process – to support and break up a task into manageable steps until the learner is able to take responsibility for the task him/herself. However, there are different interpretations of the ZPD, mediation and scaffolding (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988 ; Matusov, 1998; Wells, 1999 ; Newman et al., 1989; Moll, 1990) and these have implications for creative reworking. Daniels (2001: 59) notes that "the term scaffolding could be taken to infer a 'one-way' process wherein the 'scaffolder' constructs the scaffold and presents it for use to the novice." This can result in a deadening of the creative mind as the scaffolder may package the learning process too tightly and pose questions that the learner should be generating. Newman et al. (1989) suggest that the scaffold is constructed through negotiation between the more advanced partner and the learner. Moll (1990) also

argues for a negotiated model of scaffolding rather than a focus on the transfer of skills from the mentor to the learner.

The notion of a negotiated process of scaffolding has important implications for teaching, and results in a very different teaching and learning approach to the 'one-way' process. When John-Steiner and Meehan refer to the "dialectic of creative synthesis" (2000: 35) it is to this interpretation of internalisation and the ZPD that they are referring. Thus the notion of 'creative synthesis' entails a collaboration between the individual's mind and the social environment, including the negotiation between the novice and the mediator of the scaffolding process.

John-Steiner and Meehan's conceptualisation, by its very nature, remains at an abstract and technical level of explanation. A really fine-tuned understanding of how 'creative synthesis' works in practice is best developed in relation to specific examples. I do so in Chapter Eight, where I analyse samples of learners' imaginative writing in relation to teachers' imaginative writing pedagogies.

Concluding comments

In Chapter Two, and the preceding sections of this chapter, I presented a macro overview of the conceptualisation of imagination across time, space, conflicting paradigms and fields of study. However, it is necessary at this point to switch to microscopic vision, edging towards the finer details of imagination and education and its meaning for imaginative writing classroom practices. Hence, in the section that follows I will incrementally narrow the focus by first providing an overview of writing pedagogy approaches and debates, and then focusing on four specific key conceptual tools for thinking about imaginative writing – i.e. mediation and scaffolding, modelling, and discourses. This discussion will build on the previous section by applying these concepts directly to debates and discussion about imaginative writing research.

3. Writing pedagogy and imagination

The seventies and eighties heralded the beginnings of dramatic shifts in paradigms shaping writing pedagogy. In particular, the beginning of the personal growth model of English teaching (Barnes et al., 1969; Britton, 1970) and the process writing movement (Graves, 1983; Calkins, 1986) marked a significantly different approach to writing pedagogy to the traditional form-focused and product approach that preceded it. This change took place in a broader context of shifting ideas about the nature of language learning, and a radical shift in the conceptualisation of the role of language learners and the language teacher. A key aspect of this change was the shift from a focus on form to a focus on meaning-making, and from product to process. Inevitably, this focus on meaning-making had a significant impact on writing pedagogy.

However, despite the immense development in the breadth and depth of writing pedagogy research, from the seventies to the present, the overview that follows reveals a silence in the literature – the absence of any serious conceptualisation of imagination in pedagogical research on writing pedagogy. Although imagination is implicit in much of the research, it is a 'taken-for-granted' background element, rather than a central issue. The absence of a conceptualisation of imagination is a symptom of a broader malaise in writing pedagogy research – a lack of theoretical rigour in its formulation that has been discussed at the outset of Chapter Two.

3.1 An overview of writing pedagogy debates – implications for imagination

In the review that follows I provide an overview of the debates surrounding writing pedagogy, and attempt to examine the position of imagination in these debates and its implications. This is not intended to be an exhaustive, in-depth exploration of writing pedagogy – merely an overview of key frames of references in both approaches that will be picked up in more detail in 3.3 and 3.4 of this chapter and in the data analysis chapters.

3.1.1 Process writing

One of the important shifts in writing pedagogy introduced by the process writing movement was the shift away from the notion of writing as a solitary and product-oriented activity. An important aspect of process writing is the notion of creating a 'community of writers' in the classroom who are simultaneously writers and the target audience for the writing of their peers. Writing is seen as a social and recursive process, which involves pre-writing, writing and rewriting, all of which are interdependent (Zamel, 1987a: 268). Unlike traditional pedagogy, process-writing pedagogy also locates the teacher/lecturer in a different role: as a guide through the writing process rather than an evaluator of the end product (Zamel, 1987b: 710). Process writing proponents (Calkins, 1986; Graves 1983; White, 1991; Zamel, 1987a; 1987b; 1992) emphasise the role of drafting, peer feedback and teacher conferencing (Mendelowitz, 2005). According to Prior (2006: 54), process writing, in its early incarnation, drew substantially on cognitive processing theory (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

It is interesting to note that many of the precursors of process writing are embedded in Vygotsky's work on imagination and creativity in childhood (2004), discussed in section 3.1 of this chapter, and in Vygotsky's broader work on language and thought (1962, 1978). While the proponents of process writing may not have worked with Vygotsky's ideas explicitly or consciously, his work had already gained currency in the Western academic world by the eighties and was becoming a fundamental underpinning of educational research.

The process writing movement opened up possibilities for engaging with writing imaginatively and creatively. The focus on the social aspect of writing, the engagement with writing at cognitive and personal levels, and the notion of 'self-expression' all created possibilities for "creative synthesis" (John-Steiner and Meehan, 2000: 35) between the writer, peers, and the teachers. However, while the social is promoted in process writing (through the emphasis on collaboration,

audience, and feedback), the socio-cultural context of writing is not foregrounded. In addition, process writing has been critiqued for working with a 'liberal humanist' notion of the self and of self-expression (Prain, 1996; Kamler, 2001). Hence, it does not necessarily promote a critical or ethical imagination, and does not necessarily enable the writer to move beyond the boundaries of the self. The notion of voice, which is linked to self-expression and central to process writing, is not socio-culturally situated. Voice is seen as singular and individual – so while learners are encouraged to find their voice and express it, voice is not problematised or interrogated. In contrast, from a critical pedagogy perspective, voice is a starting point and a "necessary precondition for the collective work to be done" (Lensmire, 2000: 65). Voice is located in a socio-cultural context, shaped both within and beyond the classroom context. This notion of voice will be elaborated on in the discussion in section 3.1.3.

In conclusion, process writing played a significant role in opening up classroom writing to the possibilities of imaginative work, but the full impact of this was limited by the absence of any conceptualisation and explicit discussion of imagination. As a result teachers worked with an implicit notion of imagination and this lent itself to the perpetuation of simplistic, binarised conceptions of imagination. One example of this would be the tendency to underestimate the centrality of imagination to the development of higher-level thinking and learning. A related misconception, which emerges strongly in the interviews, is to view imaginative writing as relevant only to fictional genres, and not to 'impersonal', discursive genres. Consequently, teachers frequently do not apply their minds to the broader, productive possibilities of imagination across different genres of writing.

Process writing has been critiqued by a number of theorists for its limited focus on explicit genre and linguistic features (Christie and Rothery, 1989; Delpit, 1995; Martin, 1985). Delpit (1995) critiques process writing proponents for their perceived assumption that all students bring 'middle-class literacies' to school and argues that

their failure to address linguistic and textual features sufficiently tends to perpetuate social inequalities. She ultimately views process writing as disempowering for African American working-class students, an obstacle to accessing the language and genres of power.

Ironically, from Delpit's perspective, process writing does the very thing it seeks to avoid – i.e. process writing proponents argue that their approach empowers learners, but according to Delpit it indirectly promotes deficit and inequality. This is an example of the continuation of the meaning and form debate in the context of questions about writing, deficit, and access. This critique is particularly relevant to one of the central concerns of this thesis – i.e. the notion of writing, imagination and deficit, how notions of deficit are produced, how teachers internalise these ideas and how these ideas impact on pedagogy.

3.1.2 Genre writing pedagogy

The formulation of genre pedagogy was a direct response to what its proponents saw as the gaps and weaknesses in process writing. Proponents of genre pedagogy (Christie & Rothery, 1989 ; Martin, 1985 ; Cope & Kallantzis, 1993) argue that socially valued genres need to be taught in explicit ways that give students equal access to means for learning. They also argue for more explicit teaching of linguistic and textual features, a more active role for the teacher and greater attention to factual as well as personal genres (Kamler, 2001: 22).

An important aspect of this approach entails exposing learners to the features of a specific genre through the use of texts which model the schematic structure, discourse and grammatical features of the relevant genres (Richardson, 1994: 129). Hence, a central aspect of genre pedagogy is teaching genres through modelling and scaffolding.

Critiques of this approach include concerns that it faces the danger of becoming formulaic and mechanistic, despite its purported focus on the social dimensions of

writing (Richardson, 1994; Kamler, 2001). Boscolo argues that the genre approach "minimizes the individual's contribution to genre", foregrounding social roles in interaction at the expense of "individuals' beliefs and affective states" (2008: 303).[3] It also faces the danger of being (mis)appropriated by 'back to basics' pressure groups. (Modelling and scaffolding in genre pedagogy will be explored in more detail in 3.3.4 and 3.3.5. in relation to research on imaginative writing.)

What is the implication of this approach for imagination? Although genre pedagogy was carefully formulated to include the social dimension of writing, it has not necessarily been taken up in the nuanced way in which it was intended. There is always a gap between pedagogical theory and practice. In the case of process writing, teachers who underwent 'conversions' from traditional writing pedagogy to process writing frequently moved from one extreme to the other, resulting in the total sidelining of attention to form and structure (Crowhurst, 1988: 76). In the case of genre pedagogy, there is the danger of the reverse process happening (i.e. a swing to being overly mechanistic).

Ultimately, imagination is sidelined in this formulation of writing pedagogy, as the balance swings from meaning towards structure. In addition, the process through which writing is taught becomes much tighter and more controlled, lessening the scope for individual negotiation of meaning. In particular, implicit in this formulation is a binary between personal and impersonal writing, and the implication that the personal and the imaginative are unlikely to provide learners with the tools that they need for social access and preparation for the real world. This notion has permeated the thinking of teachers and certainly was reflected in the beliefs and views of some of the teachers in this study, as will be shown in Chapter Five.

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[3] Boscolo's critique refers to the Australian version of genre pedagogy. He presents the social constructivist perspective on genre as a viable alternative (Bazerman, 1988). The Australian version has been taken up in South Africa and it is to this version that I refer in the discussion.

However, a synthesis of these two approaches, and working with a substantial conceptualisation of imagination, can be highly productive. The work of Grainger et al. (2005) provides an example of these possibilities. Certainly there is ample work being done in a South African context that draws on the strengths of genre and process approaches (Kapp, 2003; Mendelowitz, 2005) and this trend is also evident in current English language textbooks (e.g. Mkhari et al., 2006).

3.1.3 Socio-cultural approaches to writing pedagogy

The past two decades have seen the development of new approaches to writing which build on process writing and genre pedagogy in productive ways. Most of the key elements of process writing pedagogy have been incorporated into new approaches, but reworked to bring critical and socio-cultural issues into sharper focus. This includes socio-cultural approaches to teaching writing and critical writing pedagogy.

According to Vanderburg (2006: 378) Vygotsky's socio-cultural development theory is used extensively in current writing research, where it is integrated with the Hayes and Flower (1981) model of writing (i.e. process writing). Socio-cultural approaches to writing research focus on social interaction and the development of learners' 'inner voices'. Writing, according to this model, is a "mode of social action", not simply a means of communication (Prior, 2006: 58). Writing is never an autonomous activity, but always draws on socio-cultural contexts and artefacts. One of the leading proponents of a socio-cultural approach to writing is Ann Dyson (1990, 1997, 2004) who draws primarily on Bakhtin as well as Vygotsky. Some of her key ideas will be discussed in the sections that follow. Other socio-cultural writing researchers include: Greene and Smith (1999), Sperling (1990), Freedman (1992), Gere (1990), Preus (1999), and Cooper and Holzman (1989).

Critical writing pedagogy intersects with socio-cultural approaches to writing, but has a more explicit focus on promoting a social justice agenda, diversity issues and

power. Interestingly, like imagination, it is not the focus of any of the articles in the writing research compendiums: *Handbook of Writing Research* (MacArthur et al., 2006) and *Research on Composition* (Smargorinsky, 2006). Proponents of critical writing pedagogy include: Kamler (2001), Lensmire (2001), Giroux (1992), and McLaren (1993). Much of this work (e.g. Kamler and McLaren) has focused on rethinking narrative writing from critical perspectives and reconceptualising the notion of voice.

Lensmire aligns himself with the critical pedagogy approach to voice, although he also identifies certain gaps in this approach and attempts to take the ideas of critical pedagogy further. According to Lensmire the strength of the critical pedagogy conceptualisation of voice is that voice is viewed as a collective resource with which the classroom community can engage in challenging, transformative work. The socio-cultural context of classroom writing, institutional constraints and the broader society are foregrounded in the production of texts. However, there is a need for locating student voices more directly in the local context of the classroom. In particular, Lensmire argues, we need to engage with the conflict of voices in the classroom and its implications for writing. One needs to take into account conflict between students, between students and teacher, and between dominant and marginal discourses (2000: 65).

Lensmire (2000: 75–79) proposes that we work with the notion of "voice-as-project" to indicate that voice is something that will develop "across time and situation" (76) and that is grounded in the daily lives of students at school. This concept also affirms the agency of students as they write and reconstitute themselves textually. Lensmire's conceptualisation of voice-as-project comprises various elements, including the notion of appropriation. This notion is particularly useful in vividly highlighting the way individuals assimilate and rework cultural resources such as language and experience. From this angle, voice may have socio-cultural constraints and parameters but can be reworked and remade (2000: 75–79).

The discussion that follows draws predominantly on socio-cultural perspectives on writing. Hence, process writing and genre pedagogy will be interpreted within this framework.

3.2 Scaffolding and mediation of the imaginative writing process

In this sub-section I develop John-Steiner and Meehan's conceptualisation of scaffolding and mediation as negotiated, dialectical and dialogical in relation to highly specific research on writing pedagogy, and imagination. I utilise this space to answer the questions:

- What kind of scaffolding and mediation is most likely to generate imaginative writing?
- What kind of teaching context, scaffolding and mediation would enhance the possibilities of deep internalization, productive combining and creative synthesis – the kind of synthesis that has possibilities for generating imaginative thinking and writing?

In the context of teaching writing there is frequently a delicate balance between form, structure and meaning. At times too much attention is paid to the grammatical and structural aspects of writing, while at other times meaning is foregrounded and structure is ignored. Writing can be reduced to a mechanistic process and sometimes even when creative approaches have been used, in the end it is reduced to error correction (as will be seen in Chapters Seven and Eight).

There are some interesting debates about the meaning of mediation and scaffolding in the specific context of teaching writing. Haas Dyson, in her work on popular culture and children's writing, foregrounds the dialogical nature of language and writing. She draws on Bakhtin's dialogical notion of language (1981, 1986):

> In this view, learning to use language involves learning to interact with others in particular social situations and, at the same time, learning to be, so to

> speak, within the dominant ideologies or "truths" about human relationships; that is, it involves learning about the words available in certain situations to a boy or girl, to a person of a particular age, ethnicity, race, class, religion and so on. (1997: 4)

The focus then is on using language in a social context, and on the accompanying constraints. Texts are formed at the intersection between self and others, ideological constraints and available, socially acceptable repertoires. All of these factors are negotiated in the creation of texts – hence Dyson's argument that composers are "not so much meaning makers as meaning negotiators, who adopt, resist or stretch available words" (1997: 4). Her focus on 'negotiating meaning' creates a stronger sense of a dynamic interaction with existing cultural and social resources than the notion of 'meaning-making'.

Dyson elaborates the connections between *play, speech, imagination, and space* in interesting ways. Although children are, to some extent, constrained in their play by social and cultural realities (Vygotsky, 1978), play does provide a space for children's exploration of "possible roles in possible worlds" (Dyson, 1997: 14). Sometimes, in play, children escape "blueprints for cultural action" (14) and deliberately subvert expectations and norms. In the same vein, speech exists in an in-between space, located between "children's present time emotions and images – their meanings – and the words others have given them, their linguistic reality, as it were" (Bakhtin, 1981 cited in Dyson, 1997: 140). Dyson takes this idea further by examining what it means specifically for the construction of a "textual space" (19). She foregrounds the interactive aspect of children sharing writing with peers in public spaces. This idea is discussed directly in relation to her classroom data but has broader implications. She describes the creation of a textual space as follows:

> The children interactively experienced a textual space – a space in between their *desires and their realities*, their *own viewpoints* and those of *others,* and

> a space where words could simultaneously create *coherence and disruption* (19).

Erikson and Richardson raise important questions about the nature of scaffolding the writing process and the notion of a one-way process implied in certain configurations of writing pedagogy. Erikson argues that joint negotiation of texts is not just a matter of the teacher providing a scaffold but should entail a far more collaborative process in which the learners *participate in creating the scaffold* (Erikson, 1984 cited in Richardson). Richardson argues that the genre approach to teaching writing "seems to be functioning on an impoverished view of the teaching-learning transaction, and by doing so, simplifying the notion of scaffolding so that it is a construct by the teachers. A scaffold that may not reach" (1994: 130).

Bayer (1996) explains how, during a one-year language teacher education course, she used different *levels of scaffolding*, increasingly placing more responsibility on the students for their learning. She outlines her move from using "shared knowledge scaffolding" (169) towards "anchored knowledge scaffolding" and finally "collaborative apprenticeship", which entails negotiation of meaning between students, peers and teacher (182).

I have adapted the scaffolding models of Bayer (1996) for the purposes of this research project. I view scaffolding as having various layers, where the outer layer is constructed by the teacher who creates a framework and boundary for learning and imagining. However, the learning that happens beyond this initial framework is frequently the most significant. Through the process of individual engagement, collaboration and participation, learners have ample opportunities to problem-solve, negotiate meaning and construct their own layers of scaffolding. The inner layers of scaffolding thus consist of individual and collaborative work, and it is the space that provides the most potential for deep internalisation, ownership, agency and 'creative synthesis' – for learners to work with, through and beyond the framework created by

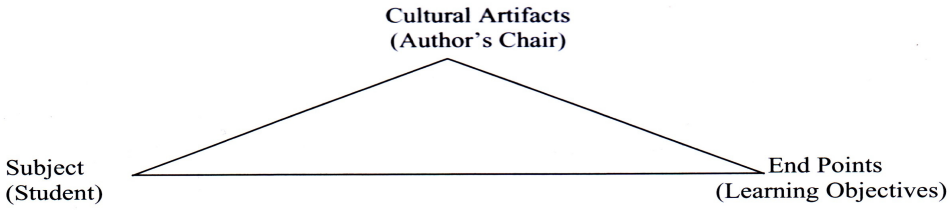
the teacher. Put another way, this is where scope for Dyson's "in-between space" (1997: 19) is located.

While the teacher sets the outer layer of scaffolding, I am not suggesting that the process of scaffolding is linear or fixed. Rather, beyond the initial teacher-based scaffold, teachers and learners can move recursively through these various configurations of scaffolding, depending on the constraints of time and space. For example, the inner layers of scaffolding (individual and collaborative) could happen interchangeably, alongside further layers of teacher scaffolding. The collaborative phase could involve learners and the teacher.

My key concern and interest is the extent to which configurations of scaffolding open up classroom spaces for imaginative thinking and writing, and a "dialectic of creative synthesis" (John-Steiner and Meehan, 2000: 35). I will apply this model to the analysis of the classroom practice of all five teachers (Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine).

McCallister (2008) critiques the theoretical vacuum at the centre of much work on writing pedagogy. Of particular interest to her is the process writing workshop approach and its lack of focus on "dialectically orientated theories in education" (466). She revisits the notion of the 'author's chair' (Graves and Hansen, 1983), which focuses on the reading–writing relationship and notions of children as authors, giving and receiving feedback about each other's stories. This became one of the foundational principles of process writing pedagogy and research in the eighties. McCallister uses Vygotsky and Cole's ideas (1998) to rework the notion of the author's chair as 'mediational triangle' (as illustrated below).

Figure 1: Vygotsky's mediational triangle (Cole, 1998)



This triangle consists of three points: the student as subject (on the bottom left-hand tip of the triangle), the 'author's chair' as the cultural artefact mediating learning (at the top tip) and the end point/learning objectives (at the right-hand tip of the triangle). Learning happens through a dynamic interplay of all three points of the triangle. When, for example, a student reads his/her text to the class and discovers that they lose interest at a particular point in the story, the end points or learning outcomes are affected (McCallister, 2008: 467–468). I would add that the success of this process is in turn influenced by how the teacher mediates the discussion about what worked and what didn't work. This model is very productive and can obviously be applied to a host of other 'cultural artefacts' in writing pedagogy such as texts used to trigger or model writing.

The concept of an expanded process of composition (Grainger et al., 2005: 22–25) provides a flexible model for scaffolding the writing process in ways that promote affective engagement, the development of imaginative thought over time, and the opportunities to play with ideas across multiple modalities. Most importantly, it provides ample opportunities for learners to negotiate ideas with the teacher and each other, hence creating their own second layer of scaffolding. Hence talk and discussion are central to the expanded process.

Grainger et al. (2005) argue that the initial stage of writing (pre-writing) is crucial. It is often given insufficient attention, reduced to a spider diagram or quick brainstorm. They argue that during the pre-writing stage, teachers need to "focus on the generation of ideas and involve children in a range of creative contexts in order to

generate thinking and capture ideas" (23). In their view, planning should include a host of modalities such as oral, kinaesthetic, and visual activities which "may be combined with written ones in imaginative and creative contexts" (23). Learners must have opportunities to "inhabit creative contexts" (24). For all of this to be accomplished, the teacher needs to allocate sufficient time for the writing process in order to engage the children in "more extended writing journeys ... letting ideas emerge, live, be rejected or selected as they travel" (23).

In support of their argument for fluid movements between writing and body work, they draw on Vygotsky's notion of tools in interesting ways (1978). Vygotsky acknowledges that tools of the body can become tools of the mind. He notes the connection between physical activity and its impact on the workings of the mind. So, for example, before writing about an imagined character or animal, inhabiting the character through movement, speech and sound impacts on one's thinking and writing. At a later stage in the writing process, abundant talk and 'inner speech' is crucial, as young writers re-read their texts and reflect on them critically (Grainger et al., 2005: 24).

So what does it mean to scaffold the writing process? How does one do it in a way that integrates form and meaning, prising open the spaces for critical and imaginative thinking? Writing pedagogy researchers such as Dyson, Richardson and McCallister provide some productive ideas in this regard, though none of them foreground imagination. I will analyse the classroom data carefully with this question in mind. I now move to discuss another component of scaffolding – the concept of modelling. I have chosen to deal with it separately from scaffolding, despite the fact that it is an integral part of scaffolding as it features prominently in research and debates about writing pedagogy.

3.3 Modelling the imaginative writing process

Like scaffolding (and as an aspect of scaffolding), model texts can be used in a number of different ways depending on the values, beliefs and purposes of the teacher. They can be used in a mechanistic way that elicits imitation, setting up the model texts as objects of admiration and idealisation, ideals that need to be copied as closely as possible. This was taken to extremes in the earlier version of ESL form-focused writing pedagogy, where controlled writing at times verged on simply reproducing a model essay.

Alternatively, model texts can be used as an integral part of a dynamic process, in which learners are encouraged to engage with the texts on their own terms as springboards for their own creative imaginations. Learners can rework, transform and appropriate these texts for their own purposes. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that a certain level of imitation is part of learning as long as imitation is only a step in the process, with "creative reworking" as a second step (Vygotsky, 2004: 11).

In my own work, I have found it extremely productive to use a combination of published model texts and texts written by previous students. This immediately conveys an enabling message to the students and a sense of identification (Mendelowitz, 2005; Mendelowitz & Ferreira, 2007). However, the teacher needs to facilitate discussions with the learners about the personal, linguistic and thematic aspects of the model texts. The relationship between meaning and structure needs to be explored continuously in a fluid way.

In the writing pedagogy literature the concept of modelling has two distinct meanings. The first meaning, foregrounded in the genre approach to writing, entails exposing learners to the features of a specific genre through the use of texts which model the schematic structure, discourse and grammatical features of the relevant genres (Richardson, 1994: 129). An overview of this approach was provided in

section 3.2.1. Richardson (1994), Sawyer and Watson (1987) and Sawyer (1989) have raised critical questions about the extent to which conscious awareness of structure generates more effective performance in writing. Richardson (1994: 132) argues as follows:

> Just as changing the size of the student group and individualizing teacher-student interaction does not of itself change the structure of classroom discourse, so an awareness of generic text forms will do little of itself to improve the teaching of writing where power, authority, influence and consent are paramount factors in the teaching/learning transaction.

Richardson's comment is a useful reminder that there are many dynamics to consider when one thinks about the teaching of writing, not least the broader power dynamics of classrooms and the schools in which they are located. A similar position is taken up by Kamler in her discussion of genre pedagogy and modelling text structures. While she acknowledges that gaining control over powerful genres is clearly an important aspect of writing instruction, there are other significant issues that need to be taken into account such as students' subjectivity and the power relations that shape the writing process (Kamler, 2001: 82–82).

The second dimension of modelling, discussed at length by Grainger et al. (2005) and Courtland, Welsh and Kennedy (1987, 1990), focuses on the teacher as model of the writing process, the teacher as artist and writer. This approach emphasises the importance of the teacher's own participation in the classroom writing process. Grainger's conceptualisation of what it means for teachers to model the writing process is particularly comprehensive.

The idea of teachers "writing from inside the compositional process" and "journeying alongside children" (Grainger et al., 2005: 156) is a central aspect of their argument, suggesting that teachers need to be collaborators and participants in the creative process alongside their learners. At the same time they acknowledge that teachers

need a double lens: they need to be both 'inside' and 'outside' the creative process, simultaneously spectator and participant. An important aspect of teachers being 'inside' the process is that they do their own writing. This could mean that teachers write in private and/or that they model the writing process for the children. In particular, they make strong arguments for the value of teachers writing spontaneously in the classroom, and sharing this process, with all its stops and starts, with the learners. While it is helpful for teachers to write texts in private and then share them with the learners, it is even more valuable when they model the writing process in action. Teachers frequently expect learners to produce texts on the spot, but are seldom prepared to subject themselves to the same pressure (Grainger et al., 2005: 166–167).

From this perspective, modelling the writing process takes on a much larger, more fluid meaning than simply the idea of using model texts. The teacher's constant movement between insider and outsider roles also serves to model another aspect of the writing process – the need for the learners to be able to move between these two spaces so that they can at times immerse themselves in the creative process, and at other times stand at a distance, becoming their own 'spectators'.

While the notion of teachers being participants and spectators is a useful concept, it has potential limitations and tensions that Grainger et al. do not explore. Clearly, there comes a point in a participatory, collaborative classroom when the teacher has to stand at a distance, particularly when dealing with summative assessment. This shift from being the nurturing participant to being the evaluator can cause discomfort and ruptures in the classroom, both for the learners and the teacher**.**

Courtland, Welsh and Kennedy (1987, 1990) conducted a longitudinal case study, tracking the changing practice and beliefs of one teacher, named 'Bob', over a three-year period, where he attempted to move from a product to a process approach of teaching writing with Grade 4 and 5 learners. The study yields a range of interesting

insights about the process of teacher change, teacher cognition and teaching writing, successfully synthesising these disparate fields.

From the perspective of the researchers, one of the biggest stumbling blocks of Bob's successful implementation of the process approach was that he never sustained the role of teacher as model writer. He reluctantly attempted this at the beginning of each year but always retreated from the role. This point reinforces Grainger's argument (2005).

While I have presented these two versions of modelling as two separate ideas that are part of different pedagogical approaches, there is clearly scope for productive synthesis. The first approach (genre pedagogy) is more structural, the second (Grainger et al.) more about modelling behaviour and practice, modelling being a writer, and behaving like a writer. However, the use of models in the first approach is key to creating a fluid reading–writing relationship, and should be an integral part (but only a part) of the holistic framework outlined by Grainger et al.

3.4 Conceptualising classroom discourses

I am working with Gee's notion of Discourse (with a capital 'D'), which he defines as:

> … different ways in which we humans integrate language, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools and objects in the right place and at the right time so as to enact and recognise different identities and activities, give the material world certain meanings, distribute social goods in a certain way, make certain sorts of meaningful connections in our experience, and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others. (1999: 13)

Working with the framework, language is part of a larger social system that performs a repertoire of functions other than simply transmitting information. Put another way, it is far more than the words that are spoken. With specific application to the classroom context, the teacher privileges and backgrounds a set of values, enacts

his/her identities and positions learners into certain identities through classroom activities. What is most resonant for the purposes of this analysis is Gee's notion of how certain ways of knowing are privileged over other through the use of Discourses. One of the central arguments of this thesis is that imagination has been sidelined in educational discourses, especially in the South African context. Thus, it is crucial to explore what ways of knowing are privileged/sidelined in the classrooms of the five teachers and where imagination is placed within this hierarchy of knowing. All Discourses have a history and genealogy and I will analyse in the data chapters how teachers in practice draw on the long and complicated history of imagination.

Grainger et al. (2005) conceptualise imagination and creativity across a number of modes and genres. They are not simply arguing that in order to teach imaginative writing effectively teachers need to engage with their writing. They are arguing that teachers need to develop their imagination and creativity in a number of contexts in order to be empowered to teach writing with passion and conviction. This is a holistic approach to creative and imaginative writing, suggesting that it doesn't exist in a vacuum but needs to be developed as part of a broader way of thinking and acting in the world. They reiterate their argument about the importance of teachers' engagement with their own creativity in the quotation below:

> If teachers of writing don't actually write – or even consciously talk creatively – in the way that they expect children to do … they will neither maximize their creative potential nor fully understand the challenge of being a writer. (Grainger et al., 2005: 164)

In this comment they are referring to the importance of the teacher's use of creative/imaginative discourses and suggesting that this is a basic ingredient for the creative-writing classroom. The ideal scenario, according to Grainger et al., is for teachers to develop their own creativity through engaging in their own writing but at the very least they need to create a classroom environment that is conducive to

creative/imaginative work through the use of 'conscious creative talk'. The meaning of this term, its impact and limitations, will unfold as I analyse the teachers' Discourses. Christie, a leading proponent of genre pedagogy, argues that there is a strong relationship between classroom Discourse and the written texts produced by learners. In her research, she demonstrates that the texts produced by learners "reflect the patterns of interaction" in the classroom (1984: 2). Christie calls this configuration of classroom Discourses "a curriculum genre" and defines this term as:

> … the ways in which teaching/learning activities are systematically structured and organized in patterns of classroom discourses. Curriculum genres are also systematically shaped and structured ways of making meaning. (1984: 2)

Christie's notion of "curriculum genre" provides a productive way of focusing my lens for classroom data analysis. Like Gee (1999), she emphasises that classroom Discourses are not simply about the use of language but also about the shape and pattern of activities, both a micro and a macro view of the classroom.

It is important to note that the use of imaginative discourses is not always enough to guarantee productive imaginative work, but when such Discourses are coupled with effective imaginative writing pedagogies, the work and the Discourses are likely to reinforce each other. This will be illustrated in the five case studies that follow. On the other hand, imaginative discourses can be undermined by deficit discourses.

3.5 Writing pedagogy and deficit discourses

The issue of deficit perceptions of learners and writing emerged as a central theme in the data analysis, both in the interviews and in the classroom observation. This is therefore an issue I will be exploring in more detail in all four data chapters (Chapters Five to Eight) from a number of different perspectives. I will illustrate that deficit notions are prevalent in the feedback phase of writing pedagogy, even when the writing tasks are framed with a focus on imagination. In the discussion that follows, I

provide a brief historical and pedagogical framework of deficit discourses and writing pedagogy.

There is a long history of the conflation of editing with surface error correction in educational contexts. In the nineteenth century writing was equated with "writing from dictation" (Hannon, 2000: 19) and it was only in the twentieth century that composition gradually became an integral part of the writing curriculum. Even then, until the mid-1970s and 1980s composition was often a glorified grammatical exercise with a focus on error correction rather than student meaning-making. However, like any story of developing paradigms, this is not a linear story with a resolved ending. While the Discourses of writing as personal meaning-making abound in curriculum documents in South Africa, in practice the old and new Discourses frequently co-exist (as will be explored in Chapters Seven and Eight). In some instances it is simply a mechanistic approach that prevails.

According to Wilson, teachers are "... haunted not always by any real problems in their students' writing, but instead by a feeling of responsibility to their profession, students and colleagues" (1994: 74). In his study teachers frequently felt that if they were not addressing grammatical problems sufficiently, they were not doing their job properly. While Wilson is not arguing that grammar should be ignored, he is saying that teachers grapple with this tension in an ongoing way, and that external pressures can result in a swing back to a mechanistic focus. In a broader context Simon Pardoe problematises "the asymmetry inherent within traditional deficit accounts of public literacy and student writing" which is prevalent in political and media debates, sustained by some research (2000: 159). This can be seen in the 'back to basics' call in the United States and the United Kingdom and the move towards standardised testing. From this perspective, English language teachers are seen as linguistic mechanics, fixing and repairing their learners' 'broken' English.

In a South African context, referring to someone as a 'second language English speaker' is frequently employed as code for labelling students as having somewhat deficient English language proficiency. Students frequently internalise this positioning (Ferreira & Mendelowitz, 2009a). While historical factors such as the legacy of apartheid and Bantu Education partially account for this, fifteen years into democracy these terms and the conditions that generate them have not been transformed substantially. The main shift has been a replacement of race with class as the fundamental educational divide (class as the new race?) but even then this is slippery and not always easy to pin down in state schools.

Even when educators set up curricula and courses with an explicitly inclusive and social justice agenda, one can be unexpectedly "haunted by deficit" (Ferreira & Mendelowitz, 2009b: 88) at key moments, especially at the summative assessment phase. In our work with first-year, pre-service teachers doing the Bachelor of Education degree, we developed a course on language and identity that was designed to promote the valuing of diversity and the verbal and textual sharing of linguistic identities across different backgrounds. While the tutorials and lecture discussions largely achieved these aims, in the formative assessment of students' language narratives we experienced some discomfort and contradictions of our own discourses, particularly in the assessment of students' assignments.

We commented as follows:

> The structural linguistic inequalities by which these students had been shaped and disadvantaged were playing themselves out and students were inscribing this disadvantage – in the form of lack of English proficiency – into their language narratives. (Ferreira & Mendelowitz, 2009b: 88)

Blommaert et al. (2005) use a multilingualism research framework to redefine the notion of deficit. Using a spatial analysis, Blommaert et al. argue that the notion of linguistic deficit emerges from fixed notions of "communicative competence"

(Hymes, 1967). Instead, they redefine "communicative/linguistic competence" (Hymes, 1967) as a negotiation of linguistic resources that is deployed differently across different contexts. Blommaert et al.'s approach allows for a far more dynamic and contextual view of linguistic competencies across multiple spaces including institutional, local, social, political and international ones.

In a comprehensive review article on identity and the writing of diverse students Ball and Ellis point to a crucial link between teachers' deficit assumptions of linguistically diverse learners and the use of "low level drill-and-skill instruction", which in effect perpetuates limited writing development. They pose the following question:

> Why are most culturally and linguistically diverse students in poor and urban schools continuing to receive low level drill-and-skill instruction when the research confirms that instruction that builds on students' background knowledge, builds a sense of community, is interactive and meaningful, and requires extended writing, reflection and critical thinking is most effective with all students? (2008: 507)

Their question and the related discussion in their article highlight the fact that deficit is not a fixed and static notion that can simply be pinned onto learners, but in fact is part of a dynamic, socio-cultural process that has mobility. Although this research was conducted in the United States, it is extremely resonant with my own experience as a teacher, lecturer and researcher.

4. Conclusion

As has been shown in this section, Vygotsky's conceptualisation of imagination is highly productive and relevant to this research project. I draw on Vygotsky's ideas to answer both sides of my research question: i.e. teachers' conceptions of imagination and imaginative writing and teachers' enactment of practice. This elasticity is a consequence of the admirable breadth of his work, particularly the manner in which

it cuts across philosophy, psychology and education (to mention but a few disciplines).

In addition, I will work extensively with the conceptual tools drawn from the work of contemporary Vygotskians, and researchers on imaginative writing in the data analysis chapters, particularly in Chapters Seven and Eight, which are about teachers' enactment of their ideas about imaginative writing.

Chapter Four: Methodology

1. Introduction

The aim of this research is to investigate teachers' conceptions of imagination and imaginative writing and how these conceptions and beliefs are enacted in the classroom. I have used a qualitative, multiple case study research method. By this I mean that the study consists of five cases located in different classroom sites and focusing on five different teachers (Merriam, 1998: 40).

The study draws on post-structuralist views of language and knowledge. One of the underpinnings of this approach is the notion that language actively constructs meaning and that the form of language used has a powerful impact on the shaping of meaning and social realities (Richardson, 1994: 518). Richardson concludes that post-structuralism has two important implications for qualitative writers:

> First, it directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions at specific times: and second, it frees us from trying to write a single text in which everything is said to everyone. … Writing is validated as a method of knowing. (1994: 518)

This approach has the potential to free qualitative researchers in the social sciences from the constraints of 'science writing' and positivist thinking, creating new ways of knowing that are more applicable to the concerns of social scientists. It has informed the way that I position myself as researcher, both in my collection and analysis of data as well as in the way that I have written the thesis. I have approached the research with a particular lens and worldview, and these shape what I see, how I see, and how I write. At the same time I have been reshaped by my interaction with the teachers, their classrooms and the writing process. I thus see this research as a dynamic, dialogical and imaginative process. I have attempted to write the thesis, particularly the data chapters, in a vivid style that enables the reader to hear multiple

voices (the voices of the participants, my voice, the voices of other theorists) and to enter the classroom world as they read about it. To borrow from Shelley in a slightly modified form (discussed in Chapter Two, section 1.2), I hope that this text will have a semblance "of the electric light which burns within their words" (1821: 53).

One of the main arguments of this thesis is that the imagination and imaginative writing is a synthesis of higher-level thinking, affect, and creativity. In addition, I view the personal as being embedded in all genres of writing. From this perspective there is no justification for an academic text to be dry and depersonalised. In the same vein, I refuse to erase myself from this text in the name of scientific notions of objectivity that are not *entirely* applicable to qualitative research. Rather, I will aim to respond to Laurel Richardson's call to create texts based on qualitative research that are "vital", "readable", and that "make a difference" (1994: 516). Richardson problematises the suppression of individual voices in qualitative research and raises critical questions as follows:

> We have been encouraged to take on the omniscient voice of science, the voice from everywhere. How do we put ourselves in our own texts and with what consequences? How do we nurture our own individuality and at the same time lay claim to "knowing" something? These are both philosophically and practically difficult problems. (1994: 517)

I will attempt to enact the abovementioned ideas (the central argument of this thesis as well as Richardson's ideas) in the way that I write by weaving together rigorous academic research and argument with personal and imaginative elements. At the same time, I will reflect critically on the consequences of this approach in the relevant section of this chapter on analysis and writing.

2. Research design

2.1 The contested nature of qualitative research

Denzin and Lincoln make the following argument about qualitative research:

> Qualitative research, as a set of interpretive activities, privileges no single methodological practice over another. As a site of discussion or discourse, qualitative research is difficult to define clearly. It has no theory of paradigm that is distinctly its own. ...Nor does qualitative research have a distinct set of methods or practices that are entirely its own. ...No specific method or practice can be privileged over any other (2000:6).

As the above quotation shows, qualitative research is highly contested. There are many different research design options and approaches to data analysis. What is of central importance is that qualitative researchers carefully select research design options that are congruent with their objectives, and the phenomenon that they are studying. Such choices are underpinned by the epistemological agenda of the researcher's study.

The interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and multiparadigmatic features of qualitative research means that it opens a rich repertoire of possibilities for researchers, but simultaneously entails negotiating "constant tensions and contradictions over the project itself, including its methods and the forms its findings and interpretations take" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:7). Moreover these different perspectives are not mutually exclusive but can be combined in the same project (for example postmodern and naturalistic perspectives).

While qualitative research is frequently viewed as the binary opposite of quantitative research and its positivist paradigm, traces of positivism permeate qualitative research. This is not as surprising as it might seem, given the history of qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln explain that "historically, qualitative research was defined within the positivist paradigm, where qualitative researchers attempted to

do good positivist research with less rigorous methods and procedures"(2000:9).While Denzin and Lincoln describe the residues of positivist traditions as lingering "like long shadows over the qualitative research project" (9), Lincoln and Guba argue that "...it is imperative that inquiry itself be shifted from a positivist to a postpositivist stance" (1985:15-16). Flick argues that traditional deductive methodologies are inappropriate for social researchers in contemporary society and that "research is increasingly forced to make use of inductive strategies instead of starting from theories and testing them" (1988:2-3). The notion of inductive research is a central aspect of my research design and will be discussed in detail in the section that follows.

2.2 The paradigm and research design used in this thesis

The research methodology of this thesis is informed by the naturalist paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and the interactive model of research design (Maxwell, 1996, 1998; Maxwell and Loomis, 2003). I draw on elements of both these approaches, which have many ideas in common. Both Maxwell and Lincoln and Guba redefine the meaning of design as a web of interacting and interconnected elements. Implicit in this definition is a shift from linearity and determinism which are frequently foregrounded in discussion of research design textbooks (Grady and Wallston, 1988). The elements or components of this redefined notion of research design are the same as in other paradigms and models, but it is the relationship between them and the sequencing that is distinct and reconfigured as well as the underlying belief system.

Naturalistic researchers allow research design to emerge through a process of "cascading" "flowing" and "unfolding" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 41), rather than construct it in advance. They argue that it is not possible to know enough prior to commencing the research "about the multiple realities to devise the design adequately" (ibid: 41). In the same vein, the various elements of research cannot be

constructed in a linear manner. Clearly, the researcher presents some elements before others, and cannot address all elements at once. However, the researcher needs to be open to the possibility of "continuous recycling", "feedback and feedforward" (ibid: 266). A central underpinning of this view is that research is an inductive, negotiated process and that the relationship between the researcher and the 'object of inquiry' is one of mutual influence.

No inquiry can be conducted without a focus. The inquiry focus creates boundaries for a study, it delineates the terrain. However, Lincoln and Guba (ibid: 228) caution researchers not to be too rigid about their boundaries and foci. They emphasize that the focus can be altered and in the typical naturalistic study that is the likely scenario. They elaborate on the need for researcher and research design flexibility as follows:

> The focus of the inquiry can and probably will change. Conventional inquirers regard such changes as absolutely destructive of their inquiry designs ...; the naturalist expects such changes and anticipates that the emergent design will be coloured by them. Far from being destructive, they are constructive, for these changes signal movement to a more sophisticated and insightful level of inquiry. (ibid: 229)

In a similar vein, Maxwell critiques linear models of research design arguing that this view of design "does not adequately represent the logic and process of qualitative research" (1998:70). In a qualitative study, the activities of collecting and analysing data, developing and modifying theory and refocusing the research questions are often happening simultaneously, each influencing one another. Maxwell (1998) has developed an interactive model of research design to counter the problem of research designs that are linear and overdetermined. The central tenet of this approach is the way the components of a research design "may affect and be affected by one another" (1998:70). There is no fixed order for the researcher to deal

with these components, nor is there a presupposed "directionality of influence" (ibid: 70). Instead, there are multiple and multi-directional connections, relationships and influences between the components. Like Lincoln and Guba (1985), Maxwell's approach is flexible, interactive, inductive and dialogic.

The interactive model and approach has implications for the researcher's treatment of research questions, the process of formulation, focusing and refocusing. Maxwell (1996) argues that research questions must be responsive to every part of the study. The researcher needs to be receptive, sensitive and responsive to implications of other parts of the design which may create a shift in the focus of the research question. Frequently, the researcher will need to conduct a significant part of the research project "before it is clear what specific research questions you should try to answer" (1996:49). Maxwell makes a useful distinction between "initial questions" which are based on the researcher's experience base and knowledge and more focused and specific questions which are likely to emerge through the interaction of the various components of the research design, including preliminary data analysis. Finally, he raises questions about the version of research design that locates the formulation of research questions at the outset of a study and that sees these questions as determining all other aspects of design. He comments as follows:

> My argument is that specific questions are generally the result of an interactive design process rather than being the starting point for the process (1996:49).

My research design was set up clearly in advance of commencing the data collection. However, the interviews yielded some interesting and unexpected findings that necessitated a shift in the focus of my initial research questions. This aspect of the research will be discussed in the section on interviews (section 5.3).

The inductive and process orientated approaches outlined above are well suited to case study as a research method and it is this aspect of the research to which I now turn.

2.3 Case study as a method of inquiry

Having outlined the paradigm and parameters that frame this research, I will discuss case study research as a method of inquiry in more detail. What is a qualitative case study and why is it a suitable method of inquiry for this particular research project? According to Hitchcock and Hughes, one of the key characteristics of case study research is a focus upon particular individuals and groups of actors and their perceptions (1989: 322–323). This affective element is extremely relevant to the main thrust of this research project, which has been outlined in the introductory chapter.

This research project has the following additional features of a case study:

- The research took place in a localised boundary of time and space – a six-month period in primary schools in the north-eastern suburbs of Gauteng. (This applies to the bulk of the research, although I did do some follow-up work in 2008, including one additional stint of classroom observation.)
- The research took place mainly in its natural context (i.e. within various school and classroom settings).
- Rich and detailed data was collected through a range of methods.
- The data includes the accounts of the subjects themselves.

According to Zeller (1995), there are two assumptions underpinning case study approaches to research. Firstly, the primary goal is to create understanding and new meanings rather than focusing on prediction and control as is usually the case with experimental research. Secondly, the case study narrative is a product rather than a

record of the research – i.e. writing the case study narrative is part of the process of 'coming to know'.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the case study approach has many potential advantages for the naturalistic inquirer. Firstly, this approach creates a lot of scope for the researcher to accommodate the multiple realities encountered in any given study. Secondly, the researcher can also depict his/her own interaction with the research site and be explicit about the resulting biases. Thirdly, the researcher can use the case study report to describe and demonstrate a range of "mutually shaping influences present in the case" and thus move beyond the constraining notion of linear causality (42).

This study has the additional feature of being a multiple case study, as I have collected and analysed data from four different school sites, and five different classroom sites (i.e. Fiona and Jane teach at the same school but represent different classroom sites). Multiple case studies offer scope for greater variation across cases, and a greater range of interpretations (Merriam, 1998: 40). According to Miles and Huberman, researchers can "strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings" through analysing data across cases (1994: 29). However, one of the potential challenges of using multiple case studies is the management of the data, which can become overwhelming. This challenge will be discussed in section 7.2 of this chapter.

The importance of qualitative research on classroom writing is eloquently articulated by Fecho et al. in the conclusion to their comprehensive overview of teacher research in writing classrooms.

> As university-based and school-based researchers we need the emic perspectives of teachers and their students. We count on teacher researchers to show us the processes and potential, the idiosyncrasies and identities, and

> above all, the stories – told through data and theorized by teachers – of students as they write the word and the world. (2006: 133)

Leki, Cumming and Silva (2006) spell out the kind of research needed specifically on L2 writing:

> We look forward to future studies that go beyond basic description of L2 writing to explain fundamental relationships, for example, the effects of particular teaching or curricular options on learner development. … Research also needs to demonstrate convincingly and from theoretically informed perspectives how to improve the situation of L2 writers, and the education offered to such learners. (2006: 156)

Both of these quotations highlight the need for textured and detailed research on L1 and L2 classroom writing. In addition, Chapman argues that researchers need to devote more attention to children in the intermediate age group (2006: 40). The use of a qualitative, multiple case study design has the potential to generate the kind of research that Fecho et al., Leki et al. and Chapman are calling for. In contrast, a quantitative research method would yield broad brush strokes but would not generate rich, textured, detailed answers to the research question.

3. Data collection techniques

The primary methods of collection were interviews and classroom observation. This research took place over a six-month period and data collection was divided into two phases. Phase 1 took place in July 2007 and entailed in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight teachers from the four research sites. The interviews generated data about teachers' conceptions of imagination and imaginative writing as well as their 'espoused practice'. This first phase of the data collection explores answers to the first part of my research question: *How do teachers view imagination and imaginative writing from personal and pedagogical perspectives? What attitudes,*

prior experiences, histories, identities and pedagogical ideas do they bring to the writing classroom? What is their 'espoused practice'?

The second phase of research entailed classroom observation of four teachers between August and October 2007. In September 2008 I observed one additional teacher. This component of the research generated data that helped me to answer the second part of my research question:

How do teachers' attitudes, beliefs and ideas about imagination and imaginative writing translate into classroom practices and impact on learners? How do teachers understand imagination and how is this enacted through classroom writing practices? What is the relationship between teachers' conceptions of imaginative writing and their enactment of imaginative writing pedagogy in the classroom?

In the section that follows I discuss interviews and observation as data collection techniques. I begin by discussing interviews.

Interviews, as a data gathering tool, are an important part of qualitative research. Interviews pervade twenty first century culture, and have almost become naturalised as a means of gathering information that cannot be directly observed. However, interviews are seldom as straightforward or unproblematic as they may seem. Like other aspects of research methodology, interviews are conceptualised and enacted in different ways, depending on the approach of the researcher. In particular, there is much debate about the nature of interviews, their purpose and structure and the role of the interviewer and respondent. Each approach to interviewing is underpinned by specific views on the nature of knowledge and associated values and worldviews (Fontana and Frey, 2000).

There are three different ways of structuring interviews: the structured interview, the semi-structured interview and the unstructured interview (otherwise known as the depth or informal interview). Merriam (1998) presents these three different interview structures along a continuum. The structured interview is located on the

one end of the continuum and is characterised by highly structured questions, asked in a very specific order and controlled by the interviewer, who is expected to be neutral. This approach is frequently used for surveys with a high level of closed-ended questions. The respondent is viewed as a passive provider of answers to pre-determined questions rather than a constructer of meaning in a specific context. This is a tooth-extraction model of inquiry. The interviewer expects a pre-existing answer to predetermined questions, which will slot into predetermined categories. The interviewer simply needs to extract the answer in a polite, professional manner (Fontana and Frey, 2000).

Unstructured interviews are located on the other end of the continuum. In a typically unstructured interview the format is unstandardized and the interviewer does not expect normative responses (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Such interviews are exploratory and the respondent plays a much more active role, answering and asking questions and shaping the direction of the conversation. According to Merriam (1998), such interviews are often used in early phases of research, before the interviewer knows enough about the object of inquiry to ask specific questions. The typical relationship between interviewer and respondents is that of peers.

Semi-structured interviews are located on the midpoint of the continuum between structured and unstructured interview. In qualitative research projects, semi-structured interviews are most commonly used. This is far more open-ended and less structured than structured interviews, allowing for the individual respondent to explore the issues on their own terms. The most substantive part of such an interview is "guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored" (Merriam, 1998:74) but the exact wording and ordering of questions is not pre-determined. This format is flexible and creates space for new questions and issues to arise. The interviewer and respondent can jointly construct meaning and direction. I have used semi-structured interviews, though my interviews could be located further along the continuum towards unstructured interviews (i.e. I draw on elements of the

unstructured interview, particularly the exploratory, dialogic aspect, and in terms of my relationship with respondents).

There are a growing number of researchers who question the traditional assumptions of interviews. There is a strong move towards viewing the interview as a negotiated, context specific and collaborative interaction (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Gubrium and Holstein, 2001; Behar, 1996; Oakely, 1981). Gubrium and Holstein reconceptualise the interview as "an occasion for purposefully animated participants to construct versions of reality interactionally rather than purvey data" (2001:14). Fontana and Frey argue that:

> Increasingly qualitative researchers are realising that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering, but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results. (Fontana and Frey, 2000:123)

This view suggests different roles for the interviewer and the respondent from the traditional role; they are collaboratively engaged in constructing meaning and a joint text. The social, interpersonal and institutional dynamic of the interaction is crucial, and has a significant influence on the kind of knowledge produced. Behar (1996) concurs with this view and foregrounds the problematic ways in which interviewer, writer, and respondent are intertwined. She raises questions about how researchers reconcile these different roles and positions. She also raises questions about how much researchers should reveal of themselves to the respondent (i.e. level of openness). In a similar vein, feminist researchers (Oakley, 1981) are attempting to minimize status differences and to break down the traditional interview hierarchies. Interviewers are allowed to reveal their human side, answer questions and express feelings.

Fontana and Frey draw conclusions along similar lines:

> Yet to learn about people we must treat them as people, and they will work with us to help us create accounts of their lives. As long as many researchers continue to treat respondents as unimportant, faceless individuals ...., the answers we, as researchers, get will be commensurable with the questions we ask and the way we ask them. (2000:668)

This negotiated, dialogic view of interviews resonates strongly with my approach to interviews and the way I have interacted with the teachers who participated in this study. In section 5.3 of this chapter I explore the implications and impact of this approach on the focus of this research project.

Angrosino and Mays de Perez refer to observation as "the fundamental base of all research methods" in the social and behavioural sciences and as "the mainstay of the ethnographic enterprise" (2000: 673). They comment that even studies based on interviews utilise observational techniques to supplement verbal information with non-verbal cues. While observation in naturalistic settings can yield extremely valuable data, it is important to bear in mind some of the limitations and problems of this data collection technique. For instance, even if the observer does not participate in the observed activity, his/her presence is likely to have an impact on the interaction that takes place (Swann, 1994: 27). Labov (1970, cited in Swann, 1994) coined the term 'the observer's paradox' to underline the complexities associated with observation. The distinction between *participant and non-participant observer* is thus rather slippery. Bearing this issue in mind, I define myself as a participant-observer. This is in keeping with recent shifts in the conceptualisation of the relationship between researcher and 'research subject' towards notions of collaboration and equal participation (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000: 675). At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the researcher has the ultimate

control over the writing, framing and interpretation of the research report. Thus notions of collaborative research need to be viewed in relative terms.

3.1 Research sites and participants

The four schools chosen for this research are primary schools located in the north-eastern suburbs of Johannesburg, near taxi routes with easy access to Alexandra Township. School A is an ex-Model D school, while Schools B and C are ex-Model C government schools in middle-class suburbs. School D is a private Catholic school. It was one of the first multi-racial schools in South Africa during the apartheid era and has always been known for its commitment to the development of innovative curricula.[4]

Although some of these schools are only a few kilometres apart, they frequently occupy very different social spaces. The demographics of the learner and teacher populations in these four schools are varied in terms of class, and race and language backgrounds. The quality of teaching and learning also varies

The choice of the north-eastern suburbs and these four specific schools is not random. In other words, the four schools and the participating teachers were selected through 'purposeful sampling'. A central aspect of this type of sampling is that "the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998: 61). Patton (1990: 169) argues that purposeful sampling offers opportunities for selecting 'information-rich cases' for in-depth study. This study has elements of both of these

[4] From 1992, formerly white suburban schools were opened to children of all races. Different models were adopted. Most of them became Model C schools, which meant that the government paid teacher salaries but the schools were responsible for rates and taxes. A smaller number of schools became Model D schools. These schools were fully funded by the state and served as community/project schools. Fees for Model D Schools were minimal and much lower than Model C schools.

aspects of sampling in that all the schools selected were reasonably well functioning but sufficiently different to offer a range of "information-rich cases of practice".

Over the past six years I have visited schools A, B and C and supervised Wits student teachers there on numerous School Experiences. These visits have afforded me the opportunity to acquire a holistic view of the schools and to establish relationships with the principals and some of the teachers. While I have not supervised student teachers at school D, the late Professor Stein and I conducted a writing workshop with the teachers at the school in 2006 and we also attended a workshop run by Jane, one of the teachers who participated in this study.

My reasons for selecting these four schools go beyond my personal contacts with the schools in question into the realm of broader issues about post-apartheid schooling in South Africa fifteen years after democracy and questions of transformation. School A has been a Model D school since 1992 and has provided schooling for black learners specifically since that time. It thus has a different history to schools B and C. Prior to 1994, Schools B and C fell under the Transvaal Education Department (TED) and were open to white learners only. Since 1994 the demographics of these schools have shifted rapidly. School B has no white learners while School C has a diverse body of learners. This is a fascinating phenomenon that is playing itself out in different ways in ex-Model C schools across the country. In the case of School B, the surrounding area remains predominantly white and middle class. Yet the majority of white children who live in those areas have disappeared out of the public school domain. The demographic profile of School B is a much more common scenario in the north-eastern suburbs than that of School C.

Although this study focuses on five teachers who participated in both phases of the research, there were eight participants in phase one of the research. I wanted to get a broader sense of the imaginative writing practices, ideas and ethos per school than one interview per school could possibly yield. The broader interview sample also

served as a safety net should any of the core participants unexpectedly withdraw from the study at the next phase. Where relevant I will make brief references to the other three participants to reiterate points about the broader ethos of specific schools. Six of the participants are white women, ranging from ages 24 to 60. The seventh participant (phase 1) is a coloured woman. For all seven, English is a first language, and they are all South African. The eighth participant is a black Zimbabwean male whose first language is Shona. While there is a large age range, which points to different social, political and educational exposure, there is clearly and unfortunately limited racial (and class) diversity. This will be explained in the section that follows, where I outline the research process. On the next page there are two charts summarising basic information regarding the teachers who participated in the study. The first chart (Figure 2) covers the teachers who comprise the five cases in this multiple case study. The second chart (Figure 3) covers the teachers who participated in the interview phase of the research. These three teachers do not form part of the case study.

FIGURE 2: SUMMARY OF FIVE CASES (TEACHERS WHO WERE INTERVIEWED AND OBSERVED)			
Name of teacher	School	Grade taught	Years of experience & matriculation date
Nhamo	School A	Grade 6 English	20 (1981)
Debby	School B	Grade 7 English	21 (1961)
Nadine	School C	Grade 6 English	20 (1962)
Jane	School D	Grade 6 English	26 (1977)
Fiona	School D	Grade 7 English	30 (1969)

FIGURE 3: SUMMARY OF ADDITIONAL TEACHERS INTERVIEWED			
Name of teacher	School	Grade taught	Years of experience & matriculation date
Jade	School C	Grade 6 English	40 years (1963)
Sandra	School D	Grade 5 English	13 years (1990)
Lisa	School B	Grade 5 English	Six months (2002)

4. Notes from the (battle) field: Analytical description of research process

The best laid schemes o' mice an men

Gang aft agley

(Robert Burns, from *To a Mouse*)

The above excerpt from Burns' poem encapsulates my experience and understanding of fieldwork – the best-laid schemes of mice and men often go awry. While one needs to be highly organised to work in the field, one also needs to be flexible and responsive to changing situations, and to learn to expect the unexpected. This is particularly the case in the early stages of the research process, when one is recruiting willing participants.

4.1 Gaining access to research sites and participants

My previous research experiences had mostly been within the 'safety' of my work environments, my students and my own practice. Hence, access to research sites and participants had always been relatively straightforward logistically and in other ways. I have found that students are generally eager to participate in research projects, particularly if it doesn't make onerous demands on their time. Most of my research had entailed working with samples of their writing, assignments that had been written and evaluated during my courses. Hence, their participation did not require any additional time or work. In contrast, field work in schools entailed many new logistical, administrative and affective layers. For instance, many teachers may understandably feel 'inspected' and 'evaluated' by the prospect of participating in interviews, and particularly in relation to classroom observation.

Gaining access to the schools and the principals was relatively uncomplicated. I arranged to be placed at schools A, B and C during the May 2007 School Experience and during this time set up meetings with the principals. School D had a slightly more

informal hierarchy and I briefed the deputy principal telephonically about my proposed research request. All the principals were receptive to the proposed research idea and generally keen for their staff to participate. They suggested specific English teachers across Grades 5, 6 and 7 and agreed to talk to the teachers concerned. They then set up times for me to meet with the teachers.

This is where things got more complicated, and when I began to realise that I would need to be flexible on a range of fronts, even if it would mean modifying my research plan. I conducted briefing sessions with teachers from the four schools, explaining the purpose of the research and inviting them to participate in the interviews. At this stage my plan was to focus the classroom observation on Grade 7 teachers.

These briefing sessions varied in interesting ways across the different schools, and gave me a hint of what was to follow. The briefing session with the three teachers from School D was lively and relaxed and developed into an informal dialogue about literacy issues. It was clear from the interaction that these teachers are accustomed to participating in research, and the teachers confirmed this. The briefing sessions at School C were also fairly relaxed but the Grade 7 English teacher expressed some anxiety and uncertainty about the possibility of being observed. In contrast, the briefing at School A was tense and uncomfortable. Two of the three teachers seemed anxious about participating and I got the sense that they were only entertaining the idea because the principal had encouraged them. The third teacher, the Grade 6 English teacher (Nhamo), was genuinely enthusiastic about participating.

By the time I met with teachers from School B, the national teachers' strike was under way, and the school had virtually ground to a halt. As a result I met with the three teachers individually at different times at the school. Two of the three teachers were eager to participate, and the meeting with the Grade 7 teacher, Debby, also developed into an informal dialogue about literacy and her practice.

4.2 Teacher withdrawals from the study: "No longer interested"

By the end of June all the teachers (with the exception of one teacher from School B) had provisionally agreed to participate in the study and we had set up interview and observation rosters. I had already done a pilot interview with the Grade 5 teacher at School B. Everything seemed on track, and I was looking forward to building a relationship of trust with all the teachers. I tried to banish the lingering doubts about the willingness of the two teachers from School A and convinced myself that once the research got going they would become more engaged.

And then two cancellation SMSs appeared on my cell phone inbox in response to my SMS confirming the time and date of the schedules interview. The wording of both messages was the same: "No longer interested". In a subsequent conversation with the two teachers I realised that their initial ambivalence was intensified by the aftermath of the national teachers' strike, which had created a backlog of work as well as simmering tensions in the affected schools. Hence, the political and social landscape had a direct impact on the formation of the study's sample. A third teacher from School C (the Grade 7 English teacher) cancelled because of a family crisis which necessitated extended leave.

This account of teacher recruitment and withdrawals may seem unnecessarily detailed and anecdotal to the reader. However, I am recounting the narrative for a reason: it has important implications for sample selection and the profile of teachers that ultimately participated in the two phases of the study: six white women, all English L1 backgrounds, one coloured woman (English L1) and one black Zimbabwean male (English L2, Shona L1).

The two teachers from School A who withdrew would have diversified the sample in interesting ways, as the Grade 5 teacher is a black woman who graduated from the former Johannesburg College of Education (JCE) fairly recently, while the Grade 7 teacher was of Portuguese descent (English L2). The Grade 7 teacher who withdrew

from School C was of Indian descent (English L1), while the teacher from School B who chose not to participate was a black Zimbabwean woman (English L2). Subsequent attempts to recruit black teachers from another school in the area were unsuccessful, complicated partially by the aftermath of the teachers' strike (the subsequent tension and demoralisation, burdensome catch-up workload, and pressure from the Department of Education).

So what is one to make of this string of withdrawals? What are its implications for classroom-based research, the perceived dynamic between researcher and subject, between white researchers and black teachers? And how could one approach it differently next time? Possibly one needs to work harder at building a relationship with teachers prior to approaching them about participation in a research project. In-service courses, such as the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) currently run at Wits, may be more productive spaces for recruiting participants.

The withdrawal of two of the four Grade 7 English teachers led to another change in my research plan. I decided to focus the in-depth case study and classroom observation on the teachers who were keen to participate, which resulted in the participation of two Grade 6 teachers and two Grade 7 teachers. After I began analysing the interview data I decided to include the Grade 6 teacher from School D (Jane) in the phase two research, as she offered a different perspective on imagination to the other four teachers (i.e. a critical literacy perspective).

This mix of Grade 6 and 7 teachers and classes ultimately proved to be productive in generating a sense of teachers' imaginative writing pedagogies in the final two years of primary school.

5. Conducting interviews

5.1 Interview schedule

During July 2007 I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight teachers from Schools A–D. Each interview took between one hour and one and a half hours. The teachers straddled Grades 5, 6 and 7.

Before discussing the interview schedule in detail, it is necessary to clarify its role in research, and to delineate the role of the research questions and the role of the interview schedule and questions. Research questions formulate what you want to understand while interview questions are what you ask people in order to gain that understanding (Maxwell, 1996). Maxwell comments that researchers often talk about 'translating' research questions into interview questions. He argues that such a view is a remnant of positivist views of the relationship between theory and data that have long been called into question. On the contrary, it is not desirable or feasible to mechanically convert research questions into methods, specifically interview questions. Interview questions must not be judged by whether they resemble the research questions but by whether they generate rich data that contributes towards answering the research questions (ibid: 173-175). My interview questions were open and broad enough to create an imaginative space for teachers to talk about the aspects of teaching writing that they regarded as central to their practice. Specific issues were raised within this broad framework as I hypothesised that specific aspects or genres of teaching writing (such as personal narrative writing) would be located within their practices and beliefs as a whole.

I used a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 2). The schedule was divided into broad categories with specific questions allocated to each category. The broad categories were 1) Current writing practices 2) Teachers' experience of writing – preschools 3) Teachers' experience of writing at school 4) Tertiary Education - Learning to teach writing) 5) In the classroom – Teachers' beliefs about teaching

writing and description of pedagogy and practice. In practice, I worked with the main headings in flexible ways and was guided by the responses of the teachers. The advantage of this was that each interview took its own shape and frequently had a rich, dialogical quality. However, the disadvantage was that there were minor differences in the coverage of issues and questions. For example, I asked some teachers for examples of metaphors that encapsulated their ideas about writing and not others. This was unfortunate as the images that surfaced in interviews were remarkably productive and revealing. In general, the categories that generated the richest and most detailed responses were category 1 and particularly category 5.

Prior to the interviews I faxed teachers an overview of the interview schedule, with key categories that I wanted them to think about in preparation for the interview (see Appendix 1). Each heading was followed by at least one prompt. I developed this preliminary interview schedule to create time and space for the teachers to begin the process of remembering their writing histories in the distance and recent past before the interview.

This is congruent with the notion of memory that I am drawing on. Remembering is a fragmented process that happens in fits and starts and is never a fixed or coherent whole (Hampl, 1999). In addition, the context of remembering has a significant impact on the memories that are selected, the versions that are told, silenced or omitted. Ultimately, an interview of this nature is a representation of the teachers' personal and professional selves, generating a version of events, experiences, memories and ideas that could be represented differently at another time, in another context with a different interviewer. In other words, it has clear limitations, hence the methodological necessity for a classroom observation component to the research.

I hoped that this preliminary schedule would reduce the participant anxiety that is sometimes evoked by being 'put on the spot'. Teachers confirmed that they found it

helpful, and more importantly this was evident in the interviews as will be shown in the section that follows and in Chapters Five and Six. It was clear that teachers arrived at the interview having at least thought about the issues.

5.2 The interview process: memories, artefacts, gaps and silences

The interviews took place in the teachers' classrooms, with the exception of Nhamo and Lisa. The interviews reinforced the view of Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2000: 673) that observation is an integral part of all research methods, and that one draws on observational strategies even when conducting interviews. The interviews were much more than the sum of the words spoken, framed by the teachers' classroom spaces, samples of learners' writing and projects and non-verbal cues. The affective stance of teachers, and the ebb and flow of memories, ideas and moods was particularly striking as they traversed their writing histories, and its intersection with other histories.

One of the benefits of interviewing teachers in the classroom was the availability of an assortment of texts (sometimes piled up on their desks, sometimes already marked and on display elsewhere), and five of the eight interviewees brought these into the interview. Four of the eight teachers showed me examples of learners' writing to illustrate points they made about their practice, in some instances reading these aloud. In addition, two of the teachers shared examples of their own writing (an SMS poem and a poem written as a model of a task for learners). One teacher read aloud an Antjie Krog poem which she felt encapsulated her view of writing. It is important to note that none of this text-sharing was solicited or initiated by me. However, it does indicate that teachers felt that the interview space was flexible and comfortable enough for them to take initiative both in terms of the direction of the dialogue and sharing artefacts.

In the context of the interview as observation, the content of the writing shared was less significant than what it revealed about the relationship between the teachers,

their own texts, and texts written by learners. To some extent, these texts were vehicles through which the teachers represented themselves from personal and professional perspectives. The details of each interview will be discussed and analysed in Chapters Five and Six. The point of mentioning these trends here is to highlight striking trends that generate insights into my methodology and broader methodological issues.

Another striking aspect of the interviews was the teachers' shifting affective stances as they moved from one topic to another, the ebb and flow of the interviews. This became particularly noticeable through linguistic and non-linguistic cues. For example, the tone of voice and the linguistic choices of two of the teachers in particular differed significantly when they contrasted their ideal classroom practice and the constraints of their daily reality. In all eight interviews there were moments of detail, flow, enthusiasm and articulateness interspersed with the fragmentation of ideas, and hesitation. However, this was more marked in some than others.

What is one to make of these shifts? Sometimes moments of fragmentation and hesitation simply related to my question about a concept or idea that they needed more time to process. At other times it was about a memory that could not be accessed (or perhaps they chose not to access in the context of this interview). The majority of teachers struggled to retrieve memories about writing at school, yet they had vivid emotional memories of the boredom and constraints imposed on them. For example, Debby had a strong emotional memory of writing at school but struggled to remember the details of what she had learned. I found the gaps and absence of memories especially about school writing interesting, particularly when juxtaposed with the prevalence of strong negative emotional memories. Silence has its own language and meaning, but by its very nature is difficult to interpret without one being presumptuous. Why do some memories get erased while others continue to shine and shimmer years later?

5.3 Preliminary findings from interviews

Maxwell (1996) argues that it can be a problem if research questions are too focused at an early stage in the research. This may mean that the researcher is working with too many assumptions, and can cause one to overlook important issues that arise. In the case of this research my initial research question was formulated as an inquiry about: *Teachers' conceptions and enactments of personal writing pedagogy*. It emerged in the interviews that this focus on personal narrative writing was too specific and did not correspond with teachers' lived experiences of teaching writing, nor the discursive frameworks of school writing in the intermediate phase. In the interviews teachers spoke extensively about creative and imaginative writing, despite the fact that I asked them general questions about their writing histories, and their writing pedagogies (and two specific questions about personal narrative writing).

Below I summarise the number of times creative writing, creativity, and imagination were mentioned by teachers in the interviews:

Jane: Imagination (5) creative (12) creativity (4) Total = 21

Debby: imagination (8) creative (25) creativity (4) Total= 37

Fiona: Imagination (5) creative (13) creativity (5) Total = 33

Nadine: Creative (12) Creativity (1) Total = 13

Nhamo: Imagination (24) creative (17) imaginative (2) Total = 43

Imagination and imaginative total = 44

Creative and creativity total = 93

Total combined =137

*It must be noted that I conducted two interviews with Nhamo, hence the higher total.

Two unexpected preliminary findings emerged. 1) Despite the fact that I did not ask teachers any specific questions about creative/imaginative writing, they repeatedly offered their thoughts and positions on these concepts, as the above summary vividly illustrates. Furthermore, it became clear that teachers in the intermediate phase equate writing pedagogy with creative writing.

I understand this through the lens of Gubrium and Holstein's theory of interviewing (2001) – the teachers constructed their own version of their reality of teaching writing, and it is a version that places creative and imaginative writing at the centre.

In addition, what emerged is that from the perspective of the teachers imaginative and creative writing are synonymous. However, within school and curriculum discourses, creative writing is far more dominant and popularised than imaginative writing, hence their more frequent use of 'creative writing' and 'creativity'. This is easily understood, given that the Revised National Curriculum statement (RNCS) uses the concepts interchangeably (as illustrated in chapter One, 3.2.3). In addition, academic and pedagogic books on creative writing tend to also use these two concepts interchangeably, though 'creative writing' generally has a much higher profile than 'imaginative writing'

The second finding was that personal narrative writing, where it surfaced, is regarded by teachers as a sub-category of creative/ imaginative writing. I realised that personal narrative writing is not an explicit part of school writing discourses but is embedded within broader categories (See Chapter Three, 1.5.1 for a discussion of personal narrative writing).

Working in an inductive, interactive and naturalistic paradigm, I was responsive and open to these preliminary findings and adjusted the focus of the initial research question appropriately from personal narrative writing to imagination and imaginative writing. The essence of the research question remained the same (i.e. exploring teachers' conceptions and enactments of writing pedagogy) but the object

of inquiry became imagination and imaginative writing. This shift in focus in turn meant that I needed to work with a more suitable theoretical and analytic lens, hence the focus on imagination, its philosophical trajectory, a Vygotskian conceptualisation of imagination and imaginative writing pedagogy within a Vygotskian framework. My working definition of imagination is that it is "an act of mind" that facilitates creative outputs (Vygotsky, 2004; Craft, 2001). Hence, the selection of imagination, with its own specific historical and philosophical trajectory, rather than creativity as the theoretical matrix. (See Chapter Three, section 2, for a discussion of my working definition of these two concepts).

This proved to be a productive move, giving the research a **broader** focus, but still incorporating my interest in personal narrative writing, as the data analysis will illustrate (particularly Chapter Eight on learners' writing). Imaginative writing has also been the object of less attention than personal narrative in the local and international research. Hence the shift in focus gave me scope to make a contribution to an under-researched area.

5.4 Post-interview process: reflective field notes

I taped each interview, and immediately afterwards listened to the tape and jotted down notes. While the impressions were still fresh in my mind I wrote detailed reflective field notes on five of the eight interviews. These constituted a reflective record of the interview with a first layer of analysis, questions and observations. Unfortunately, I did not write reflective field notes for the last three interviews (with Nadine, Jade and Nhamo) as soon afterwards I began classroom observation and my focus shifted to these field notes. I then employed the services of a professional transcriber to transcribe the interviews. I felt that the reflective field notes would be a more productive utilisation of my time than transcription.

I realised the value of the reflective field notes when I begun writing Chapter Five, as they provided a bridge between description and analysis, offering the first basic level

of analysis. The realisation was heightened in the absence of reflective field notes for the interviews with Nhamo and Nadine, as I found it harder to write those sections of Chapters Five and Six. For the writing of Jane's, Debby's and Fiona's interview case studies I had two layers of data to work with (the transcript and reflective field notes), while I only had one level of data for Nhamo and Nadine. The reflective field notes also proved unexpectedly useful in preparing this methodology chapter, as it served as a journal of the interview process.

6. Classroom observation as ongoing negotiation

I observed Nadine, Debby, Fiona and Nhamo between August and October 2007. After analysing the interview data I decided to expand the case study to include Jane. Hence in September 2008 I observed Jane's classes. I observed each of the abovementioned teachers' English classes for two weeks at a time (approximately ten lessons each).

I began with a general checklist as a guideline, but did not refer to the checklist frequently while observing. Instead, I wrote very detailed notes during lessons, capturing the interactions between teacher and learners verbatim as accurately as possible (approximately 50–80 pages of handwritten notes per teacher). On the whole I managed to capture the teachers' words verbatim, but it was harder to capture all the words spoken by learners, especially in highly interactive classes. This was a limitation but the notes were adequate for the purposes of this research with a focus on teachers. Generally, the teacher-centred classes were easier to manage for field note purposes.

I also taped the lessons of four of the five teachers as supplementary data should I have wanted to revisit a specific lesson in more detail. I used these as and when needed in the writing of my classroom observational field notes. I did not tape Nadine's lessons, as she was not comfortable with it. Besides writing verbatim notes

during observation, I also jotted down thoughts, questions and observations about gaps and silences, and made some critical/reflective comments.

I focused on the following elements of the lessons:

Summary of observational guidelines

- Teacher input
- Teacher mediation and scaffolding of tasks
- Teacher modelling of the writing process
- Teacher briefings on writing tasks
- The range of classroom interactions (teacher fronted, group work, level of learner participation)
- Classroom discourses

(See Appendix 3, extended list of observational guidelines.)

I soon realised that there was a missing link in my observational strategy and made the following comment in my formal field notes:

Field notes on Nadine's lesson: 31 July 2007

> I'm realizing that an important aspect of researching writing is to look at the writing produced by the children because writing as an activity is, to a large extent, intangible. It's very different to observing a reading lesson for example where a text is being discussed and analysed. In that situation the children's responses would be more tangible, floating around the classroom and not hidden on a page in a book on the child's desk.

When I conceptualised this research, I always envisaged learner texts as playing a background role, serving possibly as artefacts. However, once I began the observation, I realised that learners' English books would play a vital role in providing a broader curricular frame for the lessons observed. This curricular frame would then

be supplemented by the interview data, where teachers spoke extensively about their classroom writing curriculum. I also began to realise that besides having access to one or two learner books to get an overview, I would also need a sample of learners' writing, preferably on the task produced while I observed. At this stage I still did not have a fully formed idea of what role these texts would play – this would emerge later during the data analysis phase.

The most challenging and thorny aspect of classroom observation was defining my role as researcher, my relationship to the teachers and the learners. I soon realised that the process of getting formal written consents from teachers was simply the starting point for an ongoing process of negotiation. From the outset I defined myself as a 'participant-observer' but needed to clarify the limits of the 'participant' component. What did 'participant-observer' mean in the contexts in which I was working?

The learners generally seemed to forget I was there, other than greeting me when I arrived and asking me the occasional question about a task. However, I was initially unclear about my level of 'participation' in relation to the learners, especially when they were working on tasks. I was unsure whether to be as unobtrusive as possible, or whether it would be appropriate to walk around and see what learners were doing and discussing. In the end, this varied according to the cue that I picked from each teacher. I also became more comfortable about taking a more active role as the research proceeded, and I decided that it was my preferred option, provided the teacher was comfortable with it. In future classroom observation research I would discuss this issue upfront with the teachers, in the same way as I got verbal and written consent to tape record lessons.

In each classroom, with each teacher, the extent of my 'participation' varied according to my perceptions of the boundaries established by the teacher. Some teachers adopted a 'make-yourself-at-home' attitude, while others preferred me to

be less visible. For example, Nadine, Debby and Nhamo sometimes initiated discussions about teaching issues, while the learners were working on a task. Jane and I sometimes spoke after lessons, reflecting on a particular issue that had arisen. Fiona, on the other hand, used the in-between spaces to engage with the learners. My role in these informal discussions with teachers shifted between researcher, colleague and sounding board.

Although all the teachers were really generous and welcoming, I couldn't help feeling like a parasite at times. I frequently felt extremely uncomfortable with this and attempted to ameliorate it by sharing interesting resources about teaching writing, especially at the end of the observation period or in the post-observation meetings. No matter what one does to establish a reciprocal relationship, there is no escaping the fact that the researcher stands to gain more from this kind of research than the participants. This discomfort came sharply into focus when I negotiated with teachers to view and copy learners' books. While the teachers generally were receptive to the request, I felt uncomfortable about having to ask for something else. It was obviously something that had to happen on the teachers' terms (as and when it suited them) and this ultimately meant that I obtained samples of writing tasks from each teacher, but the configurations varied. For example, I got a full set from Nhamo and Fiona and smaller samples from Nadine, Jane and Debby (for logistical reasons). I will refer back to this issue in Chapter Eight, when I analyse learners' writing. I initiated a number of conversations with Fiona about having access to learners' books and I got the impression that she was not comfortable with the idea. After one of these conversations I made the following comment in my field notes:

Extract from field notes, Monday 10 September 2007

> I find the dynamics of classroom observation really difficult at times. I felt intrusive today, putting my tape recorder on Fiona's table and the discussion about looking at students' portfolio work. She's clearly not keen for me to take them away and copy them. Maybe she'll let me look at them on the premises. I really need to see the space stories. Except this isn't about my needs. I'm a visitor in her class, in her personal, private space. She sets the ground rules, not me. I feel that I was an intrusive irritation today in her space, in her face.
>
> Needing, wanting, demanding.

Eventually, I realised that Fiona did not mind giving me access to the learners' books, and making selective copies, provided it was done on the school premises. I mention it here to highlight some of the challenges of fieldwork and the issues that need to be negotiated. In addition, one needs to consider what role ethics plays in these kinds of negotiations. There is a fundamental contradiction at the heart of this kind of research. On the one hand, one wants to follow an ethical protocol and be respectful, and not too pushy. At the same time, one wants to have a full, even dataset, if possible, which does necessitate some negotiation. I will revisit this issue in the concluding comments on research ethics.

7. Analysing the data

7.1 Organising the data/creating categories

> Moving beyond basic description to the next level of analysis, the challenge is to construct categories of themes that capture some recurring patterns that cut across "the preponderance" of the data. (Merriam, 1998: 179)

By the time I began organising the data, I had already written detailed descriptions with a first level of analysis in the interview and classroom observation field notes. I thus had some ideas about the kinds of categories that were emerging. I began with the interview data, reading through all the transcripts and reflective field notes carefully, and began constructing categories, building on the ideas that had emerged from the field notes.

These categories were fairly broad and directly related to the elements of the reshaped research question as follows:

- Teachers' conceptions of imagination and imaginative writing
- Teachers' representations of their classroom practice/imaginative writing pedagogy
- The relationship between teachers' writing histories, their ideas and their practice
- Discourses of imagination, learner capacity and deficit

I then developed more specific categories related to the practice of teaching imaginative writing for Chapters Seven and Eight, regarding the enactment of teachers' ideas/based on the classroom observation. These included:

- Mediation and scaffolding of the imaginative writing process
- Modelling the imaginative writing process
- Classroom discourses

These categories are all interwoven with each other, and build on issues raised in the first two data chapters (Chapters Five and Six). In the analysis of learners' writing, in the second half of Chapter Eight, I developed a further set of specific categories that drew on my theoretical framework of imagination, and moved the analysis to another level. Taking into account the previous three data chapters, this section gave me the opportunity to explore the implications of teachers' ideas and practice for the kind of writing learners produce.

7.2 Analysis and writing

The second stage of the analysis entailed drafting the analysis and discussion. One of the main challenges that I faced was how to organise the data in each chapter, whether to organise the chapters according to themes and theoretical lenses or in case study format, providing a textured account of each teacher's ideas, beliefs and practice. I wanted to capture the richness and the coherence of each case, but at the same time do some comparative analysis per category. Ultimately, I resolved this tension by using a mix of organisational principles.

I organised the first two data chapters (Chapters Five and Six) per teacher. These two chapters are based on the interviews and explore teachers' conceptions and beliefs about imagination, imaginative writing and pedagogy. As these two chapters introduce the five cases, I felt it was important to retain a sense of narrative wholeness.

I faced a more difficult decision with the two chapters that deal with the teachers' practice (Chapters Seven and Eight). It seemed productive and tighter to work comparatively per themes. However, as I began drafting Chapter Seven in a comparative mode, I found it difficult to detach elements of teachers' practices from the whole, the interrelated web of ideas that comprise practice. This quandary is one commonly faced by researchers working with multiple case studies. Miles and Huberman elaborate on this challenge as follows:

> Cross-case analysis is tricky. Simply summarizing superficially across some themes or variables by itself tells us little. We have to look carefully at the complex configuration of processes within each case, understand the local dynamics, before we can begin to see patterning of variables that transcends particular cases. (1994: 205–206)

Miles and Huberman's point about the danger of losing the depth and texture through summarising across themes was one that really concerned me. I thus decided on a compromise. In Chapter Seven, I wrote a detailed case study of two teachers, Fiona and Debby. In Chapter Eight, I used a comparative structure to analyse Nadine, Nhamo and Jane's enactment of practice. The comparison and overview of practice served as a context for the analysis of their learners' writing. Hence, this chapter approached the research question from a different angle to the previous chapter, providing greater breadth than Chapter Seven, while Chapter Seven provides the depth and texture associated with case study reporting. It is important to note that comparison formed a significant part of the analysis, even in the chapters that were organised per teacher. In these chapters (organised per teacher) it took the form of cumulative rather than direct comparison (i.e. concluding comments at the end of chapters).

At the beginning of this chapter, I drew on Richardson's argument about the importance of retaining the voice of the researcher in qualitative research, as well as the 'creativity and sensibilities' of the individual researcher. I now return to this issue and reflect on my tentative answers to Richardson's questions about how we as qualitative researchers insert ourselves into texts and the possible consequences of this (1994: 517). I will do this by describing a particular problem that I encountered in the drafting of my data chapters, where my position on the researcher's voice generated certain challenges.

While writing the draft analysis particularly of Chapters Seven and Eight, pertaining to teachers' classroom practice, I became concerned that at times my tone was too critical and judgemental of the teachers' practice. I was then faced with a dilemma: on the one hand, I needed to analyse the data through the lens of imaginative writing theory and identify presences as well as gaps, silences and absences. This entailed a certain amount of critical reflection on the data, and specifically on teachers' practices, in order to develop my theoretical model. On the other hand, from an ethical perspective, I wanted to write as respectfully and non-judgementally as possible. I then showed the relevant chapter (Chapter Eight) to a critical reader, who confirmed that in the description of the data my voice was too intrusive, and at times had a judgemental tone. The reader suggested that I solve this problem by separating description of the data from critical and reflective comments which could be located near the end of each section. I have reworked the relevant chapter accordingly and I hope that it does read respectfully. I am not convinced, though, that this reorganisation, and adjustment of language, necessarily solves the fundamental problem entirely. I am left with more questions that I had at the outset of this research.

- Is it possible to do classroom-based research through a specific lens without making judgements at some level?
- In the writing and analysis of the data, would a depersonalised, 'omniscient voice' create an illusion of neutrality or would it really facilitate a more respectful tone (towards the participants in the study?)
- Is it possible to retain a strong voice and stance as a researcher and simultaneously write respectfully about the participants in a study?

The predominant method of analysis that I used was thematic content analysis, exploring the patterns and counter-patterns as they emerged. Patterns and themes are identified by initially identifying small units of meaning in the data which are a

springboard for developing larger units and categories of meaning (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994: 128). Language is central to the creation of meaning, the identification of themes, patterns and discontinuities.

I also drew on Discourse analysis (Gee, 1999). I have been working with the notion of the interview as being a representation of the teachers' ideas, belief and practice. Hence, it was important to analyse the mix of discourses that they consciously or unconsciously used in the interview and their implications for the imaginative writing project. I was particularly interested in the language, discourses and images used by teachers in the interviews and in their classrooms.

Both thematic content analysis and Discourse analysis entail sensitivity to language in the construction of meaning. However, Discourse analysis moves beyond individual use of language to the consideration of the broader social and ideological context of language use. One of the concerns of Discourse analysis is consideration of how individual meanings have been produced in larger socio-cultural contexts.

8. Ethical considerations

At the outset of this research project, I followed all the ethical procedures at the university, school and Department of Education levels. I obtained permission from the Gauteng Department of Education, the schools, the teachers who participated in interviews and whose classes I observed. I was as open as possible about the aims of my research with research participants from the outset. I informed participants of their right to privacy and confidentiality and that the identities of the schools, teachers and pupils would be protected. I completed the ethics protocol for submission to the University of the Witwatersrand ethics committee and this was approved. In the writing of the thesis, I used pseudonyms for all the teachers, learners and schools to ensure confidentiality.

However, as I have argued and illustrated throughout this chapter, obtaining formal approval for conducting research from all the relevant institutions and participants is

merely the first step in the process, one that entails ongoing negotiation in specific situations while one is in the field, writing, reflecting and analysing. I am in agreement with Merriam that although researchers can draw on ethical guidelines and regulations, ultimately the responsibility for producing an ethical study, "that has been conducted and disseminated in an ethical manner" (1998: 219), rests with the individual researcher. Merriam concludes that:

> While policies, guidelines and recommendations for dealing with the ethical dimensions of qualitative research are available to researchers, actual ethical practice comes down to the researcher's own values and ethics. (218)

Member checks are an important aspect of ethical procedures. It entails checking research findings "in accordance with trustworthiness procedures and gaining closure" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:235). This means that the researcher takes the provisional report back to the research site and to the informants. The aim of member checks is "to obtain confirmation that the report has captured the data as constructed by the informants, or to correct, amend or extend it, that is, to establish the credibility of the report" (ibid: 236) Another aim of member checks can be to generate further dialogue and enable respondents to take up new subject positions in relation to the written report.

I have conducted member checks. I provided all the teachers with copies of relevant chapters of this thesis and asked them to read the chapters and make notes of their comments and responses. I then met with each teacher individually and they discussed their responses. I also asked them to inform me if there was anything factually incorrect and if they disagreed with any of my interpretations of their interviews and their classroom practice. The teachers were mostly in agreement with my interpretations. On the occasions where teachers disagreed with my interpretation or felt it required further clarification, I have made the necessary adjustment in the relevant data chapters.

An interesting and unexpected consequence of the member check process was that all five teachers seemed to regard this process as a learning experience and found the process of reading the chapters enriching from personal and professional perspectives. Nadine commented that reading the chapters about her classroom practice was “a wake -up call” which motivated her to take her ideas further while Jane commented: “You are articulating what I can’t articulate” in relation to the analysis of the crux of her pedagogical beliefs. Teachers’ comments were not restricted to my representation of them in the thesis, but also to issues raised in the chapters by other teachers. The dialogue that began during the interviews in 2007, thus continued.

Chapter Five: Teachers' conceptions of imaginative writing: Ambivalence, opposition and deficit

In this chapter, I will discuss three teachers' conceptions of imagination and imaginative writing as articulated by teachers in the interviews. I will begin with each teacher's personal writing history, and this will be followed by a discussion of their conceptions of imaginative writing and representations of their imaginative writing pedagogy. Finally, I will analyse how their views of imagination relate to the theoretical lenses outlined in Chapters Two and Three. The question of how their beliefs are shaped by broader discourses cuts across all categories. I am particularly interested in the personal, social, historical, and institutional shaping of their ideas and beliefs.

While the discussion is organised around categories, it is important to note that these categories are closely related, and at times there will be overlaps between categories. For example, teachers' personal beliefs about imaginative writing are embedded in both representations of their personal histories and their classroom practice. In addition, as explained in the methodology chapter, I conducted these interviews in fairly fluid and flexible ways. Hence, although categories broadly cover the same issues, there are different emphases per teacher.

This chapter will focus on Jane, Debby and Nhamo. Although there are distinct differences in the views they express, certain common themes and concerns emerged in all three interviews – i.e. ambivalence, opposition and deficit.

How did the three teachers interviewed engage with the issues discussed in the theoretical framework? Which positions did they occupy? I begin with discussions of Jane and Debby, who both expressed strong views contesting the value of imagination and imaginative writing but for very different reasons and from vastly different worldviews. Then I will discuss the views of Nhamo.

1. Jane: A voice for the voiceless (School D)

The interview with Jane was lively and discursive, almost turning into a debate at times. Jane was a very forthcoming interviewee and she did not hold back from offering views that clearly contested the premise of this research project. The combination of all these factors made the interview more like a dynamic and dialogical conversation.

1.1 Jane's personal writing history: A spear and a town crier

The most striking aspect about Jane's interview was her passion for social justice, purposeful writing tasks and the notion of voice. Concern about voice for Jane as a writer and teacher was a central thread that ran through the interview. This was powerfully reinforced when Jane spoke about the images she associated with writing.

For Jane writing is both a spear and a town crier. She associates the spear with personal writing – for example, the poetry she jots down in her notebook in her private life or an SMS poem she wrote about a friend who died. She explained that a spear is very penetrating, like personal writing that 'pokes the soul'. She acknowledged that writing is also a weapon that can do damage. But her overriding concern is that writing is a weapon that can bring about positive social change.

The image of the town crier is equally fascinating and completely congruent with the dominant themes that emerged during the interview. The town crier has to repeat the same information over and over in the hope that everyone who needs to hear will receive the information. In the same way, for Jane writing is about asserting her voice, being able to share her ideas and influence people's thinking.

Jane explained that it can be alienating to have a set of ideas that one is unable to share. For instance, she has a strong social justice agenda, and not everybody at School D shares that vision. It is frustrating for her to have these ideas and to have

nobody to tell, or to have a reluctant, resistant audience that hears but does not listen. She explained:

> You feel like a hermit … who are you going to tell? … you want to try and influence things but if people don't want to listen you can't influence them.

Jane regards the town crier image as reflecting writing in public spaces and the spear as relating to the internal, personal and private spaces. Yet, although these are two very different images they both ultimately reflect a deep concern with the social context in which writing and ideas are formulated. The personal and the political are intertwined.

Jane's writing histories – especially at school level – was largely present in its absence and gaps. Jane summed up these scarce memories as follows:

> Pre-school writing: visceral and visual; the smell of wax crayons; writing on the wall; reading on mom's lap; stories read with expression.
>
> School writing: boring, meaningless, purposeless teacher-imposed topics.
>
> There was lots of reading and analysis of literature. *But NOTHING, NOTHING, NOTHING in terms of writing.*

The images above evoke the all too common trajectory from a contextualised, nurturing home literacy environment to the meaninglessness of school literacy, particularly schooled writing. Jane only had one positive memory of school writing and it seems this was too little, too late. She wrote a Grade 12 essay which invited her opinion on a topic she felt strongly about. It was the only school writing task where Jane felt she had an opportunity to articulate her voice, to engage with an issue and give her opinion. Like most of the teachers' memories about school writing, finding a positive memory was like searching for a jewel in an abandoned, long-forgotten wasteland.

For Jane, the real breakthrough in writing happened when she began to do postgraduate studies: an Honours in Education and a Master's in Peace Studies (still in process). This was a "liberating experience". For the first time she was encouraged to express her views, to develop her own voice, and achieve new understandings. She found a new purpose for writing. This positive trend continued with her MA studies. She was praised for her essays and her writing style. It was very affirming for her to discover that she could write well and logically.

These postgraduate writing experiences are in contrast to the way her writing was viewed at School D. She had a negative experience with report writing. She wrote a report too quickly and was too blunt about her views. The school management's response to this report was extremely negative. They criticised her for "being herself" on paper.

1.2 Jane's view of imaginative writing and implications for her pedagogy

Jane feels strongly that fictional and imaginative writing does not have a purpose and is a waste of precious time in a crowded curriculum. She critiqued imaginative, creative writing at length in relation to her own beliefs about writing pedagogy. Jane has been teaching for many years and articulated her own pedagogy with conviction and confidence.

Jane referred to an instance of round-robin story-writing (chain writing) that she did with her learners about a starfish, an idea that she drew from a textbook. Jane expressed reservations about the value of such an exercise:

> But once again, what are you really doing there? Are you building a story? Is it relevant in my life?

Jane reiterated that she is "not that sort of person" (i.e. the kind of person/teacher interested in working with learners' fictional stories). It is notable that her word choice referred to herself as a person, rather than a teacher – suggesting that her

teaching is an expression of her identity at many levels. She expands on her approach as follows:

> You see, on the fictional side I'm not that sort of person, so I go for more functional writing. More skills-based, because the kids need to be able to write a CV. They need to be able to write an e-mail. ... Our kids are getting out there and they're illiterate in that sort of sense. And I'm saying, well *I'm a teacher and I should be fixing that!* The starfish has got nothing to do with their lives in the future. They can pick up a book and read about a starfish. So I'm pushing the sort of creative side that way.

This comment reveals a number of interesting concerns and assumptions. Firstly, it is clear that Jane feels a deep sense of responsibility to her learners to prepare them for their lives and the world of work. At this point she seems to be drawing on functionalist discourses, verging on instrumentalism. Her repetition of the words 'need' and the use of 'our kids' also show a level of ownership and connection. Towards the end of the comment Jane asserts a more specific teacher identity and the related responsibility to 'fix' literacy problems. The notion of 'fixing' speaks to a functionalist discourse, one that verges on a deficit discourse. Jane also made this point strongly, shifting her tone to one of even deeper conviction and emphasis, hence the use of italics for that section of the extract.

When Jane first mentioned functional writing I assumed she meant transactional writing with a narrow focus. However, it became clear that she is referring to a much broader set of parameters. This includes any writing she considers valuable for the learners in terms of skills development and critical thinking. On the other hand, she believes that creative work is located outside the parameters of useful work, a distraction from the real work that needs to be done, unless it is framed within a relevant, purposeful context. Jane acknowledged that her negative view of creative writing has been shaped by her experience of school writing and that teacher

training did little to alter this perception. However, she confirmed that while she rejects this version of creative writing (which she sees as the dominant version in schools), she does see scope for another kind of creative writing that can help to develop learners' critical thinking and social justice perspectives. This idea will be analysed in further detail in 1.3.[5]

In response to Jane's critique of creative writing, I asked her what she considers to be the benefits of personal, creative writing. Her reply was interesting in terms of content and word choice.

> It's stimulating the imagination. It's **probably** useful for innovation. But once again you see how that links to functional then? So I keep looking for the functional. Harry Potter? What has it done? It's ... stimulated the imagination. Has it helped the world? Yes, **probably** there's some morals that can be told via the story which is of **possible use.** I want use. I don't want just pure imagination, which ... I don't know ... it's something in me.

Jane's choice of words here are in stark contrast to the very definite, powerful way in which she articulated her ideas about functional writing. Although she acknowledges that there are benefits to imaginative work, all the benefits are framed with words that indicate uncertainty and doubt (probably, possible etc.) and are evaluated in terms of level of functionality and use. She ends her answer by asserting what she wants and what she doesn't want, in effect negating any positive benefits for imagination that she mentioned earlier in the answer. I found it fascinating that the final line of Jane's answer tailed off into total uncertainty and then was directly related to Jane's own sense of identity and self. This is consistent with other comments made in the interview (e.g. "I'm not that sort of person"), which suggests

[5] In the initial interview, Jane expressed outright rejection of imaginative writing. However, after reading this chapter she modified her position and argued for a version of imaginative writing that can broaden learners' critical thinking and engagement with social justice.

a strong connection between her pedagogy and her own identity and history – that in some sense pedagogy is an expression of the self This is consistent with Danielewicz's notion of "teaching selves" and her argument that classroom practice entails enactments of teachers' beliefs and selves (2001: 174).

Jane's 'teaching identity' importantly also needs to be located in the context of the institutional context of her work (School D) as well as the broader social context of a post-apartheid, transforming South African society. The notion of empowering learners through explicit building of their skills was consistently articulated in interviews with all three teachers from School D (although each teacher had her own interpretation of this approach in relation to her own worldview and history).

Jane has serious reservations about the value of imaginative fictional work, what she refers to as "the fairy in the garden, that sort of thing." However, she values cross-cultural storytelling. To illustrate this point she gave an example of a storytelling task, where the learners had to collect stories from their families and share them with the class. Jane contrasted the value of this task with another task that entailed learners writing their own endings to African folk tales. Jane commented on this second task as follows:

> You know there's sort of "Why did the python lose his skin?" And then you read the first half of it and then finish it off. But it's made up. (Laughs) I'm just saying you know *what's the point of why he loses his skin! … How is that [going to] help a child ever in their lives?*

Hence, from Jane's perspective 'made-up stories' based on 'pure imagination' have no relationship to higher-level thinking and critical thinking. In contrast, cross-cultural storytelling is based on real historical and social experiences and can thus play a role in broadening learners' worldviews and understanding of others. The cognitive and affective processes required for these two different task types are totally unrelated. Imagination and imaginative work exist outside these parameters.

This assumes that there is such an entity as pure imagination, unrelated to reality and other aspects of mental functioning. This view of the imagination as a separate faculty of the mind has strong resonances with Western philosophical conceptualisations of the imagination, from Plato to Kant, as outlined in Chapter Two.

1.2.1 Voice, 'real-life stuff' and imagination

Jane places a strong emphasis on the personal and the voice in the context of social issues – what she calls 'real-life' stuff. She wants to teach her students to be articulate, to express themselves powerfully, to have a voice and to be able to impact on the world. This preoccupation with voice in the classroom is closely related to Jane's image of the town crier, and the role of voice in her own personal writing history. She explained her view of voice in relation to writing pedagogy:

> To me, I'm probably not very good in that way [with creative work], in that I...there has to be *purpose* for writing. I can't stand just making up a writing lesson. Or a writing skill lesson. It's frustrating. I need to have a reason to write. So it could be ... we wrote letters about objecting to the name change. ... So that's the purpose of writing. It's also showing the kids that you have a voice through the newspaper.

The notion of voice is central to Jane's pedagogy. She has quite a multifaceted understanding of voice. Her key concern is to empower her learners to be able to articulate their ideas and make themselves heard. But Jane's notion of voice goes beyond the liberal-humanist, individualist version of voice as the expression of a unique self. Jane's selection of themes, activities and materials also promote learners' engagement with marginalised communities and human rights issues. In some cases her curriculum creates 'a voice for the voiceless', an idea that Jane mentioned in relation to animal rights but could equally apply to the way she exposed learners to the experiences of refugees.

Learners attended a presentation of a research report on refugees presented by a refugee, and with refugees in the audience. One of Jane's main aims was for the learners to realise that refugees are people too and are very different to the stereotypes frequently portrayed in the media of helpless victims who have little to offer. Jane then built on this experience by following it up with an African poetry writing lesson where learners drew on their experience of the refugees' presentation. This process illustrated her notion of 'real-life' teaching as she explained below:

> But that's the kind of thing that I do. It's coming from something real. It mustn't be constructed or ... you open the textbook and I've got to write on this. I can't stand it.

Jane explained the social, historical and political roots of her concerns about voice that points to the crux of her philosophy. I remember the moment when she made the comment and how powerful it felt then and how powerful it still feels when I re-read it:

> And as I say, the voice stuff is really important to me. That is ... it's because I'm a political animal, I was trained growing up, the context of South Africa got to me, and it's not going to happen to any child here. I teach them bias. I teach them how to read and detect bias ... I *then* try and get them to write in an objective way. That's something else I concentrate on. So *that's my passion*. The creativity stuff gets pushed.

What I find particularly powerful about this comment is the way in which Jane's personal history, her identity and the socio-political history of South Africa are interwoven, shaping her commitment to a critical pedagogy. There was a definite shift in her tone and voice when she said "and it's not going to happen to any child here" to one of determination and deep conviction. She is referring to apartheid education and the ways in which black learners were silenced and subjected to the

worst kind of rote learning, all of this underpinned by the ideology that black children were being prepared to be manual labourers and to serve whites. However, this comment (particularly "the context of South Africa got to me") also reveals Jane's rejection of her own "apprenticeship of observation" (Johnson, 1999), where myths were perpetuated and white learners were silenced too. 'Apprenticeship of observation' refers to the impact of teachers' own schooling experiences on their conceptions and enactment of practice. While teachers frequently teach the way they were taught, Jane views her 'apprenticeship of observation' as a model of how not to teach.

Another significant aspect of this comment is the mix of discourses, an overlapping of critical pedagogy and a liberal notion of 'critical thinking' that suggests it is possible and desirable "to create objective distance in pursuit of rational questioning procedures" (Norton, 2004: 104). This mix of discourses is illustrated in her comment that she tries to teach her learners how to "detect bias" and how "to write in an objective way". However, it is juxtaposed with other comments throughout the interview that assume a critical approach that is centrally concerned with social change. The overriding sentiment is strongly and unambiguously one of social justice, when read in relation to the rest of the interview. Jane has developed her own brand of critical pedagogy and critical literacy that ties in with her values, beliefs, history, and teaching context. This is congruent with Comber's point that critical literacy has created a "repertoire of practices" (Comber, 2006: 54) that teachers can adapt to their specific work contexts.

It is also necessary to differentiate between critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 1993) and critical literacy (Janks, 1993, 2000; Comber, 2006; Mellor & Patterson, 1996) as I am aware that I use these terms interchangeably. Critical pedagogy and critical literacy both share a central concern with curriculum, social justice and questions of power. However, critical literacy is more language-based, while critical pedagogy has broader application across disciplines. The differences are

not always clear-cut, though, and there is overlap. Although Jane draws on both these approaches, ultimately she draws more consistently on critical pedagogy as she applies this across disciplines (including English, Social Studies, Lifeskills and Religious Studies).

Jane's notion of voice resonates with the critical pedagogy version of voice as outlined by Lensmire (2000). She is interested in eliciting learners' voices in relation to social issues. While process-writing proponents are concerned with self-expression in relation to individual experiences, Jane's focus on "real-life experiences" focuses on the social dimension of experience and imagining others' lives and experiences. However, Jane emphasises that while she foregrounds social issues she also values personal self-expression. Moreover, she views the social and personal to be interconnected, and argues that the personal is embedded in all writing. For example, even when learners are writing in the persona of someone else, they express an aspect of themselves.

She is adamant that writing must not happen in a vacuum. It must emerge from students' engagement and involvement with a real-life trigger. This could be a poem, an art work, newspaper article or a talk. She encourages learners to draw on each other, and broader societal issues as generated by 'real-life triggers'. Read through the lens of critical pedagogy, voice is viewed as a 'collective resource', shaped by the classroom community of learners and artefacts from the broader society.

I pointed out to Jane that her concern with voice and her dismissal of imaginative/fictional writing seemed to be contradictory. Jane responded by expanding on some of the pitfalls and problems of doing imaginative writing with Grade 6s. She commented that enabling learners to produce "something good" requires an enormous amount of time and effort. Jane made an interesting subsequent comment about the mismatch between excessive scaffolding and creativity:

> They [the weaker learners] just need so much more scaffolding, the steps. Then you think, well is this creative or are you actually writing the thing for them? You know?

This question has stayed with me throughout this research process and is a key question. It resonates with the critique of 'one-way' scaffolding as a form of transmission (Daniels, 2001), raising the debates about the role of structure as a facilitator of imagination and as an obstacle. This is an issue that I will address in detail in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Throughout this analysis, Jane's image of the town crier is foregrounded at the expense of the spear, the notion of the private, inner voice. One wonders what happens to Jane's notion of the spear in her formulation of writing pedagogy. Put another way, how do the notion of inner voice and voice as collective and social resource speak to each other? This is a question about Jane that has broader application to socio-cultural theories of writing pedagogy. From a Vygotskian perspective, there is an ongoing dialectic between the two aspects of voice – the inner and the outer (social/public) voice. And thus both aspects of voice are socially shaped and reshaped by engagement with peers, teachers and other multiple sources of input. The personal is always embedded in the social; hence learners are working simultaneously *on* and *with* both elements of voice and the self. Jane provides the beginnings of an answer to this question. She explains that the writing produced by the learners (especially where learners take on other personas and perspectives) gives the reader (i.e. Jane as teacher) insight into the private world and identity of the writer, but also gives the writer insight into other possibilities and other worlds. This explanation highlights the process through which the self is both expressed and reconfigured through writing and its impact on audience, in this case the teacher.

1.3 Linking Jane's conceptualisation of imaginative writing to theory

In conclusion, Jane draws on a mix of functional, critical literacy and critical pedagogy discourses, though ultimately her passion is for social justice work and the functional aspect of her pedagogy is really a vehicle for attaining her social justice goals. The functional discourse seems to be partially drawn from the institutional space of her school, where it is possibly a misnomer for empowering education rather than the narrow, instrumentalist version of functionalism.

Jane views the process of empowering her learners with the confidence and skills to articulate their ideas in the 'real world' as being very far removed from imaginative work (in fact detracting from the 'real work' that needs to be done) Yet, the work Jane describes demands a high level of imagination from the learners and is an excellent example of narrating other lives (category 2) or what Vygotsky calls imaginative writing that corresponds to some real-life phenomenon. Her pedagogical goals are congruent with Vygotsky's argument that this sort of imaginative writing broadens the writer's worldview and enables him to move beyond the narrow boundaries of his own life. She exposes learners to the experiences of others through interviews, talks and texts and they then make the imaginative, cognitive and affective leap into that person's experience.

Why then is Jane so adamant that she does not do imaginative work? As I have illustrated, from a Vygotskian perspective, Jane is doing highly sophisticated imaginative work, but the Discourses which frame her thinking limit the formulation of a broader, synthesised conceptualisation of imagination. As discussed in the preceding chapters, imagination has been sidelined in educational discourse and more specifically in writing pedagogy debates. The Platonic notion of imagination as a separate faculty of the mind, though discredited, still permeates contemporary understandings. The positioning of imagination and imaginative writing in the curriculum documents (as discussed in Chapter One) also plays a role in 'keeping imagination in its playpen'. In all of these discursive contexts, imagination has been

constructed in binarised ways, leaving little space for creative synthesis of supposedly opposite ideas. It seems that Jane rejects the above, binarised version of imaginative writing but is open to other versions and possibilities along Vygotskian lines.

The question that remains is: what are the implications of this discursive framing of Jane's writing pedagogy? How does it impact on her classroom practice and to what extent does it limit the imaginative project (if at all). I will answer this question in Chapter Eight, in relation to analysis of Jane's classroom practice and her learners' writing.

2. Debby: In search of the magic of the fairies (School B)

The interview with Debby was rich and fascinating but when I reflected on it afterwards, it felt like an intricate puzzle with some pieces that did not fit. She is passionate about teaching and highly committed to her learners. Yet she articulates an elitist view of imaginative writing that suggests a deficit view of her learners. There were moments that were puzzling and contradictory. In the discussion that follows I try and understand the puzzle and find the missing pieces.

2.1 Debby's personal writing history: Going underground

Debby views writing as a private and solitary pursuit as well as an outlet for her emotions. She didn't write much when she was younger and this includes adolescence and early adulthood. As a wife and mother she didn't find "a room of her own" (Woolf, 1929). However, as she gets older she finds more time to write and has a greater need to express her feelings. Debby commented on the role of writing in her life:

> Now it plays a very big role, but when you are young it plays a very small role in your life. Because you … I think writing becomes more important as you get older because it's about finding yourself and your feelings.

Writing is thus an important space for self-discovery and self-expression, a place to record and revisit emotions. Debby's writing mainly takes the form of diary writing where she focuses on 'emotional issues'. In contrast, Debby's memories of school were dominated by images of fear and silence. This despite the fact that she attended the 1950s version of 'excellent schools'. Debby only had one specific memory of school writing:

> They were called essays in those days. And then they would say, your homework is to write an essay about the stormy weather or a veld fire. They were boring.

What is striking about this memory is Debby's recurrent use of the third-person 'they', indicating an absence of possibilities for ownership and engagement with the writing process. The imposition by teachers of arbitrary writing topics on learners was one of the hallmarks of the product approach to writing. Debby's brief writing memory can be read against the broader educational context of her schooling. She described it as a 'stifling' institution that engendered fear and rewarded rote learning and conformity. This context would clearly have militated against writing as a form of self-expression and self-discovery. She recounts one such memory as follows:

> I just remember just sitting silently. I don't remember ... when I see my kids having such *fun, enjoying it*, I just remember *fear*. Terrible fear at school. ...we were kind of blocked. You had to learn rote. You went and learned everything and you had to spit it out in exams.

Debby used an extract from a poem by Antjie Krog, a critically acclaimed South African poet, to express her own beliefs about writing, to represent her own relationship to writing, and to speak through the poem about the role of writing in her life. She read this poem aloud at the outset of the interview, which then set the tone for the rest of the interview. She introduced the poem as follows:

And I'll just read something to you that Antjie Krog said, just to tell you where I am about writing. Because very few people go here.

Writing Ode, by Antjie Krog (an extract)

To be able to write one has to enter the self

by going beyond the limits imposed by the self

one had to leave the daylight

the drag of fabricated voices

and go underground

one travels like a thought

It is quiet there

And completely cut-off

Safe private

One touches down the damp inside

One gropes through the groundless dark

to find one's voice

to hear the sound of a poem

the line that softly splutters from somewhere

and the writing, the writing down, takes place

in wresting the self down

Krog's representation of writing in this poem reinforces Debby's comments about writing. Her selection of the poem reveals that she embraces some of the key ideas of the Romantic poets regarding imagination and writing, as discussed in Chapter

Two (1.3). These include the individualistic and solitary nature of writing. The notion of 'going underground' resonates with Shelley's metaphor of the poet as nightingale "who sits in darkness" (Shelley, 1821: 19) and indicates a need to break away from societal engagement in order to write. In the same vein, the notion of voice and selfhood is located internally. The point of this discussion is not to do an analysis of Krog's poem, but rather to highlight key issues that are congruent with Debby's stated view of writing, and that will be developed further in relation to her pedagogical ideas. The poem provided a reference point for the rest of the interview, where Debby frequently referred to one or two key images from the poem ('going underground', 'the line that softly splutters') in relation to her learners' own attempts to write.

2.2 Debby's view of imaginative writing pedagogy and implications for practice

Debby's description of her pedagogy and the writing produced by her learners seemed to run parallel to her conceptualisation of imaginative writing. In a sense, this was the aspect of the interview that was contradictory and confusing. In order to make sense of this, I have separated these two aspects into two separate subsections. I thus begin with Debby's description of her practice and then move to her conceptualisation of imaginative writing.

2.2.1 Writing pedagogy: "the line that softly splutters from somewhere"

Throughout the interview I found it difficult to pin down Debby's writing pedagogy, as she resisted my attempts to probe further on this issue. In the context of the interview and in my reading of the interview as text afterwards, her pedagogy does not emerge clearly or explicitly. Debby's ideas are, at times, mediated through other texts and voices, carrying strong traces of influential people in her life. One such example is her description of her ex-colleague, Mary. They taught together at School R. Her strongest belief about teaching English emerged when she described Mary's

powerful impact on her ideas about teaching English. This was the first time in the interview that Debby expressed enthusiasm about her own learning experiences:

> She *retaught* me how to teach English … very late in life … I was 40ish.
>
> Mary was outstanding and had her own ideas, not drawn from books but from her own experience.

One of the most important ideas that Mary shared with her was the following:

> English must live. They must be speaking it. You can't just write and write and fill in another worksheet and fill in … do another … comprehensions are wonderful, I do a lot of them but they need to be acted out and brought to life.

In terms of the history of language pedagogy, the approach that Debby learned from Mary represents a shift from traditional language pedagogy towards communicative language teaching, an integration of the four key skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) and a more activity-based, learner-centred approach. This approach has become mainstream and is embedded in the curriculum documents and contemporary textbooks. Debby also explained that theme-based work is central to her teaching, and that she uses the extensive input from the themes to stimulate their writing. She believes that learners cannot write without input. However, it seems that the input she refers to is thematic, content-based input rather than linguistic and genre input about how to construct a particular text. This impression was later confirmed during my observation of Debby's lessons.

When I asked Debby to describe her approach to teaching writing, she replied that it is essentially a hit-and-miss process.

Referring to a task that worked really well, Debby reflected:

> I set the scene that day and they gave me good stuff. But sometimes I could do exactly the same stuff and I get pathetic work. It kind of doesn't … I'm not sure what makes them write properly to tell you the honest truth.

Debby spoke about her use of aspects of a process approach to writing. She argues that if she is going to do creative writing, she needs to do it properly, and there is no such thing as a 'quick fix'. She needs time to guide the learners through the process one step at a time. There must be time for peer feedback, reading sections to each other and then it takes Debby a long time to mark it.

> I like to mark it thoroughly, I don't like to just tick and write. I always assess them with proper assessment sheets.

Ironically, Debby does not do creative writing that often precisely because it is so labour-intensive. Debby is insistent that only the neat, final version of the story is pasted into their books. So in effect there is no record of the drafting process, and it does not feed into the final mark.

Debbie is always on the alert for the lines in her learners' writing that 'splutter from somewhere' but argues that "very few learners ever get there". Despite her reservations about learners' capacity for good writing, Debbie was clearly extremely proud of some of the work they produced. During the interview, we sat at Debby's desk surrounded by different piles of learners' books and aside from reading two Krog poems aloud, at various intervals Debby pulled out a learner's text and proudly shared good extracts from their writing with me. Debby had been doing an earth theme with her Grade 6s and had asked them to imagine they were an animal who was about to become extinct.

After reading aloud one particular imaginative story written by a learner, Debbie enthused:

> So the facts were not quite right but I just thought it was **beautiful**. ... And I always think that it is too **thrilling**! And very few children can write like that. ... and this was just completely make believe, not fact. And I thought it was very **wonderful**. (Laughs) And she's by far not my top child at all. But she has the ... what does Antjie Krog call it? "The splutter from somewhere".

The use of a range of positive adjectives ('beautiful', 'thrilling', 'very wonderful') creates the impression that Debby really believes in her learners and celebrates their achievement, almost in a maternal way. Debby described a recent creative-writing exercise that she did with her learners with a similar level of excitement. She turned all the desks in the classroom around and instructed learners to sit anywhere. Having disrupted their comfort zones, she told them to write from their new perspectives.

> And so for 20 minutes they sat and wrote *furiously*! And I can't tell you the beautiful stories I got. And that is from no preparation whatsoever. That was just to see how they would react to a different situation. (Laughs)

The final aspect of Debby's pedagogy that I wanted to comment on is her view on the role of grammar in teaching writing. She believes that teaching grammar is important and that it is 'teachable' as opposed to imagination and creativity.

> That's what I always say. I can teach you to write the correct sentence but I can't teach you to be too creative.

When I probed and asked Debby if she thinks knowledge of grammar helps to improve learners' writing she replied, "Not really, but they have to structure the language." In other words learners need to know the basic rules and metalanguage of the grammatical system but it may not transfer into their written language.

2.2.2 Debby's conceptualisation of imaginative writing

There seemed to be a tension between Debby's pride and enthusiasm about the learners' writing and her beliefs about their capacity to write imaginative stories. In the section that follows I discuss **three arguments** that Debby made about the limitations of learners' capacities to write imaginatively. **Her first argument** is an elitist one – i.e. that few people are capable of 'going underground', and that children have a limited capacity for creative writing:

> So to try and teach young children to write creatively is *very* difficult and not that successful because they haven't got the **experience** to draw from. So there are very, very few really **born writers**.

In the above quote, Debby argues that creative writing requires the writer to draw on a repertoire of experiences that children do not yet have. Although Debby does not define 'experience', one must assume that it includes emotional and cognitive development. From a Vygotskian perspective, experience includes access to socio-cultural resources and tools (Vygotsky, 2004: 14–15). Debby is thus suggesting that teachers are unlikely to teach creative writing successfully to children, as they are not developmentally ready for this kind of writing. In addition to this age-related limitation, Debby takes an elitist view on writing skills, arguing that creative writing is an innate talent that one either has or does not. This argument is introduced in the comment above with the use of the phrase 'born writers'. This argument results in a defeatist and disempowering position for teachers who wish to teach imaginative writing.

Debby's **second argument**. focuses on race as a category to explain her learners' limited imaginative capacity. She introduces this point through a discussion of learners' responses to fantasy genre.

> I've tried doing *The Hobbit*. They find it very difficult. I haven't had too much luck with that. That is really stretching the imagination and I find African

> children with less [of] the imagination than white children. You can cut that off if you want. But I really do and again I think it's the two-dimensional. They seem two-dimensional for me. They don't have the magic of the fairies. And the love of animals.

This is a discursively interesting moment in the interview as Debby is aware that the argument she presents may be read as racist and politically incorrect (hence her comment "You can cut that off if you want"). At the same time, it presents me as researcher with a quandary. Do I simply respond in a neutral way or do I offer alternative explanations to this seemingly reductionist/essentialist view? I decide to follow the latter route.

Debby then explores the implications of this limitation for imaginative writing. She describes her attempts to facilitate learners' poetry writing. This generated an interesting discussion in which I tried to untangle race and class in order to understand better the stereotypes emerging.

> Debby: ... but they're starting [to write poetry]. They're starting to kind of think, ooh, this is fun. Or they write songs.
>
> Belinda: Yes, that's a nice way, because they can kind of relate to that. And it's actually very similar.
>
> Debby: But not at this age, I haven't found it. Or else I don't know the difference ... you might be able to see this ... between African children and white children. I don't think they have too much background of books at home.
>
> Belinda: These children that you have here?
>
> Debby: Yes. Very little. Whereas I think, I know my daughter has taught at Smithfield College and you're getting far more creative children, who are writing excellent poetry at this age, where they're not at all.

Debby slides between race and class as categories. For example, her comment about "backgrounds of books at home" has been identified as a key factor in children's' literacy development. Brice-Heath's longitudinal ethnographic research (1983) highlights the ways in which middle-class children are privileged at school by their exposure to literacy-rich environments at home. The working-class children in her study were exposed to a different set of literacy practices that did not prepare them for school literacies in the same way as middle-class children. While Heath does not make value judgements about these different sets of literacy practices, she argues that middle-class children enter the schooling system armed with "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1991). In a South African context, the PIRLS study has reached similar conclusions. Howie et al.'s findings confirm the hypothesis that "learners from educationally advantaged homes with literacy resources have a better chance of achieving literacy than less resourced peers" (2008: 62). The recommendation that arises from this finding is that schools must compensate for 'minimal home opportunities' offered to children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Debby's reference to Smithfield College as a point of comparison reinforces my view that she is partly talking about class. Smithfield is an expensive private school. My understanding is that the children who attend Smithfield are from a range of ethnic backgrounds but would all be drawn from upper-middle-class income groups.

Debby did not foreground the issue of language, and the fact that English is a second or third language for most of her learners at any point in the interview. However, in response to my question, she made the following comments:

> Belinda: And in terms of writing and in terms of English being a second or third language for most of them ... what role do you think that plays?
>
> Debby: I'm sure it [English being second or third language for learners] plays a huge role, because although we try and get them to speak English in the

> classroom ... they are not speaking English. They don't speak English in the playground. We've got teachers that don't speak English properly.

This comment does not shed much light on the role of English as LoLT and its impact on the learners' struggles to write imaginatively. However, it does resonate in interesting ways with Heugh's research (2000) and concerns about teachers' struggles to teach writing when they themselves are not comfortable (or fully proficient) in English (see Chapter One, 4.2.2 for earlier discussion).

I asked Debby how she thinks imaginative writing could be developed further. I was hoping this question would generate some clarity on Debby's beliefs about teaching writing, as thus far she had resisted pinning her pedagogy down. Debby's reply returned to the Antjie Krog poem as a central reference point, highlighting why she had used it as a starting point for the interview.

> I don't think you can develop it. That's why I read that Antjie Krog. I don't think they are ever going ... well not ever; very few are going to go underground .... And I've been teaching African children for 10 years, and I have seldom come up with really, really good work.

Debby based this comment on her experience of teaching at School R many years ago (when she was in her 40s) and in her mind this experience is a yardstick against which others are measured, particularly in terms of the quality of writing produced by the [white] learners.

> I can remember at School R teaching, reading these *amazing* stories. That start and finish as whole wonderful creative stories! We're not getting that.

Debby seems to have an idealised memory of her time at School R, both in terms of the learners' capacities and her significant encounter with Mary (discussed in 2.1). She uses School R as a point of comparison, with race as the key category. This powerful memory has been frozen in time. However, what she's not taking into account is that the whole landscape of writing and reading has changed in the past

20 years, with the predominance of multimedia, the internet, blogging, sms technology etc. All the teachers have raised this point in the interview, mostly seeing it as a stumbling block and as the most important factor that accounts for the deterioration of reading and writing (across race and class).

These comments about the limited capacity of black children to be imaginative were out of sync with other parts of the interview where Debby seemed to put a lot of energy into nurturing the learners' creativity, and expressed such enthusiasm about the work produced. It is an aspect of the interview that I found extremely contradictory. There seems to be a tension between two juxtaposed discourses: that of the passionate, committed teacher who really believes in her learners alongside a seemingly racist, deficit and reductionist discourse (if not explicitly racist, then at least essentialising their identities and capabilities). The essentialised explanations she draws on may have more to do with the discourses available to her than a deep-seated belief.

Debby's third argument about imagination emerged in response to my question about the purpose of teaching writing. This added another dimension to her argument about imaginative writing. Until then, I thought her belief was mostly about the limitations of learners in terms of their age and backgrounds. But in this discussion it became clear that she has doubts about the educational values of such work, similar to Jane in this respect.

> I don't know. I wonder that myself. (Laughter) So that's what I was thinking about. Why … when I feel there are very few people with real creative ability and I don't feel it and I know it …
>
> Belinda: So why bother?
>
> Debby: So why bother? So I do feel like that. Other than the enjoyment of the child, they enjoy it so much. To go into your imagination and try and re-stimulate the imagination. The imagination is dying with TV. So it's to keep the

> imagination fertile. ... And … what other reasons? Haa! I can't even think … writing letters for instance, that's a good skill to have.

Debby added that the function of creative writing was "escape", "fun", "going into our own worlds", "I really don't know?" Debby's final comment about the purpose of writing was about functional writing: that learners must write a good paragraph, write letters, summaries etc. She also commented that learners find letter-writing and dialogues easier to do, easier to get into than 'creative writing'.

This was a strange way to end, as Debbie had not foregrounded 'functional writing' during the interview in the way for example that Jane did. In the context of her enthusiasm and pride about the imaginative writing tasks produced by the learners it was surprising that her belief about the limited value of imaginative work was very similar to the view expressed by Jane. However, in other ways her third argument about imagination was consistent with her belief expressed all along that you cannot develop imagination and therefore it is self-defeating to spend too much time on it. She also expressed, over and above that, a deeper belief that even if children could develop their imaginations easily the educational values are limited to escape and enjoyment.

2.2.3 Institutional limitations

Debby's beliefs about the limitations of her learners also need to be seen in the context of the other interviews. All teachers interviewed so far have indicated that there are certain limits to what they believe their learners can do, and these limits are located along a continuum of possibilities.

There is an important institutional dimension to Debby's view about the learners' imaginative writing limitations. Debby explored these limitations, and at the same time sees herself as working against some of these prevailing discourses at School B. While Debby tries to do some creative writing within the constraints and logistical difficulties (she teaches all the Grade 6s and 7s English and finds the marking load

unmanageable), she argues that extended writing, particularly creative writing, is not being taught well in the lower grades. Debby's view of the teaching of writing at School B was reiterated by Lisa, a Grade 5 teacher who I interviewed. Both teachers commented on the dominance of sentence-level writing tasks in the lower grades. Debby attributes this largely to the teachers' disillusionment, exhaustion, demotivation and the constant battle for discipline. She summed the position of creative writing up in the following comment:

> And I think the teachers are feeling it [overloaded] greatly and they are putting creative writing on the shelf.

Sadly, the school magazine has joined creative writing 'on the shelf'. This casualty, more than anything, highlights the position of writing within the curriculum at School B and the ethos that surrounds it. Debby told me that they used to bring out "a beautiful school magazine." In the last year or two, the magazine has died. Teachers didn't want to do it anymore. But also the writing became too "pathetic" and "impoverished" to warrant it. It seems that the magazine became an embarrassing reflection of literacy in the school and spluttered to an end with "such dull, deadly dull words."

Debby's pedagogical perspective is located in a number of spaces: the personal, social and institutional. And while in many respects she perceives herself as going against the grain of the institutional ethos, the institution does play a role in framing her position. In the most immediate sense, some of the limitations of her learners must stem from the closed production practice approach used in the lower grades.

2.3 Linking Debby's conceptualisation of imaginative writing to theory

This interview provides some interesting contrasts to Jane's interview. On the surface they seem to be making similar arguments about imagination, but the values and beliefs underlying these arguments are very different. Jane was very clear about her own pedagogy and her philosophy while Debby resisted pinning her pedagogy down, and at times the ideas she expressed were contradictory. Where there were contradictions in Jane's interview (for example, her harnessing of imaginative work for social justice alongside her rejection of imagination for its own sake), these seemed to be more about the dominance of binary thinking in the available discourses around writing pedagogy.

To some extent, Debby's view about age and imagination coincides with Vygotsky's view, but then diverges from Vygotsky in significant ways. Debby's argument that children do not have sufficient experience upon which to draw for imaginative writing resonates with Vygotsky's argument that adults have more highly developed imaginations than children and adolescents. However, Vygotsky's view is fluid and developmental rather than fixed. He views imagination as taking different forms at different developmental phases. In addition, his perspective is socio-cultural, thus making provision for the intervention of educators and mentors to actively make social and linguistic resources available to children to mediate the development of their imaginations (Vygotsky, 1987, 1994, 2004). In contrast, Debby's argument about age-related limitations is fixed and does not take account of the mediation and access to socio-cultural tools and resources.

Debby's elitist and innatist view of imagination follows the same trajectory as the age-related argument. Debby believes that some people are 'born writers', and capable of 'going underground', while others are not. She argues that this capacity cannot be developed or taught to those who do not possess the natural talent. In contrast, while Vygotsky acknowledges that certain people develop a much higher level of imagination than others, he argues that imagination is an integral part of

intellectual functioning and absolutely not a self-contained mental function. Thus the development of imagination is phase-related and exists along a continuum of different levels of sophistication and development.

In the same vein, contemporary Vygotskians such as John-Steiner and Meehan challenge the notion of creativity and imagination as "a collection of individual traits and abilities" (2000: 40). Instead, they see creativity as a "dynamic system" (40) developed through social interaction and collaboration. They conclude that research on creativity in the eighties and nineties "has challenged the image of the lonely creative genius [wondering 'lonely as a cloud'] that has been part of the Western mindscape for generation" (40).

In relation to children's imaginative writing Vygotsky makes two important points. Firstly, he argues that it would be unfair to treat a child as a professional writer and to have unreasonable expectations of what s/he can produce. Instead, one needs to keep in mind the developmental and educational benefits of children's imaginative writing. Vygotsky emphasises the role of adults in "stimulating and directing their creative responses". Put another way, imaginative writing must be "stimulated and guided from without" (2004: 65).

In a second and related point Vygotsky addresses the question raised by Debby and Jane, and frequently raised by others: What is the point of putting effort into children's imaginative writing if so few of them will develop into fully fledged writers? Vygotsky concludes that there are crucial emotional, linguistic and cognitive reasons for this endeavour, regardless of the number of children that eventually become professional creative writers. He provides the following compelling argument:

> The sense of significance of these creative endeavours lies only in the fact that they allow the child to make the sharp turn in the development of the creative imagination that provides the new direction to his fantasy, one that persists

> throughout his life. … Finally it is important because it permits the child, by exercising his creative tendencies and skills, **to master human language, this extremely subtle and complex tool for forming and expressing human thoughts, human feelings, and the human inner world.** (2004: 69)

It is clear from the above discussion that Debby's conceptualisation of imagination and imaginative writing is vastly different to Vygotsky's position. Rather, she embraces some of the key ideas of the Romantic poets regarding imagination and writing, as discussed in Chapter Two (1.3). These include the individualistic and solitary nature of writing. The notion of 'going underground' resonates with Shelley's metaphor of the poet as nightingale "who sits in darkness" (1821 : 19) and indicates a need to break away from societal engagement in order to write. In the same vein, the notion of voice and selfhood is located internally. Finally, the notion of 'the lonely genius' who is inspired by a mysterious and ethereal muse is firmly entrenched in both Debby's and the Romantic view of imaginative writing.

3. Nhamo: The elusiveness of imagination (School A)

Nhamo's view of imagination and creativity is not expressed as explicitly as Jane and Debby in relation to teaching, although it does emerge from his detailed reflections on his own schooling and his development as a writer and a teacher. He regards imagination and creativity as a very important element of writing, yet throughout his writing/teaching life this has proved to be elusive, often within reach and then slipping away for a range of contextual, pedagogic, logistical and sociolinguistic reasons. These will be explored.

As Nhamo shared his history during the interview, I was transported to another time and place: Zimbabwe in the 70s, 80s and 90s. And it wasn't only a difference in place, geographical and social location. Nhamo's profile was very different to the rest of the research participants in terms of gender, race, nationality, and language history.

Nhamo, for example, foregrounded his identity as an English second-language speaker (albeit fluent and proficient), particularly in relation to his school history. Shona is his first language but at school English was the medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards. He shared the most detailed memory of learning to write at school as it was a more conscious process of learning to write in an additional language than it was for the other teachers. One of the most striking features of this interview was Nhamo's reflections on the challenges and key moments in each phase of his development as a writer and as a writing teacher. Hence, this section contains more interweaving of past and present than the discussions of Jane and Debby, a dialogue between Nhamo's past self, present self and his ideal self.

3.1 Nhamo's personal writing history

I have divided Nhamo's writing history into two subsections as his school writing history is far more extensive than Debby and Jane's, and there is a strong trajectory from his school history to his personal view of writing. This section thus begins with Nhamo's school writing history and then moves into a discussion of his personal view of writing.

3.1.1 Nhamo's school writing history

The dominant theme of Nhamo's school writing history is the absence of 'figurative expression', the elusiveness of creativity. Although this is dealt with separately from his personal writing history, there is clearly a relationship between the two, and ways in which his school writing history significantly shapes his overall view of writing.

Nhamo provided a very detailed account of the strengths and weaknesses of his experiences of school writing. The dominant practice in Nhamo's schooling, particularly in primary school, was on what he termed "controlled writing". Nhamo's teachers used three different forms of controlled writing. One was "closed production practice" (Ellis, 1998), where learners are provided with texts with missing words or incomplete sentences and are required to fill in gaps.

The second one was “guided composition”, a euphemism for a highly controlled form of composition writing where learners are given headings, ideas, vocabulary and phrases per paragraph. The third type of controlled writing entailed memorising and reproducing model essays. None of these tasks provided Nhamo with possibilities for developing his own ideas. They represented attempts by the teachers to ‘error-proof’ learners’ writing but simultaneously eliminated any spaces for imagination and critical thinking.

One of Nhamo’s most striking memories was of his Grade 6 English teacher, who took controlled composition to extremes, by expecting learners to memorise pre-existing compositions and reproduce these under test conditions. Nhamo tells this story through two lenses: his lense as a learner at the time not realising that there was “anything bad about it” and his professional lense, where he is now:

> But I realise that we were just parroting, there was no originality.

The distinction between his past self and his present self and the shifting lenses he uses to reflect on his history is a recurrent feature of the interview, and one of the reasons that it has the texture of a reflective narrative.

Occasionally learners were given more scope for creativity and Nhamo remembers such tasks in detail, possibly because it was so unusual. Nhamo recounted this memory.

> Then they would also give us the picture type of writing where they bring us a picture, they show us the picture … we discuss in the class … we predict what was happening in the picture we are seeing, then he would ask us to build stories. … So we’d build a story out of that and create **their own story**. So I really liked that picture kind of composition.

While Nhamo enjoyed the openness, creativity and ownership of the picture tasks, he provided a retrospective rationale as to why most of the writing, teaching and tasks in primary school were so structured:

> Although that time we were also **handicapped** with the language because we're not first-language learners. But because of [this] they drilled language structures, how to build languages, so our sentence construction was not all that bad. But the figurative expression we lacked. So you could just write good, structured composition but we didn't have that flair of figurative language.

A handicap is a hindrance, a thing that prevents one from doing something; mental or physical disability (*Oxford English Dictionary*). While this image of handicap cannot be taken at face value and needs to be understood in sociolinguistic, colonial and post-colonial contexts, it is a fascinating and significant image. It certainly speaks of the internalisation of a deficit discourse as regards language acquisition and questions of linguistic power. It also illustrates the impact of static and fixed notions of 'communicative competence' and how this can result in fixed notions of deficit for teachers and learners (Blommaert et al., 2005). The issue of perceptions of linguistic deficit has already been raised strongly by Debby in relation to her view of her learners. It is interesting that it surfaces in relation to Nhamo's own view of himself at a particular stage in his development.

It seems that Nhamo's teachers, particularly in primary school, were working primarily with a form-focused approach to teaching second-language writing, which dominated the teaching of writing from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. However, Nhamo explained that there was a shift in high school where writing tasks became more challenging but were still located within a similar pedagogy. The topics were more challenging and learners were given more freedom to create their own stories

and to “produce something meaningful” within the constraints of form-focused pedagogy.

Nhamo’s high school teachers seemed to work with the later version of the form-focused approached, which entailed the widespread use of controlled composition and less sentence drills – the shift from sentence drills towards the use of connected discourse. Possibly the rationale for this shift was that by high school learners had sufficient proficiency in English to develop their own writing within limits.

In summary and as a final reflection on his schooled writing Nhamo commented that despite its limitations, it did equip him with a solid foundation of competent writing schools and he was able to build on it when he did his O Levels, college and tertiary studies.

He summed it up as follows:

> So the structures, the systems in place, to me they were helpful, because they helped me to attain what I wanted. … But the only difference is, if the system did not equip us with the quest to do our own writing, the books …

3.1.2 Nhamo’s view of writing

Nhamo made the following comment about the role of writing in his life and the lives of others:

> Writing can play a very crucial element in one’s life. Because when you write an article where you can have audience to admire your piece, or article, you feel honoured and you feel great, and that **ownership** is a crucial element. You still remember I said one of my assignments was read at one stage. It propelled me and I got a book prize at the end of that year.

In this comment, Nhamo refers to a seminal moment during his teacher training where his lecturer read his assignment to the whole class as an example of excellent work. Nhamo foregrounds the potentially empowering aspect of writing, and how

the capacity to express ideas coherently, fluently and convincingly can impact on one's self-esteem. An important aspect of this process is, according to Nhamo, getting recognition and a positive response from an audience. He uses very strong words to convey the emotional impact of getting recognition ("honoured", "great", "ownership") and the ensuing pride. These comments need to be read against Nhamo's background as an English second-language speaker who studied through English as medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards, while his home language, Shona, was increasingly sidelined at school. Nhamo and his fellow students were forbidden from speaking Shona in class and in the playground, a common but misguided practice in the seventies.

Bearing the image of second language as 'handicap' (discussed in 3.1.1), Nhamo's pride in the achievement of attaining a high level of mastery and fluency in written English is about overcoming a long struggle and many obstacles. While he is not the only teacher who struggled to find and assert his writing voice, his struggle has a specific context and history. His ideas have some resonance with Jane, who for partially different reasons also foregrounded the social and empowerment aspect of writing and voice, both in her personal experience and in her approach to teaching writing. However, Nhamo's focus is less on social justice and more about self-esteem, writing and audience. Having discussed the thematic issues raised by Nhamo about writing, it is necessary to revisit his comment and read it more closely in terms of language and discourse:

> Writing can play a very crucial element in one's life. Because when you write an article where you can have audience to admire your piece, or article, you feel honoured and you feel great, and that ownership is a crucial element. You still remember I said one of my assignments was read at one stage. It propelled me and I got a book prize at the end of that year.

In terms of language, Nhamo's comment is deeply personal and emotional. Yet in the first two lines of the above quotation he uses pronouns that create some distance between his idea and himself, possibly making it applicable to others, going beyond the self ("you", "ones"). However, in line three he moves into a directly personal mode, referring to a seminal experience in his writing history (reminding me of an earlier reference to this memory during the interview) when his essay was read aloud to the class at teachers' college. Here, he uses first-person pronouns (I, me, my) and one is left in no doubt that his comments about pride and 'ownership' speak back to this significant memory. This memory is a powerful contrast to the complete absence of ownership of writing that dominated his school memories.

Nhamo then proceeded to comment on the other side of the coin, what happens when you do not/cannot master the language of power, the lingua franca:

> But to someone who does not have those skills it creates a bad impression. Take an example someone who writes, just scribbles, and you take that book and say, I want to read this article which was written and everything in the book is upside down, as you read that person really feels to say, oh I'm not **worth** it that much. So it dehumanises that person. So a writing skill it gives value to some person's credibility. So I feel it's a skill that needs to be developed.

Nhamo, in this comment, emphasises the social context of writing and the fact that it can provide access and serve as a gatekeeper. But he seems to be taking this idea even further by talking about the 'dehumanising' impact of not being able to articulate oneself in writing. The word 'dehumanising' suggests a sense of worthlessness and marginalisation that people can experience if their writing is judged to be inadequate. Nhamo does not specify a context for this comment, but it is not difficult to think of examples. Access to higher education is one such

immediate example where written proficiency in the medium of instruction enables entry and maximises students' chances of success.

Nhamo's notion of the dual functions of writing (as empowering or dehumanising) intersects with Jane's notion of the 'town crier', to some extent. Both foreground the intersection of public and private spaces, and the deep feelings of marginalisation when one's writing voice is sidelined. Jane's notion of feeling 'like a hermit' corresponds with Nhamo's notion of 'dehumanisation'. Both of these views contrast sharply with Debby's notion of 'going underground' and her individualistic notion of writing.

In response to my question about an image or metaphor that he associates with writing he responded as follows:

> The image I only have is that when you are writing, you are only putting thoughts into expression. You are putting something you have already **imagined** onto a piece of paper. Be it pleasurable memories you are trying to put on, be it **imaginative expressions** you are trying to put on, so you form images and you try to express those through writing. Your feelings they are expressed through writing. … So most of the forms of writing they present some **feelings** of some kind. The way that person expresses himself or herself.

Nhamo presents a view of writing that takes into account cognition and affect, moving beyond the commonly espoused binaries of personal vs. impersonal writing. Ultimately he seems to view writing as a form of self-expression, whether one is writing a personal, imaginative text or a discursive, academic text. He explained that even if one is writing an academic essay and expressing someone else's ideas, the manner in which one discusses or critiques them conveys one's own feelings about the issue.

He elaborates on this argument:

> Even when writers themselves if you read an article … be it a novel … the way the novel[ist] expresses his line of story, you feel that he's trying to sort of create a sort of image or feeling which he wants people to feel or either **to be in his shoes in order to be part of him**.

He is also interested in the imagined relationship between writer and reader, and the way writers try to invite readers into their created world emotionally, imaginatively and cognitively. Interestingly, he does not seem to view writing as a process through which thoughts and imagination are developed, but rather as a space to 'put down' thoughts. This contrasts with ideas by writing theorists such as Vivian Zamel, who regards writing as "a process of discovery", a process through which ideas are shaped and formed (1987: 267). In the same vein, Patricia Hampl, a memoirist, claims that she writes in order to discover what it is she knows (1999: 27).

3.2 Nhamo's view of imaginative writing pedagogy, past and current experiences and implications for practice

Nhamo's history of teaching writing, to some extent, follows a similar pattern to his schooling. What is striking is the recurrent gap between his ideal pedagogy and his real, applied pedagogy in challenging circumstances. The theme of perceived deficit continues in relation to his students both in Zimbabwe and in South Africa.

3.2.1 Pedagogical threads from the past

Nhamo has been teaching for 20 years, mostly in Zimbabwe. When he first started teaching, he taught the way he was taught and subscribed to the belief that writing needs to be taught in a highly structured way (the 'apprenticeship of observation'). However, his ideas and beliefs were altered when he began studying a Bachelor of Education at university (1999). He referred to this experience as "some kind of paradigm shift". He was introduced to new approaches to language teaching, such as the integration of all four skills into the language classroom. Although Nhamo did not

name this shift in terms of the history of language pedagogy, it is clear that a shift towards communicative language teaching was beginning to take hold. As regards writing pedagogy specifically he commented as follows:

> And that's when they also asked us to at least incorporate the creative element into place. So from 2000 there was a shift in the way I was teaching. I was now also trying to incorporate children to be creative in their approach …

Nhamo returned to the classroom inspired by the new approaches that he had learned and keen to implement them. However, he encountered obstacles in his path to implementing a more creative approach, and especially to teaching writing. In his explanation of these obstacles, there were fascinating differences between his use of discourses that described his 'ideal pedagogy' and the limitations of his material reality. Nhamo mostly attributed these obstacles to the fact that his learners were second-language speakers of English who lacked the vocabulary required for creative, imaginative and experimental writing. He commented as follows:

> … but despite that it [I] would realise that although you want to equip the children with the skills of being creative in their approach, but they had limited capacity in terms of vocabulary, in terms of depth in the structuring of their writing. So we would only have a few children who would have their own way of writing, we were able to give them **freedom** to write the way they wanted. But the rest of the class you had to resort to assisting them so that again you go back to the guided, because the system had to force you to allow to cater for every child in the process. So for the slow learners and those who didn't have those writing skills, you ended up giving them most cases guided type of writing in terms of essays.

Nhamo's ideal pedagogy is represented through words such as 'creative', 'freedom' and 'depth'. But these words are outweighed and outnumbered by words that depict

the disillusioning reality that he confronted. Creativity and freedom are juxtaposed with sentences such as “you had to resort to …” “… so that again you go back to the guided”, “the system had to force you …”, “… you ended up …”. These are sad words that indicate defeat, a loss of agency, doing what he no longer believes in and does not want to do. As Nhamo describes this disappointing realisation, he mostly distances himself from the experience by using the pronoun ‘you’ and ‘we’ instead of the first-person pronoun ‘I’. This alternation between first- and third-person pronouns was a feature of the interview.

3.2.2 Present pedagogical threads

Nhamo experienced similar challenges when he came to teach in Johannesburg in April 2007. There was a distinct shift in Nhamo’s tone of voice when he began talking about this memory, which contrasted with the energy and enthusiasm of earlier parts of the interview. It seemed that he had gone through an exciting process with his own development as a writer and student at college and university which he wanted to share and pass on to his learners but somehow this was not happening. His tone of voice became quite flat, indicating his feelings of disappointment.

When Nhamo began teaching at School A, once again he found that his ideal pedagogy was difficult to implement:

> … I wanted to give them that autonomy to express themselves, but yeeeh! It’s really a tall order. Their level is not up to scratch as the expectation for Grade 6s. … our learners, what we expect them to do and what they actually do, there is a great variant. That is the challenge I’m still facing with the present learners. So in **the end I end up** going back to the structure kind of thing which we didn’t like.

Nhamo gave an example of the first writing task he gave the learners to get a sense of where the learners’ writing level was. The task required learners to write about themselves, and Nhamo regarded this as a simple task. However, learners struggled

to produce extended writing on this topic. What I find fascinating about this is that Nhamo interpreted this as an indicator of the learners' own limited capacity. While the learners' limited vocabulary and the fact that they are second- or third-language speakers of English plays a role, the explanation needs to go beyond the learners. For instance, one needs to ask the question: what approach to teaching writing did their previous teachers use? Nhamo took up his post in April 2007, and the teacher who preceded him did mostly closed production practice work with them (this I gauged by going through the learners' books). One wonders what kind of writing the learners did in previous grades and how this institutional context frames Nhamo's experience in significant ways.

3.2.3 Nhamo's conceptualisation of imaginative writing

Nhamo's view of imagination and imaginative writing did not emerge explicitly in the first interview (July 2007). I thus conducted a second interview with Nhamo during May 2008 in which we discussed imagination in more detail. All the ideas discussed in this section are drawn from the second interview.[6]

Nhamo views imagination as an important tool for thinking and idea development. He also emphasises the role that teachers can play in developing learners' imagination through productive interventions. He foregrounds the developmental aspect of imagination and the potential and limitations of learners' imaginative capacity. What was strikingly different about Nhamo's conceptualisation from Jane and Debby was a focus on his learners' limited English proficiency as an obstacle and the relationship between oral and written imaginative writing/storytelling. This aspect of the interview had both important cultural and pedagogical dimensions,

[6] By this time I had done preliminary analysis of all the interviews and had fine-tuned my research question. Hence I was in a position to pose very direct questions in relation to issues that arose in the first interview and in relation to the range of positions that had emerged from other teachers.

which will be elaborated. The constructions of ESL learners as deficit, introduced in his own writing history, continue to pervade the text through recurring images of illness, medicine and gaps.

Nhamo explains the importance of imagination as a tool for thinking as follows:

> Imagination from a teaching point of view is very important in the sense that the child will be **creating** first his **own ideas**. He will be putting **his ideas** into action. By so doing he will also be trying to **construct** his **own story**. ... They need to actually be **involved** into the practice of imagining things **for themselves**. By so doing we are developing their thinking into a gear up. So imagining as a tool can help them, propel them into the next level of thinking.

Nhamo is the only teacher out of the three discussed thus far that has made any reference to the link between imagination and higher-level thinking. Debby and Jane equate imagination with fantasy, with escapism, as a form of play that has limited educational and intellectual value. In contrast, Nhamo views imagination as an important part of intellectual development which can propel learners to "the next level of thinking". This developmental aspect is then elaborated on in detail and is interwoven with a consideration of language issues.

I asked Nhamo if all children are capable of doing imaginative writing and what the obstacles are. He responded as follows:

> Not all children will be able to do imaginative writing. One of the major obstacles is the language itself, most children are limited in their language. They have very limited vocabulary, they have very limited expression, so that in the end they will have difficulty expressing themselves in the written form.

Initially, it seemed that Nhamo was taking a similar position to Debby, albeit for different reasons. However, he qualified this comment by differentiating between learners' capabilities and ultimately argued that all learners can develop their imaginative writing at different levels of competence. Progress will depend partially

on their starting points and their linguistic and intellectual resources. He differentiates between three groups of learners: the "extremely bright" learners who will "excel into that level", the average learners who "can pull through to the next level", and the "lower average" learners who "can be pulled a bit to the next level". Nhamo acknowledged that there are three learners in his class who are "intellectually handicapped", and who may not be able to think or write imaginatively. He makes an interesting distinction between those learners who are "pulling through" (with some agency) and the weaker group that is "being pulled" (total lack of agency). Either way the image is one that speaks of illness, a trope that resonates with other images that Nhamo used. For example, he also spoke about the teacher increasing "the doses" of imaginative skills "put into the learner" as they progress to higher grades. Despite the obstacles, he argued that written language proficiency and imagination can and should be developed in tandem. He commented that "You can't wait for language to grow so that you'd say imagination comes later. No."

Nhamo views learners' lack of proficiency in English as a key obstacle to their development of imaginative writing. He made a strong distinction between learners' capacity for articulating imaginative ideas orally and expressing imagination in writing. He elaborates on this oral-writing distinction as follows:

> Most learners do not have the necessary language to express themselves when it comes to the actual writing. ... And if you give them a topic to imagine and come up with a story you can get quite interesting stories from learners who can hardly read, hardly write, hardly spell. But when it comes to putting that story which they have created onto paper, it becomes something else.

Nhamo's comments raise the issue of the transition from oral storytelling to writing and what this move entails in terms of language and imagination. This transition has *developmental, pedagogical and cultural* dimensions. Vygotsky's insights on this

issue are valuable, though not specifically applied to additional-language learners. He comments that developmentally children's literary creativity begins with drawing, and is replaced by verbal creativity at puberty. However, he points out that there is always a lag between children's oral and written expression. Written language is significantly "more abstract and arbitrary" (2004: 45); it has its own rules, which differ in some ways from oral speech and these laws have not yet been mastered by the child. There may also be "deeper internal causes" such as the child lacking "intrinsic motivation to write" (2004: 45). Nhamo's learners thus grapple with this transition at various levels – i.e. in addition to the usual development shifts from speech to writing as outlined by Vygotsky, they grapple with the shift to a second or third language.

Pedagogically, Stein (2008) and Beynon (2004) address this transition in a South African context through the creative use of multimodal pedagogies. Beynon's approach entails "the evolution of storytelling into storyreading" (2004: 161) and a slow progression towards "the complexities of writing" (161). Beynon emphasises that the transition from storytelling to storyreading and storywriting is "not just a textual follow-up to an oral experience of a story. It is a lingering within the story" (161). Stein (2008) discusses the possibilities of teachers helping learners 'translate' their ideas across modes through structured mediation and scaffolding.

Culturally, there is a long tradition of storytelling in South African black communities. Hofmeyr (1993) outlines the impact of the shift from oral storytelling to written texts in classrooms, in her study of Makanspoort mission school. Even when school primers contained traditional African stories the written version was more static, less flexible, and lost the performance element of the oral versions. Interestingly, the transgressive aspects of stories, the exotic, fantastic and bizarre, were eliminated over time, leaving behind tamer and more realistic stories (1993: 53–54). Hofmeyr notes that the relationship between oral storytelling and written story genres is a dynamic one, and that storytelling can be enhanced when the teller draws on

elements of written short stories. In the same way, as Stein and Beynon illustrate, writing can be enhanced by storytelling. While storytelling as a traditional practice has been sidelined over time, particularly in urban areas, it has taken new forms and shapes in contemporary South Africa. The upsurge of urban performance poetry (urban voices) is one such example.

One of Nhamo's strategies for facilitating the transition from speech to writing is to focus on oral storytelling. This practice is then supplemented by the school's remedial programme, which enables learners to develop basic written language skills. But 'closing the gaps' is still a challenge, as the remedial classes are only once a week. Nhamo acknowledged that it is not enough, but "at least we're trying."

He elaborated on some of the school's strategies for 'closing the gaps'. They have instituted a system this year whereby the same person will teach Grades 4 and 5, and the same person will teach Grades 6 and 7 so that they can really develop the learners' skills in a systematic way over an extended period of time. They also have weekly meetings to identify learners who are struggling. The gaps and challenges extend beyond the school. There is often a lack of parent and family support for learning.

Despite the difficulties and constraints described by Nhamo, he believes that teacher interventions can facilitate the development of learners' imaginative writing to some extent. He commented as follows:

> So it's not something you are born with. I totally disagree with that. It's something which can be developed if it is actually taught to you and you are exposed to it with competent educators.

Besides using storytelling as a bridge, Nhamo does not provide details about what such an intervention might entail. He does refer to the writing workshops run by a volunteer teacher, Pam, as an example of a possible intervention. Pam invited the learners to write on any topic and develop their ideas on that topic. Then she taught

the learners how to do self and peer editing (i.e. Pam introduced the learners to a process approach to writing). In response to this workshop Nhamo concluded that exposing learners to resources, skilled teachers and ideas of other learners is important. However, learners need to have a certain level of proficiency to benefit from exposure.

Nhamo's final comments about the relationship between oral and written imaginative language suggests that he sees them as existing along a continuum.

> It's interlinked in a way, in a sense that you can develop imaginative writing through the oral. You can start with the basics of oral, where you get learners just to have the ideas, and then orally express themselves. Because once you have that idea of developing a story and express that story orally, **that's the beginning of imagination.**

He comments that expressive and imaginative written language is like "the icing on the cake". The oral version of the same story is entertaining and interesting but the icing is an additive that makes the story "nicer" but not fundamentally transformed.

> It will sound better, will flow better, but it's basically the same story. That's why it's the icing.

In some ways I found this final comment puzzling and possibly out of sync with the line of argument that he developed in the rest of the interview. However, in the final analysis, the comment is less about debating the value of imagination and more about the oral-written continuum of imaginative language, thinking and storytelling.

3.3 Linking Nhamo's conceptualisation of imaginative writing to theory

Nhamo's view of imagination resonates strongly with Vygotskian ideas in his focus on the development of higher-level thinking through imagination and in his emphasis on learner agency, learners as active constructors of meaning and stories. Like Vygotsky, he views imagination as developing in tandem with cognition, as a tool for thinking.

In the same vein, the personal, affect and cognition are integrated in his conceptualisation of imaginative writing in Vygotskian ways. Nhamo's ideas are framed, to some extent, within a socio-cultural context as reflected in his emphasis on the social impact of writing and the relationship between writer and audience.

Nhamo's developmental conceptualisation of imagination also resonates strongly with Vygotsky's argument that children's imagination is developed to a higher level through educator intervention and mediation and access to a rich range of resources and social tools. Like Vygotsky, Nhamo rejects the elitist view of imagination that imaginative writing is an innate talent. However, he does acknowledge that not all learners are capable of developing their imaginative thinking and writing to the same level. In the same vein, Vygotsky makes allowances for different levels of imaginative development, with few people ever reaching the upper levels of truly transformative imaginative work (literary, scientific, philosophical etc.)

Nhamo does not specify what kind of scaffolding, mediation and teacher input is required for developing imaginative writing, other than using storytelling as a transitional tool. What remains unclear is whether he is referring to a tightly structured scaffolding that becomes a form of transmission teaching (such as controlled writing), or whether he has negotiated scaffolding in mind. This will emerge in the analysis of his enactment of practice (Chapter Eight). What is clear is that he views storytelling as a social tool and resource that can be harnessed for the development of imaginative writing.

The notion of freedom is an important but elusive aspect of Nhamo's conceptualisation. In his recounting of the difference between his ideal and real pedagogy, he acknowledges that he wanted to give learners "the freedom to write the way they wanted", but most learners needed a more structured, scaffolded approach. From Vygotsky's perspective, freedom is a central element of imagination. He foregrounds "free reworking" of elements of experience, "free combining" and

"inner freedom of thought", which is in turn closely related to mastery of conceptual thought (1994: 269). Nhamo's own imaginative freedom as a teacher seems to be compromised and diminished by institutional, contextual constraints and learners' limitations. Hence, while his ideas and beliefs about imagination are closely aligned with Vygotsky, there are tensions between his beliefs and ideas and the reality of classroom practice. In Chapter Eight, I will explore how he enacts these ideas and how he negotiates the tensions between the ideal and the real.

Nhamo's perception that imaginative freedom in the classroom is diminishing raises questions about the relationship between teachers' engagement with imagination and the extent to which they are able to facilitate learners' imaginative development. This issue will be focus of the chapter that follows.

4. Conclusion

A range of views on imagination and imaginative writing have emerged in this chapter. Jane and Debby, for different reasons, express serious reservations about – and, at times, opposition to – the value of imaginative writing in the classroom. Nhamo, on the other hand, articulates an ambivalent view towards imagination and imaginative writing. He views imaginative writing as valuable, yet finds himself constrained from implementing his ideas in the classroom.

An emerging finding is that teachers' conceptualisations of imagination and their related beliefs and attitudes have a more significant impact on their espoused pedagogy than their personal writing practices. An important element is teachers' conceptualisations of learners' potential capabilities, and this relates strongly to their conceptualisations of imagination and the discourses that they draw on. For example, Debby values imaginative, expressive writing in her own life but believes that most learners have limited capabilities. This is, in turn, complicated by discourses of race and linguistic deficit. Nhamo, on the other hand, implicitly embraces Vygotskian ideas about imaginative writing, yet his implementation is

constrained by perceived logistical, contextual and linguistic barriers. Jane draws on a mix of social justice and functional discourses to mount an argument about the futility of imaginative writing. Yet, when describing her espoused practice it becomes clear that she works with imagination and imaginative writing at a highly sophisticated level with her learners. However, she also touches briefly on a deficit discourse when she suggests that too much scaffolding is needed in order for learners to produce high-quality imaginative writing. It is possible, though, that this comment reveals more about Debby's view that imaginative writing is not valuable enough to expend the time needed to make it a worthwhile pedagogical exercise.

The findings of this chapter suggest that there is a complex relationship between teachers' personal writing histories, their conceptions of imaginative writing, their espoused practice and their institutional contexts. Teachers draw on a range of different discourses to construct their ideas about imaginative writing and their practice. The range of discourses that emerged include empowerment discourses, deficit and elitist/deficit discourses, social-cultural views of imagination and views that synthesise cognition and affect. In all three interviews there were instances of tensions between competing and sometimes contradictory discourses, particularly in Debby and Nhamo's interviews. Put another way, teachers are frequently caught between contradictory and competing discourses. The personal and institutional histories of teachers, to some extent, indicate processes which have shaped their use of contradictory discourses. These interviews reveal that the notion of imagination is powerfully located in discourses. I would thus like to emphasise that my analysis of the teachers' use of discourses is not intended to 'do deficit' to teachers or to make value judgements, but rather to explore the multifaceted ways in which they have been discursively positioned and located. In the same vein, I conclude that teachers' use of deficit discourses reveals as much about themselves, and their own senses of powerlessness, as it does about their view of learners.

Chapters Seven and Eight will explore how these discourses are played out in the teachers' classrooms and its implications for teaching imaginative writing.

The chapter that follows explores Fiona and Nadine's views on imaginative writing. Both these two teachers take different positions to Jane, Debby and Nhamo. For Fiona and Nadine, teaching imaginative writing is a creative act, and a vehicle for their own imagination and creativity.

Chapter Six: Teaching imaginative writing as a creative act

> We explore how, through their own imaginative involvement, teachers' creative potential can be released and their confidence, commitment and understanding of the artistic challenge of being a writer can grow. (Grainger et al., 2005: 157)

Grainger et al. argue that in order for teachers to teach imaginative writing effectively, they need to be "collaborators" and "participants" in the creative-writing process alongside their learners (2005: 166–167). They argue that teachers must develop their imagination and creativity in a number of contexts in order to be empowered to teach writing with passion and conviction (as discussed in Chapter Three, 3.3. and 3.4). In this chapter I discuss Fiona's and Nadine's conceptualisation of imaginative writing pedagogy in relation to Grainger's framework – where teaching imaginative writing is represented as a vehicle for both teachers' creativity. I explore the forms and shapes of teachers' "imaginative involvement" (Grainger et al., 2005) and what it means for teachers to write alongside learners.

I begin with each teacher's personal writing history, which includes their personal views of writing and their school writing histories. The second category integrates their espoused imaginative writing pedagogy, their conceptualisation of imagination and links to theory. This integration is a reflection of the way the two teachers articulated their ideas and pedagogy as inextricably linked.

1. Fiona: Discovering the art of English (School D)

The interview with Fiona provides a contrast with the previous three interviews (discussed in Chapter Five) in a range of different ways, particularly as regards her view of imagination and her view of learners' capabilities. At the same time there are some institutional links and continuities between Fiona's interview and Jane's: at certain points they draw on the same institutional discourses, but when it comes to their own beliefs, ideas and practices there are very clear-cut points of departure.

The most striking aspect of Fiona's interview is her passion for imaginative work and her implicit belief expressed throughout the interview about the value of imaginative writing work alongside a focus on 'structured freedom', carefully negotiated scaffolding and challenging the learners cognitively. However, what is extremely interesting about the shape and form of the interview is that Fiona does not explicitly articulate her views about imagination or why she thinks this is important. Instead her view is expressed very powerfully through her detailed description of her classroom practice and pedagogy and the discourses she uses to describe this.

The other way in which Fiona's interview differs significantly from the other interviews, particularly Debby's and Nhamo's, is that it is virtually free of any deficit discourse other than comments about the negative impact of changing technologies on children's reading and writing practices. However, in specific discussions of her learners' work she focused more on what learners could do than what they could not do. She has high expectations of her learners and frequently they seemed to surprise and delight her with what they produced. Finally, a discrepancy emerged between her personal relationship to writing, particularly imaginative writing, and her ideas about writing pedagogy and practice. This will be elaborated on in the analysis that follows.

1.1 Fiona's personal writing history

As with the three teachers discussed in Chapter Five, there is a complex relationship between Fiona's view of writing and her school writing experience. The discussion that follows will illustrate this.

1.1.1 Fiona's view of writing

Fiona's personal view of writing is expressed through the metaphor of double-sided tape, and a letter. Fiona explained her use of the double-sided tape metaphor as follows:

> I think because it's useful, and I think that takes me back to being **functional**. … I also think you **change** things with it, because if you put stuff up and you can change like [a] whole room or you can put up a mirror and so it **shows** you things. But it's also very straight and it doesn't just have one side, it's got both sides. You can go on one side or you can use the other side.

What is striking about Fiona's image is the notion of writing as a facilitator of change and a way of exploring and constructing different possible meanings. The writer is an active constructor of meaning, exploring both aspects of an issue. Equally important is Fiona's idea that "you can put up a mirror and so it shows you things." Here she alludes to the reflective aspect of writing, the way in which writing enables her to create an idea and then exists as an object in time and space that one can review, revisit and revise. The institutional discourse links between Fiona and Jane also surface here in her use of the term 'functional'. Like Jane, she uses the term to refer to writing as empowering and a facilitator of change, an enabling act rather than with the mechanistic meaning often associated with functional discourse. It is necessary to note, though, that Fiona is not working within a social justice agenda in the way that Jane does.

Fiona explained the second image (writing as a letter) as follows:

> And I think the letter was because everything fitted into … writing fits into a place. And you can open it and all sorts of things would happen. And it can be a bill which is absolutely awful if you can't pay it. [laughs] But it could also be such a close communication from somebody that you love, that you could just keep it and read hundreds of times.

Fiona is referring to the physical space in which writing is located, for example on a piece of writing paper. But one could also interpret it more broadly to mean the different social, historical, technological, and political spaces in which people write and how this shapes meaning. Kamler (2001) has done some valuable work on this in relation to narrative.

Kamler (2001: 5) argues that spatial metaphors rather than notions of time have the capacity to reshape the writing of personal narratives in profound ways. In writing her own autoethnography she claims she is able to see 'dislocations' and 'relocations' in new ways through the lens of spatial metaphors. She elaborates on her journey across multiple sites, spaces and paradigms, highlighting continuities and discontinuities. This journey includes her engagement with emotional, geographical, institutional and intellectual spaces. An important aspect of spatiality is an emphasis on social relationships between individuals and groups.

There is a disjuncture between Fiona's metaphoric, spatial view of writing and her view of herself as a writer. Focus and structure is very important to Fiona in her own writing. She describes her own writing as "very stylised". By stylised she means structured within the parameters of the particular genre she is working with. She explains that her writing is "very straightforward" and "very ordinary". She elaborates:

> I don't use metaphors. … It's very theoretical. It's kind of dealing with the issues … and dealing with what you need to deal with.

She is uncomfortable with expressing her feelings or personal opinions in writing, unless the opinion can be supported by evidence from research. On the question of her own voice, she prefers to keep her 'personal voice' out of her writing. Fiona sees this as an expression of her need for privacy and her tendency to keep people at a distance unless they know her well. Unlike Debby and Jane, who do some of their own personal writing (mostly through poetry), Fiona is very clear that she does not do diary or journal writing. She is far more comfortable with research writing. She comments:

> I'm not a diary or a journal person. I can't bear that.

Fiona's school writing histories provides some clues into the factors that shaped her view of herself as a writer, though it is clear from her comments that personality and concerns about privacy also play a significant role.

1.1.2 Fiona's school writing history

Fiona makes some links between her "stylised" writing style and the way she was taught to write at school. She attended a "very good" school but was subjected to the approach to teaching writing that was dominant in South African schools in the 1960s. She was required to write on arbitrary topics (like "A Thunderstorm") in a very controlled and structured way, using words and phrased per paragraph, provided by the teacher. She elaborated:

> And **they gave you** … "clouds amassing" and then you **had to** use that phrase. It was very **controlled**. Maybe that's why … and yet as I say, I still write like that. I don't have the phrases in front of me but I still write very stylised. With that very key **structure**. So it might have come from that, I mean I never really thought about it before.

There is a remarkable similarity between Fiona's and Debby's accounts of school writing, particularly as regards the lack of ownership and engagement with the writing process. As in Debby's case, Fiona's writing topics, key phrases and a specific

writing style was imposed on her by her teachers ("They gave you", "you had to"). As a result, Fiona's school writing was correctly structured, well written with "correct content" but "never innovative or creative."

It is interesting that this school experience shaped Fiona's own writing, but not the way she teaches writing. A possible contributing factor was her exposure to a powerfully positive alternative role model in Grade 12. In Grades 10 and 11 that she had one English teacher who was a very negative role model but this was overshadowed by her Grade 12 English teacher, Mrs Louw, who had a very powerful impact on her view of English. She still carries this inspiration with her many decades later. Even when she spoke about Mrs Louw's impact on her it was interwoven with ideas about her own pedagogy. She commented as follows:

> And then we got to Matric and we got this … Mrs Louw who was just amazing and made me **look** at … I'm particularly fond of poetry. I love poetry for children. You don't have to go really into depth, but I love the way poets use words and pictures. And as I say, and it's not me at all, but I love the way that *they* can do it. And she **changed my whole thought process** about English. Because then it was just, I had to do it. It was a subject and so I did it. And she came along and just **showed me the art** behind it and what writing could be.

In every interview each teacher spoke about an experience like this – at least one or more – where a role model or an experience, a moment in time reshaped their thinking, beliefs and ideas about teaching English. Debby's pedagogy, for example, was reshaped through her interactions with Mary. The root of Fiona's pedagogy is clearly embedded in this memory. English was no longer a subject that that one just 'had to do' but opened up a new way of seeing and a new way of thinking about reading and writing. An important aspect of this realisation was not only about reading with more depth and insights but the development of a passion for thinking about how these works of art are constructed – i.e. the craft of writing.

Fiona's own writing may be 'ordinary' and not creative or innovative but she inspires her learners to think and write creatively, and in the process taps her own creative imagination. Fiona's articulation of ideas about writing pedagogy was the most detailed and elaborated part of the interview and it is to this issue that I now turn.

1.2 Fiona's pedagogy and conceptualisation of imaginative writing

There are a number of key ideas that are central to Fiona's pedagogy. First and foremost she values imaginative work enormously and puts a lot of energy into devising effective ways of eliciting creative work from her learners. The key elements of her approach include a focus on structure, scaffolding and modelling, imaginative writing as 'play' and collaboration between learners and between learners and teacher. All of these elements are framed by an enabling discourse, one which applies to both Fiona and her learners. These elements form part of a discovery, process-oriented approach to teaching and learning. In the section that follows I unpack the meaning of these ideas in the context of Fiona's work. I also explore the links between Fiona's ideas and an underlying Vygotskian conceptualisation of imagination and imaginative writing. I begin by discussing enabling discourses.

1.2.1 Enabling discourses

In this section the connections between Fiona's convictions about the importance of imaginative writing, her passion and confidence emerge as being highly significant. Deficit/enabling discourses are commonly thought of in relation to teachers' perceptions of learners. However, Fiona's use of enabling discourses throws a different light on the issue, showing that these discourses work in two ways – in relation to learners, and in relation to the teachers' beliefs about their own abilities. The teacher needs to feel enabled pedagogically and institutionally in order to enable learners' imaginative development.

Fiona's passion for teaching writing is evident in her response to my question about the purpose of teaching writing. She responded as follows:

> I just want the children to be able to communicate their thoughts and feelings … I mean , you need to explain, to be able to have the words to explain. And I find I sometimes … can't articulate exactly what I mean. But I want to give them the opportunity to go and **find** it, and they do **find** their own voice. **I don't like … I don't write creatively for myself but I can get my children to write creatively**. I really can. And I **love** it. And they **know** it. And that **love of it gets passed on** to them, I don't know how. I really don't know how, but they do. ... so it's for me, the best.

Fiona's passion for eliciting creative writing from her learners is consistently communicated in this extract through the use of words and phrases such as "love" (repeated twice) and her comment that "It's for me, the best" when learners produce creative work. This was a consistent thread throughout the interview. But what is most striking is her use of an enabling discourse – her focus on what the learners can do and **what she can get the learners to do**. The modal 'can' and the verb 'do', sometimes used as an auxiliary ("and they do find their own voices") and sometimes used as a main verb ("I really don't know how, but they do") are used repeatedly. The repeated use of the modal 'can' is extremely interesting, as Fiona uses it to emphasise what she is able to elicit from the learners.

There are a number of fascinating insights generated by these comments. Fiona feels *enabled*: she believes strongly that she can elicit creative work from the learners, and she also believes that the learners can do it despite the fact that she does not do creative writing herself. Her focus is on creating a learning environment where learners can discover their own voices, and find ways of articulating meaning. The repeated use of the word 'find' is significant, as Fiona is signalling a belief in a discovery, process-oriented approach to teaching and learning where the learners ultimately take ownership of their learning and writing.

Although in the rest of the interview and in my observation of Fiona's lessons it is evident that she has a very clearly formulated pedagogy, she does not attribute the success of her creative-writing classes to her pedagogy. Instead she foregrounds the way in which her love of creative writing "gets passed on to them."

Fiona suggests that it is her belief in the importance of creative writing and her love of the children's writing that is responsible for her learners' success. Her emphasis on beliefs and attitudes is congruent with understandings of teachers' "conceptions of practice" (Freeman, 1996; Johnson, 1999, 2006), which foreground teachers' personal knowledge and beliefs and how these guide the individual's action in social contexts. Fiona's emphasis on beliefs also resonates with Danielewicz's argument that methodology must be embedded in a broad framework of ideas and beliefs to qualify as pedagogy (2001: 133).

The discussion so far has highlighted the belief dimension of her pedagogy in the above discussion. All these ideas are crucial aspects of Fiona's pedagogy but what I would like to focus on now is the more practical component of Fiona's pedagogy and what this suggests about her views on imagination.

1.2.2 Structure, scaffolding and modelling

From the outset of the interview, Fiona made it clear that structure and modelling is a crucial aspect of learning and writing, for herself in the context of her own writing and in her pedagogy. Fiona commented that the interview overview that I sent her prior to the interview was very helpful in focusing her. She immediately made the link between her own need for structure and focus and her approach to teaching. She commented as follows:

> Because I'm a great … I do a lot of modelling. I get good authors. I get excerpts of good extracts and I say to the kids, what makes this so good? And so we look at a lot of that and word research and I try and coach them to … you **can do** the same thing. You **can do** this.

The issue of providing learners with structure in language learning, and especially writing, is a key issue, one that is explored in more detail in the chapters that follow (Chapters Seven and Eight). How much structure is too little or too much? At what point does an emphasis on structure deaden the learners' agency and imagination? Fiona's use of structure provides the beginnings of an answer to these critical questions, providing learners with what I term 'structured freedom' – i.e. structure that opens up possibilities of learners' cognitive and imaginative engagement rather than structure than invites replication.

Fiona works with structure and mobilises learners' understandings of structure in creative and cognitively challenging ways. Rather than simply getting learners to reproduce good models, she challenges them to think about what makes them work, how language is being used to convey meaning and to create aesthetic power. There are links between Fiona's memory of learning "how to look" at texts and the way she works with her learners. She seems to open up a world of possibilities by exploring these texts with her learners. And one of the main possibilities is that learners "can do the same thing."

Importantly, when Fiona speaks about her focus on structure, her focus is on genres and language, conventions and crafting. In many contexts, a focus on structure in the language classroom often refers to a focus on grammatical structures. However, Fiona views grammar as a part of the whole. As with all the teachers so far, Fiona has quite a definite view of grammar: "I hate language lessons with a passion! Grammar lessons are a nightmare."Fiona teaches grammar because it is expected, but mostly deals with language in the context of texts and literature. She does not believe in isolated, decontextualised, explicit grammar-teaching but prefers for structures to emerge in context.

In the following comment she links the process of unpacking structure to **play**:

> Yes. I do the structured stuff very much, but even within a structure, I love teaching poetry. So I get phenomenal poems out of the kids. And we always look at a poem and we look at what's happened, and we base, in Grade 7 because they still don't have … they know what they want to say but they're not quite sure how. And so I always will give them some sort of structure to base on whatever they're doing. And then we **play with words**. And I do, I just **play** with them. And I **love** it.

From the above quotation, it is clear that Fiona chooses poems to illustrate or expose the children to specific aspects of poetry. She works with a fluid reading/writing relationship, where models are used to generate understanding and ideas but are not used in a fixed, lockstep way. Fiona also uses learners' texts as models of writing. She comments:

> I use a lot of the children's own work. I love that. I go, remember the last time you did this and you used this word, and how could we make that image a bit better? So I do a lot of their work.

An obvious link in Fiona's work to Vygotsky is her use of scaffolding and mediation in ways that ultimately lead to the learners internalising the 'cognitive tool' for their own future independent use. Fiona is committed to giving the learners tools to arrive at answers themselves and in the process cultivating learners' thinking skills and problem-solving. This surfaced throughout the interview and very explicitly in the classroom observation. Examples of this in the interview are her frequent use of discovery learning discourses (e.g. her repeated use of the word 'find', helping learners to find …). Her mediation with model texts is another example of her interactive and *negotiated* use of scaffolding (Newman et al., 1989; Moll, 1990).

1.2.3 Imaginative writing as play

In the previous section on poetry-writing Fiona emphasised that once learners have grasped the structure "we play with words ... I play with them." Fiona's use of the notion of play is significant for a number of reasons. At the most basic level it indicates a sense of enjoyment and exploration for the learners and her. It reflects her involvement in the imaginative process, despite the fact that she doesn't engage in her own creative writing. Teaching imaginative writing is a vehicle for her own imagination and creativity and this will become increasingly evident in the sections that follow, as she describes how she takes learners through the various elements of the imaginative writing process.

From a Vygotskian perspective, there is a significant link between play and creative writing. As discussed in Chapter Three, in terms of the overall developmental trajectory, during childhood play is the central space for the development and enactment of imagination, while during adolescence the imagination becomes internalised, private and hidden from view. The adolescent is no longer reliant on external objects but begins to think metaphorically (Vygotsky, 1994: 283). Creative writing plays an important role for the adolescent in providing a space for the exploration of imagination and the articulation of private thoughts and feelings. It becomes another form of play, albeit a more sophisticated one, and a tool for developing metaphoric thought.

1.2.4 Collaboration in space

In this section I discuss the final aspect of Fiona's pedagogy in relation to a specific creative-writing project that she did with her learners – the journey into space. Through an analysis of Fiona's description of this project, I highlight the collaborative aspect of her pedagogy and show how this relates to her conceptualisation of imagination. The other important aspect of this section is that it highlights her involvement in the imaginative process, and takes forward the evolving argument

that teaching imaginative writing is a creative act for her. The notion of collaboration is thus explored from a number of angles.

The space story was the major creative-writing project of the year. Fiona spent nearly a whole term on this project. They explored the theme and wrote poetry and emails on the topic but the major assignment that they worked towards was the creation of a story. In terms of Vygotsky's categories of imaginative writing (Chapter Three), the space story fits into fantasy/fictional writing. It lends itself to imagining and creating other worlds without constraints in ways that reality-based topics do not. The way that Fiona worked with this theme illustrates many of Vygotsky's ideas about fantasy writing. Vygotsky argues that the process of creating imaginary worlds is based on elements from reality and drawn from previous experience. Ideas drawn from experience are combined with ideas from the imagination and reworked to create fantasy or fictional writing.

We see this process in action in the way that Fiona describes her work on this topic. She began by brainstorming ideas about space with the whole class, drawing on their own ideas, imaginings and prior knowledge. While clearly none of the learners would have had direct experience of being in outer space, they have all had secondary experiences through movies and, to a lesser extent, stories about space. Fiona recounted this memory as follows:

> … what **we** did was that we started off by looking at how what sort of things could **we** do about space because there's so much, the area is so vast. **You** can do aliens, **you** can do space craft, you can do planets … **you** can do robots. **We** talked about … I mean the whole board was just full, and **we** talked about there is so much out there with space. So if **you** were told to write a space story what are you going to do because there's so much?

Fiona's representation of this process is indicative of her collaborative, participatory style. This introduction to space was not about teacher input but about a

collaborative construction of ideas and experiences. She begins by using the first-person pronoun ‘we’ in the first sentence, and uses the past tense. But as she recreates the moment she shifts to the present tense and the use of ‘you’ to indicate direct address, the words she would have used with the learners. For the rest of the paragraph she shifts between past and present tense and ‘we’ and ‘you’. She consistently made these shifts throughout the rest of this discussion about space.

Fiona’s discussion with the learners about teleportation (imagine yourself somewhere and you will be there) provides a vivid example of the process of combining ideas from experience with imagination. Learners gave ideas about the positive and negative possibilities that could be generated, such as immediately transporting somebody who is ill to a suitable hospital and the option of placing a bomb somewhere and then disappearing. Vygotsky’s notion of the combinatorial imagination takes on other dimensions in this collaborative process, as the learners are combining their ideas as a group, including the ideas of the teacher.

Fiona described how the collaborative process established at the outset of the theme is continued into the writing stage, very much working within a classic process-writing model. However, she emphasised that she cannot use the fully fledged process approach for all the writing they do, as time is a huge constraint. She described the writing process for the space story as follows, how they move from extended talk to writing:

> And then we really just let them **go wild**. We let them … so ok, choose something new and write. And then what I do … we sit … we sit outside on a lovely sunny day and we all read, out our best things, and we said, ok what are you doing with this story? And the kids asked questions of each other. Where are you going with this story? What happened before this, if they took out a bit in the middle? And they say, but this doesn’t really make sense …

Fiona considers it important that learners "learn to look at their work." By this she means look critically, and also learn to see their work through the eyes of others, a peer and teacher audience. Fiona acknowledged that peer feedback is only as good as the quality of the learners in the group and that strong learners tend to gravitate towards each other, and the same is true for weak learners. Fiona creates a structure for the peer feedback process by providing learners with editing checklists on content, meaning and form and more importantly by modelling the process in the way that she responds to their writing in whole group and individual contexts.

1.2.5 Permission to fly

Fiona underlines the importance of allowing learners to write stories without constraints, commenting that some of them were "really, really weird and way out." She explains why she thinks it is important to give learners this leeway:

> I let their imaginations go because I think we are so into the computer thing these days that we don't let our kids' imaginations fly. Everything's there for them. The imagination's done.

Fiona consistently uses images about removing constraints and giving the learners permission to explore beyond the usual confines in their space writing project. Earlier she spoke about "letting them go wild." In the above quotation she talks about "letting their imaginations go" and letting their "imaginations fly." These images are key to getting a deeper understanding of Fiona's view of imaginative writing and why she views it as being valuable and worth the effort and time expended.

She also demonstrates an awareness that for learners' imaginations to flourish, she as a teacher has to create an enabling and unthreatening space, that it won't happen automatically. She needs to give learners permission to 'fly'. One of the ways in which she does this, evident both in her description of practice and the classroom observation, is by literally removing the learners from the confines of the classroom at key moments, enabling them to work in small groups and discuss their work away

from the structure of desks and chairs. There's also a dimension to these images that suggests a process of unlocking the mind. This resonates with Vygotsky's argument that imagination and freedom are inextricably linked, and that one needs to have "inner freedom of thought, action and cognizing" (1994: 269) in order to imagine.

Ideas cannot be freely combined and creatively reworked in an environment that requires rote learning or mindless compliance, such as those described by all the teachers in their school writing histories. In contrast, Fiona seems to create an environment where it is possible for learners to think and write imaginatively. At the same time, she gives herself permission to 'fly' with the learners, and this is partly what enables her to teach imaginatively.

Finally, Fiona elaborated on her assessment criteria for this particular assignment. She explained that she intentionally kept the criteria broad because so much of the work they do has strict criteria and in this instance she wanted to give them a chance "to be a bit freer." The two broad criteria that Fiona used were language and creativity. She commented that the language component was easy to mark, but the creativity criterion was more subjective and slippery. I asked Fiona what she meant by creativity and she explained as follows:

> F: Look it has to … if it's going to be a story it has to have a flow. It has to go from one thing to the next thing. And so for me I look for that. And then I look at how they're going to be able to put that together.

Her explanation was vague compared to her articulation of ideas about other aspects of her pedagogy, and the rich conceptualisation of imagination embedded in the latter. This suggests that, as is often the case with teachers, her theories and ideas about imaginative writing are implicit.

1.3 Concluding comments about Fiona

Fiona's conceptualisation of imaginative writing is framed by enabling discourses as regards the learners and her ability to develop the learners' imaginative writing. She believes that structure, scaffolding, modelling, play, and collaboration are important strategies. These elements of her pedagogy are both pedagogical strategies and indicators of her underlying Vygotskian beliefs and ideas. For example, she foregrounds the social and collaborative aspect of learning, and integrates imagination and higher-level thinking. She seems to use a negotiated form of scaffolding, in that her scaffolding consists of outer teacher layers followed by inner layers of scaffolding in which learners have scope to develop their own ideas and interact with each other, and with the teacher. There is a strong relationship between her use of negotiated scaffolding and 'structured freedom' in that the structure provided is fluid and permeable and ultimately enables learners to move imaginatively beyond the structure and create their own texts.

A significant aspect of her conceptualisation and pedagogy is her own involvement with the imaginative process at every stage of its development. This emerged most strikingly through her collaboration with the learners, her passion and her sense of play. While one can never take articulations of espoused practice at face value, it is important to mention that there were no significant tensions between her espoused practice and her enactment of practice. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.

2. Nadine: "I didn't know I had it in me" – discovering one's own creativity through teaching (School C)

Nadine shares Fiona's passion for imaginative and creative writing. Both their beliefs and ideas are interesting juxtapositions to the range of positions articulated by Jane, Debby and Nhamo. While they both share a passion for imaginative, creative writing, Nadine is more interested in personal self-expression than Fiona.

Nadine believes that it is important to allow the learners to express themselves through creative writing. Much of the writing work she does is not directly about the learners' own lives. She believes that the personal is embedded in writing and that she learns an enormous amount about her learners through their writing.

A striking aspect of my interview with Nadine was her passion for teaching reading and writing and how she moves fluidly between the two modes. She also did not use deficit discourses. Instead, like Fiona, she expressed a strong belief that her learners can learn to improve their writing and are capable of creative self-expression. However, she did argue that there are some age-related limitations to what learners can do, particularly certain higher-level writing activities such as argumentative writing.

Another striking aspect of Nadine's interview was her articulation of the discovery of her capacity for creative writing through teaching. She does all the creative writing tasks that she sets the learners and uses these as models for the learners' own writing. Hence the title of this section: "I didn't know I had it in me." When she made this comment she was referring to her surprise and delight at discovering her own creativity through teaching.

2.1 Nadine's personal writing history

I begin this section by discussing the importance that Nadine attaches to the creative writing that she does for her learners and then relate that to her personal perspective on writing and her school writing history. It is not possible to separate these histories, as Nadine's relationship to writing is bound up with her teaching experiences in unexpected ways.

At the beginning of the interview I asked Nadine about the role of writing in her life. Nadine explained how her own creative writing is inspired by her teaching:

> The role of writing in my life … I have discovered only in the last few years that I love writing. I do a lot of writing for the children and I give it to them, because I think they can actually benefit from it. … When we're doing street-children I can say to them ok, come on, you're a street-child now, write something, a little poem and so on. And I say I will write one while you write. ... And they love it. They enjoy what I write. I don't say it's brilliant, but it certainly is something at their level and it gives them a very good idea what to do.

Nadine never had the opportunity to develop her own creativity during her schooling and teacher training. Hence it came as a surprise when she began accessing this part of herself through teaching. As the interview progressed, Nadine referred back to this discovery a number of times and it became clear that for her it was an identity shift, which made her reflect back on her schooling and wonder why it had never emerged earlier. There was one other experience, other than teaching, which released the creative aspect of herself. She explained:

> I must say … it's been … you know, I didn't know I had it in me. When I realised that I had it in me, is I worked for an organisation for only two years that developed children's books and I often used to write a story.

Nadine didn't always get positive feedback on her stories but her colleagues loved her poetry and she feels that she "could have developed a writing style." She worked for this organisation before she began writing stories for her learners. The other context in which Nadine writes is for her grandchildren in response to their requests. This is similar, audience-specific writing, to the kind of writing she does for her learners. Nadine commented on this as follows:

> And it's because I changed to doing this that I know I must have been very creative. … That I remember quite clearly that I couldn't do maths. But I must have been quite creative yet it doesn't stick out as being something that I did.

It seems that Nadine is trying to work out why her creativity was so dormant when she was at school. When Nadine spoke about her school writing history the puzzle began to make some sense. The dominant image of Nadine's school writing was one of absence, gaps, a blank. In response to my question about her memories of writing at school, Nadine responded:

> I have *no* memories of them whatsoever. Isn't that amazing? … Can't remember a thing. Not *one* recollection of ever writing a story.

Nadine uses repetition to emphasise her realisation that she does not have a stock of memories to draw on about school writing: "*no* memories", "Not *one*". She seems quite shocked and angry at this realisation in a similar way to Debby and this was reflected in her choice of words (mostly negatives) as well as her intonation during the interview.

Like Debby, and at a similar time period, Nadine went to what was considered "a good school", yet she feels that she learned nothing valuable. She had one brief memory about writing history essays at school, but these were regarded as "very factual", and didn't tap her creativity in any significant way. The way Nadine described these essays, it sounded as though they were an extended prose version of reciting facts rather than engaging in interpretation and critical thinking.

When I attempted to probe Nadine's absence of memory she responded as follows:

> B: Is it because you think you didn't really have an opportunity to do it?
>
> N: I don't know! I can't remember doing it. Comprehensions I can remember. But … it is a total blank, which actually saddens me.

Clearly, Nadine had quite a strong emotional response to the absence of memory and the sense that there was a creative part of her that never had the chance to develop itself until a much later stage in her professional life. She views this as a lost opportunity at a formative stage on her life ("... saddens me").

While most of the teachers struggled to retrieve memories about school writing, some more than others, none of the others had a complete blank as Nadine did. Debby, for example, retrieved predominantly negative memories, while Fiona and Nhamo had a mix of positive and negative memories.

Nadine concluded that she learned very little that was valuable at school and that her real learning happened "on the battlefields of school here." This was particularly the case as regards learning to write creatively at school and learning to teach writing at teacher training college. Nadine's memories of college, although sparse, did contain at least one memory of an outstanding Afrikaans lecturer whose ideas she was able to apply in the English classroom. Interestingly, although she remembered the name of this lecturer and remembered her as "inspirational", she did not recall or recount specifics about what she exactly taught her and how she inspired her. Even in this recounted memory, there are a lot of gaps and absences if one compares it, for example, to the vividness of Fiona's memory of being shown "the art of English".

2.2 Nadine's pedagogy and conceptualisation of imaginative writing

There are a number of key ideas that are central to Nadine's pedagogy. Like Fiona, she values imaginative work and puts a lot of energy into devising effective ways of eliciting creative work from her learners. However, the key elements of her approach have some similarities with and differences from Fiona's approach. Nadine's conceptualisation of imaginative writing is revealed through her detailed description of her work across imaginative writing genres. She focuses on three categories of imaginative writing: narrating the self, narrating other lives and fictional/fantasy narratives (as discussed in Chapter Three, 1.5). Although these categories provide useful delineations between strands of imaginative writing, there are clear continuities between Nadine's work in these three categories, particularly her interest in how the self is expressed across these genres. Like Fiona, her work is framed by enabling discourses and she regards structure and scaffolding as essential. However, she works with a different version of scaffolding to Fiona, and this will be elaborated on in 2.2.4.

2.2.1 Enabling discourses

Nadine made links between teaching learners how to write and their capacity to improve. Like Fiona, she expressed a strong belief in her capacity to teach learners how to write and their capacity to improve significantly. She commented:

> No, children **must write**, they **must** express themselves. They've **got to** write. And when you start bringing in all the things that maybe they haven't had in the lower classes, their writing improves. Because I sometimes show writing to colleagues of mine in the lower grades, and they can't believe the **improvement** in the child. It's because now they learned rules, they're learning not to be the 4 out of 10 person anymore. And *here* they definitely ***can*** **improve**. ... And you're the 4 out of 10 in maths ... ok with that, then when it comes to their own creativity ... they want to improve.

Nadine's first comment ("children must write", "…must express themselves") conveys a sense of urgency and a very deep-seated belief in the value of writing and self-expression. Like Fiona, she uses strong modals and verbs that convey a sense of the importance of writing as well as modals that convey a strong belief in the conditions of possibility for writing ("definitely can improve", "want to improve"). The word "improve" in various forms is repeated four times to reiterate this point. Her comments refer both to the conditions of possibility for the learners as well as conditions of possibility for herself as teacher. Nadine foregrounds pedagogical strategies that she uses which enable learners to improve, particularly linguistic features ("... now they learned rules."). This is an interesting contrast to Fiona, who seemed to attribute her learners' good writing to her strong belief in them and her passion for imaginative writing.

Nadine elaborates on what she means by rules as follows:

> firstly I teach ... they have rules in my class. They cannot use two words at the beginning of a sentence more than twice. And I have all the rules and they suddenly realise ... because I always say to them, now listen, I'm going to tell you a secret, this is a trick that will get to all the teachers. They will think that you are very good (laughs).

On first reading, it seems as if Nadine is talking about expression in terms of grammatical correctness. However, as she continues her comments it becomes clear that she is talking about both aspects of expression: using linguistic resources as a vehicle to facilitate self-expression and to engage the reader. As the analysis of Nadine's pedagogy proceeds, it also becomes clear that she is not referring to the process of learning rules in a very rigid way. The reader, however, is constructed as the teacher, the marker, the evaluator, and Nadine is sharing the secret rules of the marking game with them.

One of the reasons that Nadine teaches reading and writing the way she does is because of the shifting profiles of learners at the school as well as the impact of global, technological shifts on learners' reading and writing practices. She also commented that the class composition of learners at the school has changed over the years, resulting in more learners who do not have as much access to rich literacy practices at home. She did not specify whether a shift in the language profile of learners was one of the issues.

2.2.2 Personal writing/Narrating the self

While Nadine is similar to Fiona in her passionate belief about the value of imaginative writing, she focuses more on personal self-expression than Fiona. She believes that learners express themselves through their writing, even when they are not writing directly about themselves. She uses discourses of ownership and agency to describe learners' writing ("It's their own expression"), in sharp contrast with her own school writing experience. She learns a lot about her learners through their writing. She explained:

> It is self-expression that comes out on their writing. I learn a lot about the children, even if it is a street-child they're writing about. I suddenly pick up things in their writing that's quite amazing. And I think it's also a good exercise in knowing the children.

Nadine's theme for the year was issue-based, exploring issues in South African society like street-children, pensioners, crime and migrant labourers. Learners explored these issues through fictional and non-fictional creative writing (i.e. the latter refers to narrating other lives, using knowledge from sources to create a story). In both genres of writing, Nadine foregrounded the personal as a means of exploring and writing about issues, encouraging learners to give their opinions, problem-solve, relate issues to their own lives, explore personal responses and think about what they would do in the situations discussed. As part of the street-children theme,

Nadine read *Mellow Yellow,* a novel about a street-child, with the learners as well as children's poems from *Homeless Talk, a* newspaper written and produced by homeless people.

While Nadine believes that this is mostly a very positive result of learners' writing, there are times when it raises ethical and uncomfortable issues. She gave an example in the context of the street-children theme that they were working on.

> Now, two years ago, the children wrote about being a street-child. I worry myself silly that some of these children had not been actually raped. Abused in some way. Because it came out.

At various points in the interview Nadine made connections between the learners' imaginative writing and the reality and possible experience base of these stories. This view resonates with Vygotsky's argument that imaginative writing and thinking has strong associations with reality and life experiences (Vygotsky, 2004). For example, she believes that we live in a violent society and that her learners have an awareness and direct/indirect experience of crime, rape, and abuse. She regards the learners as "streetwise", and this reflects in their writing.

2.2.3 Narrating other lives

The ideas discussed in the previous section already indicate that Nadine sees strong connections between imaginative writing, self expression and learners' experiences.

This underlying principle is strongly applied to the narration of other lives but introduces a more explicitly social awareness element into her pedagogy.

Nadine works with an integrated model across English, History and Geography, and she sees this cross-discipline approach as lending itself to writing and particularly narrating other lives. In addition, she moves fluidly between reading and writing, so literary texts as well as social science texts frequently serve as springboards into imaginative writing.

Nadine gave the example of her work in Geography on migrant labour. She explained as follows:

> Yes, like we've just done Lesotho. And when we were finished everything about Lesotho, the children realised that maybe people come to work here in Johannesburg on the mines and that, but [leave] the hills and the fresh air in Lesotho, and what do you leave behind? And I gave them three questions only. And I said, now I want you to write a poem about Lesotho. They were superb.

Nadine shifts from a focus on the children's cognition, their understanding of the experiences of migrant labour, to the projection of themselves into that experience, a synthesis of cognition and affect. She is clearly encouraging them to use the 'experience' generated by reading about migrant labour as a springboard for imagining themselves in that situation and writing a poem. This is a powerful way of extending their understanding and empathy, to move beyond the confines of their own lives and direct experience. This shift is mirrored in Nadine's explanation where she suddenly makes linguistic shifts from the third person to the first person. She asks the learners directly "and what do you leave behind?" (thus placing them in the shoes of migrant labourers).

Nadine explains how she takes the links between learning about Lesotho and migrant labour and literary texts. She explains how she uses an extract from Alan Paton's seminal South African novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* to deepen their understanding of the issue:

> … Now with *Cry, the Beloved Country* I'm going to show them how to compare what they themselves have written about Lesotho. And now this man is leaving his country to come to Egoli (Johannesburg) as well. And he's heard stories of Egoli.

This is a fascinating process of identification, and a strategy to deepen the learners' exposure to a range of secondary experiences about which they have already written in the persona of a migrant worker. The idea of comparing their 'narrative about other lives' with another narrative on the same topic is highly productive. In a sense they are being required to do a double 'imaginative leap', from their own lives into somebody else's life and then from their own narrative onto a narrative constructed by Alan Paton.

This process illustrates Vygotsky's notion of how narrating other lives can enable the writer to move beyond "the narrow boundaries of his own experience" (2004). The boundaries and borders that are being crossed in Nadine's work on migrant labourers are multiple. Gloria Anzaldua's 'border-crossing' work springs to mind. In her essay "How to tame a wild tongue" (2000), she blurs traditional boundaries, using a mix of poetry, memoir and historical analysis as well as code-switching between English and Spanish. While the extent of border-crossing is more limited in the example under discussion, learners are crossing a number of personal, genre and textual boundaries – between their own experiences and others' experiences, between their text and others' texts, between poetry and narrative.

2.2.4 Fictional narratives

When I interviewed Nadine, she was in the middle of a writing project on 'Who killed Humpty Dumpty?' and she was visibly excited about this work. The theme for the section was "Who … Dunnit?" and Nadine had been teaching the learners vocabulary related to detective work, forms of evidence and some 'super-sleuth' skills. They then discussed the Humpty Dumpty nursery rhyme and learners were required to write a detective story in which they solved the mystery of Humpty Dumpty's murder.

This Humpty Dumpty project fits into the category of **fictional/fantasy** writing in a number of ways. Learners are required to combine their existing knowledge and

experience of detective work with ideas from the imagination and rework these to create something new. While learners would probably not have direct experience of detective work or detectives, they can draw on resources such as books, movies and television programmes to create the story. Another interesting 'imaginative leap' that learners have to make is to transform elements of the nursery rhyme genre into a fictional detective narrative, transplanting the plot and the characters into another genre.

2.2.5 From controlled writing to freedom

Nadine literally bubbled over as she spoke about the project. She provides a detailed account of her scaffolding of the project, as the following excerpt illustrates:

> And for example today we've had a build-up. We're on Who Killed Humpty Dumpty? And I started off by giving them vocabulary, because that is what they don't have. And we discuss the vocabulary. And then I made them draw clues. ... They were just *loving* it.
>
> Then I am now doing a controlled planner. Because they don't know how to plan. ... So I said right, now this was controlled in a way. I'm going to show you these words, beady eyes, big ears, all the things that a detective might just have. Moustache, a tweed jacket. And I started the story and I said, you know this detective is sitting in his office and there's a phone call and he's got to go. Now, I said, here is my sheet of words to describe a detective. You can use *any* of these words you like ... and you can make them really interesting, that's good for you. Then you've learned something. And I said, but you are only to write for me now in your planner a description of the detective who's going to be sent to the crime.

Nadine has given learners a linguistic structure to work with, including typical descriptions of detectives from popular culture. Nadine refers to this practice as 'controlled writing', and she refers to it a number of times in the interview as an

integral part of her writing pedagogy. Nadine seems to be working with structure and controlled writing in a different way to the mind-numbing examples provided by the teachers about their school writing histories. One difference is the fact that the 'controlled planning' is part of a larger process – at a certain point in the process the learners are set free to go in their own direction, to take the words and phrases that they like, add their own and weave these into a plot and characterisation of their own. Nadine explains how she sees the learners taking ownership of this task as follows:

> Yes. I want to see how they are going to describe this detective, because they've been given information, they've got lots of it. And although I'm controlling it in a way, I'm not controlling it. Because they are going to write their own thing about the detective.

However, through the discourses Nadine uses when she talks about her controlled writing process a more ambiguous picture emerges. Nadine slips between the language of collaboration and the language of teacher instruction. In her description of the Humpty Dumpty controlled planning process, Nadine uses the collective first-person plural 'we' three times, compared with nine usages of the first-person singular pronoun 'I'. The 'we', which indicates a collaborative process and a certain level of participation, is used in the first two lines: "And for example today we've had a build-up. We're on Who killed Humpy Dumpty. … And we discuss the vocabulary." The rest of the paragraph is mostly about what Nadine told the learners, instructions, demonstrations and examples provided by Nadine to the learners. Verb usage includes the following examples: "And I started off by giving them vocabulary…" "Then I made them draw clues", "I'm going to show you these words …", "And I started the story…", "…but you are only to write for me … a description of the detective…" There is not much indication in the description of Nadine drawing on learners' resources and ideas, other than the discussion of the vocabulary. It is also interesting to note the notion of writing for teacher as audience ("write for me").

It's important to note that Nadine ends her description of the controlled writing process by giving the learners choices ("You can use *any* of the words you like") and by trying to motivate the learners to use these words to make their writing more interesting and to learn new things. She also makes the follow-on comment that the learners are going to "Write their own thing", using the vocabulary exercise as a springboard.

I posed this question to Nadine:

> B: Don't you find that there's a tricky balance between kind of creating a structure that creates good writing but not over-structuring so that they all become the same? Or that it becomes kind of too tight?

Nadine was initially hesitant about answering this question not because of reluctance but she needed time to think about it. She explained that when she makes writing tasks too loose, learners produce lower-quality writing. She gives an example of an unstructured writing task that they will do during my two-week observation:

> They will do free writing and I'll let you compare and see … what is the difference between structured and unstructured. But you'll definitely see it. So don't think I structure everything. But I do find that I'm not prepared to … they've got to learn new vocabulary. They must learn it, you know, and they've got to improve each time. They can't be a good writer at the same level.

In this comment Nadine reiterates the importance of structure in ensuring that each writing task is a new learning experience. She picks up on the theme of learner development and improvement that was introduced earlier. She then describes the next phase of the Humpty Dumpty writing project, where learners move into creating their own story. There is a clear shift in the discourses she uses here, reflecting the phase of setting the learners' minds and imaginations free. She describes this process as follows:

> Yes, I'm trying to teach them how to … Let's look at the detective, all the things about the detective. Let's write down all the things we can do about it concerning the detective and let's see Humpty Dumpty and his friends. What was the problem there? Write down what you think the problem is. … And they are now going to have to make up their minds whether they all got together to kill him, or whether somebody … who was it, and why did he do it? Now that will be their own free writing.

Nadine does not use the term free writing with Peter Elbow's notion of free writing in mind (1981).[7] Nadine uses the term "their own free writing" to refer to a phase in the learner's writing process where learners are free to develop their ideas in their own way.

The language used in Nadine's description of this phase is much more collaborative than her description of the controlled phase, indicated by verb phrases like "Let's look", "let's write down", "Let's see". In addition, there is a shift in focus to the learners' minds, thoughts, agency and ownership of their story development process. They have to use the available information about different nursery rhyme characters to produce solution to the problem. They have to imagine the different characters and what kind of internal motivations they might have as well as the kind of relationship they would have had with Humpty Dumpty.

[7] Elbow (1981) coined the term freewriting to refer to a pre-writing activity that loosens the writer's inhibitions, enabling the writer to write without stopping for a period of time and to write whatever comes to mind.

2.3 Concluding comments about Nadine

Fiona and Nadine engage with different versions of the social dimension of writing. Nadine engages learners with social issues and works across self and difference, encouraging learners to project themselves into others' lives. But her focus does not seem to be on social as in collaborative work. Fiona, on the other hand, works with a fundamentally socio-cultural approach to writing and learning, and this is reflected in the multiple forms of collaboration that permeate her practice.

Nadine foregrounds the personal and self-expression in both her conceptualisation of imaginative writing and in her description of different imaginative writing tasks (i.e. narrating the self, narrating other lives, fictional/fantasy writing). Fiona does not foreground the personal in her conceptualisation of imaginative writing as much as Nadine, but it will become clear in her enactment of practice (Chapter Seven, 1.1) that she facilitates learners' personal engagement with writing tasks in sustained ways.

2.4 Conclusions

Fiona and Nadine both highlight the possibility that in the process of teaching creative writing, teachers can access their own creativity in different ways. This may entail writing alongside the learners, as Nadine does, or it may entail "journeying alongside the learners" (Grainger et al., 2005) as Fiona does, without necessarily producing her own creative writing. This is a valuable insight, as in my own work with pre-service teachers they often express concern about teaching creative writing effectively if they do not perceive themselves as talented creative writers. These two case studies suggest that there are multiple ways for teachers to access their imagination and this should be viewed holistically. This finding reinforces the argument of Grainger et al. (2005: 166–167) that teachers need to develop their creativity and imagination in a number of different contexts in order to be empowered to teach writing with passion and conviction. This is not to sideline the

idea that teachers' writing pedagogy will be enhanced if they develop their own creative writing. Rather, this conclusion extends the notion of what it means for teachers to participate and collaborate in the imaginative writing process.

Both teachers also have strong beliefs in the value of imaginative writing, and use 'enabling discourses' to refer to its possibilities for themselves as teachers and for their learners. These two elements (conviction and belief) are closely related to their 'enabling discourses' and work together to create classrooms of imaginative possibilities.

Fiona and Nadine differ in their approach to structure and scaffolding. While Fiona creates a framework of 'structured freedom', Nadine uses 'controlled writing' and 'controlled planning' in the initial phases of writing tasks, and sets the learners free to take ownership of their writing later in the process. The implications of these two approaches to structure will be explored in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Chapter Seven: Two teachers' enactments of imaginative writing ideas: A close reading

1. Introduction and overview

In Chapters Five and Six teachers' ideas and beliefs about imaginative writing were explored. These ideas were discussed in relation to the teachers' own writing histories and broader discourses on which they draw. In this chapter, I provide an in-depth description and analysis of Fiona's and Debby's enactment of their imaginative writing ideas in the classroom. This chapter thus begins to answer the second part of the research question of this thesis – i.e. what is the relationship between teachers' conceptions of imaginative writing and their enactment of imaginative writing pedagogy in the classroom? Furthermore, how do discourses and pedagogy work together (or against each other) to open or close "in-between spaces" where learners can find a place as writers between their intentions and the constraints of everyday reality? (Dyson, 1997: 14).

I begin by providing a summary of key analytical categories used for the analysis, and a brief discussion of the tensions between 'espoused' and 'enacted practice' in teacher cognition literature (section 1.1). This discussion is followed by the following sections:

2. Description and analysis of data per teacher across categories (overview)

2.1 Description and analysis of Fiona's writing task: Imagining monsters & myths

2.2 Description and analysis of Debby's writing task: Journey into space

The framework for analysis consists of three of the categories discussed in Chapter Three (3.2, 3.3 and 3.4).These categories are summarised as follows:

i) *The teachers' use of Discourses of imagination and creativity and how these relate to other dominant classroom discourses such as enabling or deficit Discourses.*

Discourses are analysed through the lens of Christie's conceptualisation of Classroom Discourses as an integral part of the shape and pattern of activities, both a micro and a macro view of the classroom (Christie, 1984). I use the term Discourses of imagination to refer to both language and activities that construct the imagination as a significant aspect of learning and that encourages learners to develop their imaginations.

ii) *The teachers' scaffolding and mediation of the imaginative writing process*.

Scaffolding and mediation refer to the manner in which the teacher/mediator supports and breaks up a task into manageable steps until the learner is able to take responsibility for the task him/herself. The focus is on different configurations of scaffolding and mediation and their implications for imaginative writing.

iii) The teachers' modelling of the imaginative writing process.

This concept refers to both the use of model texts and the way the teacher models elements of the process such as modelling feedback. It also refers to the teacher's participation in the process. Clearly, modelling is directed related to questions of scaffolding and mediation. However, I am treating it as a separate category, as within the literature on teaching writing the notion of modelling has some specific meanings and associations.

While teachers articulated their 'espoused practices' in Chapters Five and Six in relation to classroom discourses, scaffolding, mediation and modelling of the imaginative writing process, Chapters Seven and Eight explore their enactment of these key categories.

1.1 The tensions between 'espoused' and 'enacted practices'

In order to build a composite and convincing understanding of the five case studies in this study, it is necessary to explore how the teachers enact their ideas in the classroom. The discussion that follows locates this issue in the literature concerning the tensions between 'espoused' and 'enacted' practice (Argyris & Schon, 1978).[8]

Numerous teacher cognition studies have noted the frequent discrepancies between 'espoused' and 'enacted' practice across different subjects (Freeman, 1996). Courtland, Welsh and Kennedy (1987, 1990), Gusky (1986) and Kennedy (1998) have drawn similar conclusions in the context of projects that focus specifically on the teaching of writing.

Teachers' practices are sometimes ahead of their own espoused practice and at times lag behind it. Both Kennedy (1998: 18) and Wilson (1994: 76) note the predominance of prescriptive approaches as the common default mode of writing teachers, even after substantial exposure to alternative ideas. Other significant teacher cognition studies have highlighted the relationship between teachers' views about writing and how they implement writing programmes in classrooms (McCarthy, 1990). Kennedy eloquently sums up the difficulties of facilitating shifts in teachers' beliefs about writing pedagogy, in the context of a large study on teacher education:

> Teachers enter their professional education already trapped in their own relationship with the subject. Many learned as children to equate writing with grammar, punctuation and usage. … This complex of ideas traps teachers in a traditional grammar school ideal. The presence of these ideas raises the

[8] Although these terms were originally coined by Argyris and Schon in the seventies, they have become an integral part of educational discourse and have subsequently been used by a wide range of teacher education researchers.

> questions of whether teachers who are trapped in traditional practices can learn different ideas about teaching writing. (1998: 14, 20)

Interestingly, Gusky (1986) notes that teachers often operationalise new approaches before they have really internalised the underlying ideas and beliefs. Frequently teachers develop awareness of new possibilities but for a long period of time the old and the new co-exist or alternate. As teachers begin to see the positive results of a new approach, they begin to internalise the change and are prepared to take more risks. Courtland, Welsh and Kennedy illustrate this idea convincingly through their longitudinal case study of one teacher's shift from a traditional product approach to teaching writing to a process approach (1987, 1990).

Various tensions emerge in the teachers' enactments of practice that resonate with the issues raised in the teacher cognition literature. This will be discussed across Chapters Seven and Eight.

2. Description and analysis of data per teacher across categories (overview)

Having established a conceptual framework for reading the data, I will now describe and analyse Fiona and Debby's contextualisation, mediation, scaffolding, and modelling of one writing task as well as their use of imaginative Discourses. The data is thus not necessarily organised according to lessons, but rather is based on "critical incidents" (Tripp, 1993) selected from a number of lessons in the build-up to a particular writing task or related series of tasks. A critical incident is selected for data analysis because it makes a significant contribution, positive or negative, to the researcher's understanding of an activity or phenomenon. The Critical Incident Technique is flexible, and I have adapted it to suit the purposes of this research. I have selected critical incidents that raise questions about instances of both good and problematic practices.

It is important to state upfront that the depth, breadth and scope of these tasks vary. Fiona mediated one large task across a number of lessons over a two-week period, while Debby mediated a small task over three lessons.

Where relevant I will make links between these specific moments and other issues that arose in the rest of the lesson series. My motivation for taking this 'critical incident' approach **per teacher** is that it enables me to work with the data in a holistic way and to explore the web of relationships between discourses, scaffolding and modelling in the totality of the teacher's practice. However, it is important to note that the analysis will not be restricted to the abovementioned categories – other sub-categories arise as I proceed (such as collaboration). Although I am dealing with each teacher separately, I will draw comparisons throughout and will sum these up at the end of the chapter.

2.1 Description and analysis of Fiona's writing task: Imagining monsters & myths (Grade 7, School D

Over the two-week period of observing Fiona's English lessons, she focused on a reading and writing task that revolved around a Greek myth called *The Minotaur.* The basic plotline is that Theseus must go on a treacherous journey to confront and kill the Minotaur. Learners must imagine this journey and decide on a suitable ending. Will the hero triumph? Will the monster triumph? Will they both die? This work was supplemented by introductory lessons on a novel (*The Snow Goose* by Paul Gallico) and dramatised choral verse. However, the bulk of the literacy skills were integrated into a process-oriented task on *The Minotaur*.

2.1.1 Introducing theme and task (Lesson 1)

Fiona begins the lesson by introducing the learners to the genre of myths, fables and fairytales. What is immediately evident is that she assumes that the learners have prior knowledge on this topic but that they need to know more about it. She writes the three main categories on the board and then elicits examples from the learners

per category. What follows, is a process of 'working out' and 'finding out', and Fiona encourages learners to use their available knowledge to work out the answers. There is a high level of learner participation, as they eagerly share their suggestions with Fiona and their classmates. At the end of the session, she asks learners to re-categorise their examples using their deeper understanding of myths, fables and fairytales.

This brief introduction highlights one feature of Fiona's teaching that is reinforced throughout the observation period – her consistent use of problem-solving Discourses and how this positions the learners as being capable of independent thought and taking responsibility for their learning, to some extent. While Fiona clearly promotes the development of higher-level thinking (and as the data analysis proceeds it becomes clear that this is interwoven with imaginative thought), she does not necessarily promote critical literacy. Some of the learners try to offer a critique of fairytales, and while Fiona allows them to express these views, she does not take the discussion further. She closes the discussion by commenting that "It's good for children." It is difficult to separate higher-level thinking from critical thinking – they need to work together. However, while the latter two forms of thinking emerge from psychological and cognition research, Critical Literacy is located in a social justice paradigm. In other words, Fiona does develop learners' capacities for higher-level thinking and critical thinking, but not within a Critical Literacy paradigm.

This introductory lesson also indicates that Fiona considers knowledge of genres an important starting point for a writing task, although as will become clear as the task unfolds, she uses the notion of modelling in interesting and rather unexpected ways. Having established a common frame of reference for understanding myths with the learners, she moves to the next part of the lesson:

F: We're going to do something different now. Get into groups of three and work with people you work well with. I'm going to give you a myth and I'd like you to read it together. You can do it outside or you can sit inside. It's up to you. One person from each group come and take it **(Field notes, 7 September 2007, lesson 1).**

There is a sense of ease, freedom and choice at this point in the lesson. This marks the beginning of their task. Each group collects its copies of *The Minotaur* and most take the opportunity to work outside. It is important to note that Fiona did not give learners the entire myth in one go, but gives them parts of the myth in stages.

Beginnings ... **(Field notes, 7 September, Lesson 1, 2007)**

The children are scattered all over the playground in different configurations. Some learners are sitting on the stairs, while others are standing. But they all (or most) seem to be reading and on task. A few (the minority of course) even choose to stay in the classroom. Fiona walks around and sees how they are doing. They are clearly used to the kind of group activity and working outside.

Fiona and I have a brief chat and she shows me the overview of her programme for myths and how it will lead to a range of writing tasks. She reiterates that she likes to deal with language in context and doesn't like to do grammar in isolation. She made this point strongly in her interview and I'm beginning to see how she works with language in practice.

It's a beautiful, warm spring day. I'm enjoying the sunlight and the sights of the children working in self-regulated ways. I'm sure the children are enjoying it too. I guess this is what learning should be, but it often isn't. Their bodies and their minds are freed up.

I consider this moment to be a very important one in setting the tone of Fiona's classroom practice. Using Christie's notion of the configuration of classroom Discourses across a range of factors, the organisation and shape of this activity lends

itself to collaboration, enjoyment, and self-regulation. Grainger et al. also emphasise the importance of "the climate and ethos that pervades the classroom" (187) in creating conditions of possibility for creativity and writing.

2.1.2 Generating ideas for story openings: Scaffolding, modelling & collaboration (Lesson 2 selections)

By this point learners have already sequenced the opening of the story from visual and linguistic clues and written group summaries. That took place in a lesson that I missed and Fiona told me that they really 'got it.' Every aspect of this process is carefully scaffolded but done at a brisk pace so that there is no opportunity for boredom to set in and with appropriate levels of challenge at each stage. One or two groups read their summaries aloud, and then Fiona moves onto the next phase of the lesson. Learners work in small groups, discussing the various hazardous and treacherous options from which Theseus must select his route to confront the monster (the Minotaur). Group work takes place in very specific timeframes, with the expectation of a verbal or written product. Learners are clearly accustomed to this and, for the most part, seem to work productively.

After the group work, Fiona elicits a range of personal responses from the learners about the different routes. She models this mode of responding a number of times, and consistently throughout all the lessons observed, putting herself "inside the process" (Grainger et al., 2005: 45) as illustrated by her comments below:

> F: To you which one (route) would be the worst? To me this one would be the worst (crawling on all fours). I'd prefer the snake. Which one would you not want?
>
> F: He has two choices – can either go this way which will land him in the cave with a (wonderful looking) snake and a dead-end or he can go here. This would be my nightmare because I'm claustrophobic. Or he can go that way **(Field notes, 10 September 2007, lesson 2).**

In this instance she is engaging their personal responses in partial preparation for the writing task, which will require learners to write about Theseus' journey and his fight with the monster from a first-person perspective. The focus of this task is descriptive writing and building tension in a story. Fiona begins to brief them on this task and concentrates on eliciting ideas for a gripping opening sentence. This briefing and the conversation that ensues is a "critical incident" (Tripp, 1993) that highlights some of the distinctive features of Fiona's practice. I begin with the extract from Fiona's briefing to the learners.

> F: Now when you read the myth it doesn't really frighten you because it tells you just facts. So **we're** going to make the myth better. So you're in your groups going to write your own paragraph as if you were Theseus. Now none of you chose the one with the rocks. **You are going to try and make this the best piece of writing – you/we are going to make it even better**. Let's look at this one where he has to climb. Let's look at the one with the rocks. How can **we** start? What are the things that could be scary about being here? (**Field notes: 10 September 2007, lesson 2)**

There are a number of distinctive features of Fiona's practice that are encapsulated in this extract. Firstly, her briefing is highly motivating ("you are going to try and make this the best piece of writing"). The tone of her briefing is very encouraging and conveys a sense to the learners that she expects the best from them and believes that they are capable of delivering their best. Fiona's passion for reading and writing and the response of the learners demonstrate Grainger et al.'s argument (2005: 183) that:

> Passion and affective engagement are both critical and underrated components of a creative teacher's repertoire. ... The presence of passion has been documented as a critical component of learning groups both in the

classroom (Krechevsky and Stork, 2002) and in professionals' learning contexts (Woods, 1995).

This briefing has been preceded by reading and discussion, and learners have already begun to project themselves into the text in the previous activity. Hence, numerous scaffolds have been generated and the task is part of an "extended process of composition" (Grainger et al., 2005: 24). Also striking (and in keeping with Fiona's interview) is her use of a strongly collaborative discourse, created through her frequent use of 'we' and at one point she talks interchangeably about you/we.

The notion of collaboration in Fiona's classroom and in this specific example works at a number of levels. Learners are writing the first part of this story in groups and have been working collaboratively on all the preliminary tasks. Then there is also the sense that Fiona is "inside the process" and "journeying alongside children" (Grainger et al., 2005), despite the fact that she doesn't do any writing herself as suggested by Grainger.

The task itself is an interesting variation on modelling. Having familiarised themselves with the myth (as far as they have got), learners are required to rework the myth and make a number of fundamental changes. Firstly, they need to "inhabit" the text, to insert themselves into the story in the persona of Theseus and become part of the adventure. Secondly, they have to change the language of the myth to make it more compelling and taut. Finally, they have the freedom to change the story, to combine their ideas with the existing framework of the story. From a Vygotskian perspective, this is a combinatorial exercise in creative reworking. It does not fit neatly into any three of the Vygotskian categories of imaginative writing. It seems to work as a combination of all three, with elements of fictional narrative (as it entails the creation of an imaginary world). At the same time learners are required to narrate Theseus' experience (narrating other lives) as though it were their own experience (narrating the self). The learners will be drawing on their own

experiences of fear and danger as they rework the text. This overlap of all three categories illustrates the fluidity of imaginative writing categories, and some of the limitations of genre. What remains clear is that this is not an exercise in reproduction or imitation.

The next extract from field notes on this "critical incident" (Tripp, 1993) illustrates the collaborative and dialogical process through which Fiona elicits ideas for a strong opening sentence for the first paragraph.

Extract from field notes: 10 September 2007, lesson 2

F: He's got nothing covering his legs now. In all of these it's going to be that it's dark. You have to **get across to your reader** how dark it is. **How are we going to start? How are you going to get the reader to fear this? I want you to give me the sentence**….

L: He looked into the darkness and felt a cold shiver.

L: He could see the outline of a rock in front of him.

F: Don't go too far [meaning don't go too far into the story]

Fiona repeats the sentence to the class and writes it on the board.

Theseus could see the outline of a rock in front of him.

F: **How could we make it better?**

L: Add hyphen – and that's all.

F: I like that!

Fiona adds it onto the sentence and then makes a suggestion for an addition.

F: How about if I add dim or shapeless?

Khanya that was really nice. Are you happy with that?

L (Sam): Ms, we could describe the rocks … freezing rocks.

F: He hasn't touched it yet so maybe leave that for later.

Sam (not giving up): We could say massive rocks.

Some learners prefer dim to shapeless.

F: Okay, you can decide.

L: Ms, he's holding onto it.

L: He approached

F: I love that!

L: He touched the rock hoping that it was a rock.

F: Yes …

L: He slowly walked up to …

F: **Can you see how you're building the tension?**

L: As he touched the figure … a terrible chill went down his spine

F: On the back of the story try and plan just a shorter paragraph on the bit you chose.

So, if you chose the water then describe the experience. **Think of a sentence and think how you can make it better so that we're there with Theseus.**

L: Ms, we chose the one where he's staring over the water.

F: That's fine … let's go.

Learners start working on the task. There are lots of questions about task content.

In many ways, the extract above illustrates the argument posed by Grainger et al. about ways of modelling writing:

> As teachers, we need to demonstrate to the class that writing is a problem-solving activity (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987), a process of thinking and evaluating which involves us in conversations with ourselves. Modelled writing should involve us in sharing our own creative processes and may expose our false starts, blank spots and uncertainties (Grainger et al., 2005: 167).

While Fiona is not sharing her own writing with the learners, she models the creative process in a number of ways. Firstly, in line with her focus on problem-solving and working things out, she facilitates the discussion about possible openings as a collaborative problem-solving task. Part of the problem, as she defines it for the learners, is for them to write in a way that enables their audience to imagine the scene (so there is triple imaginative work being done here: imagining the scene for themselves, using linguistic resources to create the scene, and enabling an outsider to imagine the scene). The learners generate the examples and Fiona responds to these as both reader and evaluator, at times modelling positive responses ("I love that") and other times pushing learners to "make it better." Ultimately, the learners will need to internalise this process and apply it to their own writing. Fiona also does not hesitate to share her own ideas when other suitable ideas are not forthcoming. At this preliminary brainstorming stage, the learners' ideas are quite basic and Fiona's comments remain at the level of affective responses such as "I like it", without explicitly saying why but these become more detailed and explicit as the task progresses.

The purpose of this activity is very clear – making the reader feel afraid by building tension. Towards the end of the activity, Fiona reflects on this explicitly: "Can you see how you're building the tension*?*" Hence, through a carefully staggered process, she is building both learners' understanding of the language and metalanguage required for the task. The development of their capacity for imaginative thinking is embedded in this process. As they develop the language and ideas for recreating Theseus'

journey, they are applying their minds to the problem of how to create a build-up of tension and a vivid picture for an imagined reader. This is integrated into the overall lesson without being reduced to a mechanistic grammar lesson. Fiona's enactment of practice (i.e. integration of form and content) is congruent with her articulation of her pedagogy during the formal interview and informal conversation. In the next selection of "critical incidents" (Tripp, 1993), I focus on the dialogical process through which the learners' story openings are (somewhat grotesquely) developed and discussed.

2.1.3 Imagining rotting corpses and sludgy toes: Multiple sources of learning to write the gross and grotesque (lesson 4 and a slice of lesson 5)

Fiona begins the lesson by recapping on the descriptive writing task that the learners began in lesson two. She clarifies what she wants the learners to do. She explains that she wants only a few sentences.

> F: I'm looking for the **best** your writing can be. **Create a picture** of that moment. Don't develop the story; you will have a chance to do that later**. Put yourself there** as Theseus **and imagine**. I want you to read them out today **(Field notes, September 11, 2007, Lesson 4)**

Although the Discourse of imagination is present in many different forms in Fiona's lessons (the organisation of activities, the content etc.), in this comment she is using imaginative language explicitly, an illustration of Grainger et al.'s notion of "conscious creative talk" (164). She urges learners to "create a picture", to "imagine" and to inhabit the text. She seems to associate strongly imagining and visualising. However, her conceptualisation and enactment of imagination goes way beyond the reductive philosophical notion of imagination as image formation (as discussed in Chapter Two, 2.1). Rather, she uses the notion of visualisation as a tool to scaffold the learners' understanding of vivid and reader-based writing.

Fiona's use of imaginative language is significant because it is an integral part of the overall classroom Discourse, and it is enacted continuously at various levels of her lesson. Without the broader context of creativity, the words would dangle in empty, meaningless ways. One of the key ways in which she makes imaginative discourse meaningful is through her use of multiple sources of ideas for writing. By this I am referring to the fluid reading–writing relationship as well as the peer and teacher-based response system which are well established in her classroom. Fiona's use of multiple sources of ideas resonates strongly with John-Steiner and Meehan's conceptualisation of the "dialectic of creative synthesis" (2000: 35), as discussed in Chapter Three, section 2.2. They argue that deep internalisation of knowledge is achieved by relating evolving ideas to one's own ideas and knowledge systems as well as multiple external sources which include other texts, peers and mentors. This "dialectic of creative synthesis" is clearly operating in Fiona's classroom through engagement across different sources of knowledge and the creative combining that ensues.

It is particularly important to examine the role of peers as one of the external sources, because peer response is "a big area of contestation" in writing pedagogy (Wilson, 1994: 29). In his research with teachers on a process pedagogy writing programme, Wilson found that one of the biggest obstacles to implementation of process writing was the difficulties teachers experienced with peer responses. One of the main reasons cited for this difficulty was that teachers frequently did not train learners to give and receive peer feedback productively. Fiona's use of peer and teacher feedback will be illustrated in the section that follows and I will argue that her response processes work because they are modelled and practised in a number of contexts and not treated as a separate activity. At the same time, I will discuss some of the limitations of her use of feedback.

The learners return to their groups. Fiona encourages them by referring to the pictures as stimulus as well as their group members. She continues to encourage a

sense of collaboration. The response process happens on three levels: through group work, teacher input and whole-class sharing. Firstly, learners are working in groups, sharing ideas and negotiating with each other about how best to write this paragraph, as the extract below shows:

> I eavesdrop on the conversation of the boys in the corner who are debating their next sentence quite earnestly.
>
> Boy 1: It's so dark that he almost falls off the cliff.
>
> Boy 2: No! No! No! He's walking along and his ankle breaks.
>
> The boys start writing.
>
> **(Field notes, September 11, 2007, Lesson 4)**

Secondly, Fiona interacts with the groups as she moves around the classroom, reminding them what the purpose is, commenting on what works and what does not, as illustrated below:

> F: Hey guys, listen to his beginning. I think this beginning is really what I'm looking for.
>
> Fiona reads the first few lines and then comments on what she thinks makes it a good opening.
>
> F: It's well thought out, good adjectives. I can really feel this. I want to know what's happening next.
>
> Fiona then has a discussion with the boys' group. She confirms their decision to use peered rather than looked.
>
> F: Yes peered rather than looked …. Sounds more frightening.
>
> **(Field notes, September 11, 2007, Lesson 4)**

Fiona uses learner texts as models as they develop. As she moves around between the groups, she finds a text that she wants to use as an example. There is an

immediacy and fluidity about this, as learners see other work in process, very different to the fixedness and polish of models that are already published. Her writing classes have a sense of structured freedom. She creates a very clear structure and makes her expectations clear, frequently reiterating them as she does in the above extract ("I think this beginning is really what I'm looking for ... well thought out. I can really feel this"). There is not a sense that anything goes, nor any illusions or pretences about who holds the final authority in evaluating the stories. The structure creates a contained, safe environment and within that there is much scope for the learners to play, learn, and negotiate the construction of texts and ideas with each other and with Fiona. This negotiation of meaning is illustrated in the last two lines of the above extract, where Fiona confirms their decision to use the verb 'peered' rather than 'looked'. This is not a case of teacher deciding for learners, but rather she engages with their decision-making process.

Thirdly, there is a whole-class sharing session, and each group has a chance to read its opening paragraph aloud. After each reading, Fiona and learners volunteer comments about what sentence or phrase they liked best. "Rotting corpses" and "sludgy toes" seem to hit the spot, the gorier the better as far as the learners are concerned. This resonates with Egan's argument that using an "exotic phenomenon" is an effective way of engaging the imagination, creating a dialectic process for thinking about the relationship between the known and unknown, existing worlds and possible worlds (Egan, 1992: 73).

Learners' comments are still at the level of affect (as responsive reader rather than evaluator), although one learner offers a comment about the build-up of suspense in one of the paragraphs. However, there is an awkward moment which reminds one of the complexities of whole-group sharing and feedback. One group reads its paragraph aloud and the members of the group have clearly not produced a strong piece of writing in terms of the criteria that Fiona has set.

The scenario unfolds as follows:

> F: Not lots of adjectives in that one. Not a bad thing. Very factual, very clear. You don't create an atmosphere but it's very clear.
>
> It seems like Fiona is trying to find something good to say about this group's passage though they haven't really created a vivid picture, which was the aim of the exercise.
>
> Their peers find it a little more difficult to find or articulate redeeming features of this passage as the following interaction suggests.
>
> F: That's what I liked about yours. What did you like about theirs?
>
> **NO RESPONSE**
>
> F: Nothing ... Okay. Jesse? (motions to next learners to read).
>
> **(Field notes, September 13, 2007, Lesson 5)**

The difficulty that surfaces in this moment is one that all process-oriented writing teachers must experience regularly. It certainly resonates for me. Fiona is trying to create an encouraging environment that nurtures the learners' beliefs in their ability to write. The tone of the feedback sessions so far has been affirming, and motivating. Fiona tries to balance presences and absences in her comments to this group ("No adjectives, no atmosphere but very clear, very factual"). However, if one thinks back to the initial briefing for the task, the main purpose was to transform the factual style of the original myth into something descriptive, atmospheric and vivid (which this group have not done). From that perspective the feedback is a bit contradictory, the sort of comment teachers make when not sure what else to say. There is also the consideration of the public domain and the danger that one will humiliate learners publically if one is too direct. So this consideration may be the reason she frames her feedback quite carefully and indirectly.

The silence from the other learners indicates a bigger problem. It is challenging to train learners to really articulate constructive criticism, especially publicly, and this discomfort is probably reflected in the learners' silence. Ultimately, this is one of the most important aspects of peer feedback that needs to be learned – without the development of the capacity to give constructive criticism, the potential of peer feedback can never be realised. The experience of sharing writing with a real audience is valuable in its own right (even without highly articulate feedback) but will remain limited without the generation of constructive feedback. At the same time, one needs to be an accomplished and practised reader to be able to go beyond an affective response and articulate the why (why it works/does not work) and the how (how can you make it better?). The shift from 'nurturer' to 'evaluator' is always a hard one, but one that Fiona does more explicitly in her one-on-one interactions with groups, as will be shown in the next section.

2.1.4 *Imagining the monster & gory endings: From fragments of ideas to larger mosaics of meaning (selections from lesson 5)*

In a critical review of the workshop component of process writing (what she terms 'the author's chair revisited'), McCallister (2008) underlines the importance of teachers creating space and time for exploratory, informal talking and thinking through ideas as preparation for writing (for earlier discussion on McCallister's work see Chapter Three, 3.2). Drawing on the ideas of Bakhtin (1986), she refers to this exploratory phase as primary (simple) speech genres as opposed to secondary (complex) speech genres which have "stable conventions that arise from complex and highly mediated cultural activities" (McCallister, 2008: 468). Working productively with these "genres" she argues that:

> Most of what we say consists in half-baked ideas and, only upon reflection and repetition, do we discover what we really think. These ideas underscore the reality that a lot of what we should be seeing in children's written

> communication are **fragments of ideas**. If we force thinking/writing into secondary forms without sufficient primary genre exploration, the writing will be voiceless, vacuous and weak. ... The author's Chair serves as an important place to test out through fragments in order to piece them into larger mosaics of meaning. (469)

McCallister's idea about allowing "fragments of ideas" to take shape and to be reshaped through sharing and feedback is congruent with Grainger et al.'s notion of "an expanded process of composition" (2005: 24). However, McCallister frames her ideas more explicitly within a Vygotskian and Bakhtinian framework than Grainger et al.

While McCallister does not explicitly discuss imagination, it is embedded in her argument. She focuses on a more advanced phase of the feedback process than Fiona, when learners have already written a draft and read it aloud to the class. In this lesson, Fiona gets the learners to generate ideas about the monster collaboratively (as a whole class) – his appearance, his weapons and their imagined endings, as preparation for writing their individual stories. However, McCallister's framework is totally applicable to Fiona's work, despite the different contexts and phases of the writing process.

As in the previous lesson (lesson 4), Fiona begins this lesson with a motivational briefing – making direct links between the sharing process, what learners can learn from each other's writing and the individual pieces that they are soon going to start writing. There are still one or two groups who need to share their paragraphs with the class.

> F: Right **guys**. We're on the last and final part of our Theseus story. We're going to start with the stories of the people we haven't heard yet. I'm not giving the sheets back because these descriptions should make you ***see*****.** Just the people who haven't read yet. Let's see. Remember, please listen and see

> **what makes the picture**. Remember you're going to do your individual pieces. So let's see what makes the picture. **(Field notes, 13 September, 2007, lesson 5)**

Fiona places substantial emphasis on encouraging the learners to "see what makes the picture" in other learners' work. She is asking the learners to "see" on two levels, metacognitively and imaginatively. They have to think about what kind of language and writing creates a convincing and vivid moment in the story. Again (as in previous lessons) she is explicitly using imaginative discourses by insisting that learners are able to make something present, through the sheer force and play of language and to allow it to become present through opening their imaginative capacities. In essence, Fiona is creating an opportunities for "bootstrapping" (Bruner, 1996), where children get a sense of expanded possibilities for their own writing through exposure to other children's writing. McCallister makes strong arguments for not turning the sharing process into a showcase of "successful examples of writing from children who have followed the teacher's instructions" (461). She argues that learners must be exposed to a range of peer writing. I find this quite a challenging argument, as one can understand why teachers are frequently tempted to simply showcase successful examples of learners' writing. Fiona asks the learners to imagine the Minotaur's appearance:

> What is your idea? What do you **think** the Minotaur looks like? Have you **formed any idea** about what he looks like? Theseus is going to fight the Minotaur. **So what does he look like? (Field notes, 13 September 2007, lesson 5)**

Learners express a range of different ideas, some of them drawing on movies and books that they have read. One learner imagines it to be "something big from Lord of the Rings, like an Ox!" Others have managed to have sneak preview of the picture of

the Minotaur which Fiona has not officially showed them yet. In fact, it turns out that most of them have already looked at the picture.

It is also clear from Fiona's use of discourse and practice (the slow journey of the learners alongside Fiona into Theseus' journey) that she is allowing them to form ideas gradually without the immediate pressure of individual summative performance and production, the kinds of "fragments of ideas" that McCallister discusses. This is particularly foregrounded in her question "have you formed any ideas?"

Next, Fiona asks them to imagine the monster's weapons:

> F: Half of the fun of reading is thinking what will it look like? **What kind of weapons does it have?**
>
> Masego: Ms, there was no real description. I saw one of the characters in Narnia.
>
> F: And that's what we do. That's good. We think of something similar.
>
> **(Field notes, September 13, 2007, lesson 5)**

In Fiona's response to the learner's idea (replicating a character from Narnia), she is acknowledging that learners don't imagine in a vacuum, but draw on prior experiences and vicarious experiences from cultural resources such as visual and written stories. She is implicitly working with Vygotsky's conceptualisation of "creative reworking" and "creative combining" (2004). However, the challenge is to help learners not simply replicate popular culture but to use it as a springboard for imagining, combining their own ideas with pre-existing experiences (vicarious or direct). Learners all want to participate in imagining this. Ideas include "big, sharp teeth", very muscular "like a gorilla's arm", "Like a kangaroo".

The learners' imagining about endings shows a growing engagement with the story, and the slow transformation of the fragments of ideas that they started with in the

first lesson into something more substantial. Learners offer a range of possible endings, though most assume that Theseus will successfully kill the Minotaur but will "be very badly injured and die himself" or that the Minotaur will "take his last breath and kill Theseus." Some learners are thriving on the opportunity to invent the most gory, morbid scenario imaginable. The idea of Theseus putting up a heroic fight and then dying seems to have wide appeal! Fiona asks the learners: "What about the love interest, the girl?" Learners don't immediately respond to this question and then one learner offers an ending where Theseus' girlfriend rescues him. Fiona responds as follows:

> F: I can see you want to give the girl power for a change – which is good. I'm going to show you a picture of the Minotaur now. **(Field notes, September 13 2007, Lesson 5)**

This is a break moment of interrupting the usual order of things – the strong, male hero who fights heroically to break the curse put on his father. But the moment (like the brief critique of fairytales by learners in lesson 1) does not last long. Fiona responds positively but labels it as "girl power", which is a good thing but not worth spending too much time on. This is not meant as a critique of Fiona's practice so much as a reflection of her view of imagination and her agenda which does not really foreground the ethical imagination. Perhaps one learns as much from the gaps and absences of teacher's practice as the presences. Working with Dyson's notion of the social constraints of text production, one wonders what learners are learning about "the words available in certain situations to a boy or girl" (1997: 4) in this exploration of the story of Theseus. Possibly one or two of the learners want to negotiate a different set of gender representations in the story, but this is not actively encouraged in the series of lessons observed. There may have been more scope for this kind of imagining on other lessons and tasks. For instance, the space story, which learners developed in the previous term, was a far more open-ended task.

Despite the constraints, Fiona sustains the learners' engagement and interest throughout this extended journey. She has withheld the picture of the Minotaur until this point. Now she hands it out. I even feel excited to get the picture, probably a similar excitement to what the learners feel (those who haven't had a 'sneak preview'). By withholding the picture and parts of the story for so long she has forced them to draw on their own resources, ideas, and imagination within the constraints described in the last part of the lesson. She asks learners to get into character as Theseus and imagine the fight from his perspective. She makes it clear that they are now moving to the individual part of their task.

> F: I'm not going to ask all of you. Don't want you to give all your ideas away. How does the Minotaur move? Quickly? Slowly? Fast? Ponderously? Come on, tell me how he's going to move. **(Field notes, September 13, 2007, Lesson 5)**

Most learners respond from their own perspective. Only one learner responds in the first person, as Theseus. Fiona then gives the learners a formal brief on the written task, takes some questions and then tells them to start writing. She moves around, responding to learners' questions, commenting on what they have written so far if they request it.

They now have to make the move from collaborative idea-generation and writing and talking to imagining their own story on their own terms, turning the fragments of ideas floating around the classroom into a story, their own story. But the journey is not over. They have to hand in rough drafts tomorrow. They take a while to settle into it and then a sudden quiet sets in.

> **Endings...**
>
> A quiet, almost silence, settles over the class. Most learners are writing now.
>
> Pens are moving. Imaginations are stirring. Activated. Stimulated. One or two learners are holding pens in midair, not quite sure how to proceed. **(Field notes, 13 September 2007, Lesson 5)**

2.2 Description and analysis of Debby's writing task: Journey into space (Grade 7, School B)

Over the two-week period of my observing Debby's English lessons, a range of reading and writing tasks were covered. She was nearing the end of an extended theme on space, culminating in the learners writing a story about an encounter with a spaceship and the analysis of a poem about an astronaut. This was followed by lessons on descriptive writing, literature (*Oliver Twist*), drama and a grammar game. The analysis that follows will focus on the space story and the subsequent feedback session. It is necessary to sketch a brief context for the space story task because I began observing towards the tail end of this theme and such information provides important insights into the scaffolding that took place prior to the space story task. This information is drawn from my reading of the learners' English workbooks and the in-depth interview with Debby that took place before my classroom observation commenced, where she spoke enthusiastically about the space theme.

2.2.1 Contextualising the task

The space theme starts with two poems about flight followed by comprehension questions which focus on vocabulary, and poetic techniques. The theme also included a play script, a spoof of a science fiction saga set in the Wild West. Debby took them onto the field where they dramatised the play in groups. In the learners' books the play script is followed by two comprehensions. There is an information sheet on star signs followed by an activity. The other creative writing exercise in this space theme is a short horoscope that the children composed. These were done on colour cardboard and pasted into their books. This is followed by two more comprehensions: one about Apollo's landing on the moon and the other about UFOs. The analysis of the lesson that follows needs to be read against this backdrop.

2.2.2 Introducing task and theme (Lesson 1): Dancing discourses in space

From the outset of this lesson, even before the learners enter the classroom, Debby works hard at creating a suitable atmosphere for imaginative writing. This begins with spatial reorganisation. The desks are usually arranged in groups but today Debby has spread them all over the class. The children are waiting outside and Debby is priming them for their creative-writing task. She tells then they can sit anywhere they like today. This is her cue to them that they will be doing a creative task. There is also a blank piece of paper on each desk – a sign that they will be doing a task that requires them to fill up this blank space with their own ideas. There are no questions that require prescribed answers.

Working with the notion of Discourse as the systematic structure and organisation of teaching/learning activities (Christie, 1984), the dominant Discourse for the opening of this specific lesson is one of loosening the usual structures and patterns of interaction. This aspect of the lesson bears significant resemblances to Fiona's first lesson, where she took the learners outside to begin their task. In the minds of both teachers there is clearly an association between imaginative work, narrative and reorganising space to create possibilities for an 'in-between space' where learners can find a place between their intentions and the constraints of everyday realities (Dyson, 1997: 14). See Chapter Three, 3.2 for detailed discussion of this concept.

It is this 'in-between space' that provides powerful opportunities for teachers to engage children in imaginative work. This is the crack that needs to be prised open. How do Debby and Fiona negotiate these 'in-between spaces'? There are major differences in the way their tasks are developed, and the 'textual spaces' that they create. This will be elaborated at relevant moments in the analysis and in the conclusion. As Debby's lessons proceed, I also become aware that she is straddling some mixed and contradictory discourses (as she did in her interview). In a way, the combined analysis of Debby's interview and classroom practice is consistent in its inconsistency.

In my field notes, I noted how the classroom decor contributed to the creation of atmosphere for the space task as follows:

Extract from field notes: 14 August 2007, lessons 1–2

> While the children are making their way to their new desks, I gaze around the classroom trying to take in the atmosphere created by the classroom décor. There is a sense of richness and interest in the classroom. I am often disappointed by what's on classroom walls but not today. At the front of the classroom (on the blackboard), there are beautiful posters of astronauts on the moon, and the solar system, (the current theme). There are also laminated posters of early tool makers and dinosaurs (previous theme). At the back of the class there are black and white photographs (scenes from SA life), a map of the world and of Africa, the inevitable parts of speech poster and a couple of projects done by children on the discovery of gold. I've yet to see a classroom covered in projects and texts produced by the children. Still these are colourful and interesting visual displays that relate directly to their learning. The visuals of space are particularly relevant to today's lessons and part of the creation of atmosphere.

Once the learners have chosen a desk, Debby begins the lessons by giving them a brief instruction, keeping it short because she wants to retain an element of surprise. She tells them:

> D: We're going to do some writing. Get something to press on. Then sit still. … Now you need only your ears. I just want you to listen. Hope I've got it [the CD] on the right track. **(Field notes, 14 August 2007, Lessons 1–2)**

Debby plays the CD for them – it is weird, atmospheric and instrumental. As part of her preparation for the lesson, she recruited her musician son to compose music for this lesson, another indicator that she has put a lot of thought and effort into the creation of atmosphere and triggers for the learners' imaginations. When she

finished playing the CD, she asks the learners: “What do you think ... bearing in mind what we’ve been talking about?” There is a long silence and then Debby asks another question.

Extract from field notes, 14 August 2007, Lesson 1

D: You don’t know …?

L1: A spaceship …

L2: Playing music in the spaceship.

L3: Like a part in a movie … an aliens movie.

D: Now we’ll listen to it again. As you are listening to it, imagine you see a spaceship coming towards you. It gets closer and closer. Listen with your eyes closed.

The music plays again.

D: Now we’re in space.

Most learners have their eyes closed. Some have their heads on the desk. They seem to willingly suspend disbelief and allow themselves to go on the journey that Debby has invited them on.

There are a number of interesting aspects of this interaction. Although the scene is being set for the free flow of the learners’ imaginations, Debby’s questions (“You don’t know?”) indicates that she is expecting a specific answer. Learners adapt their responses to this expectation and the responses are limited. Interestingly, the only resource that is drawn on by one learner is that of a film about aliens, not any of the texts that they have worked with in class. Having elicited ‘the right answer’ from the learners, Debby proceeds to take them further into the space journey, and into the journey of their minds and imagination. She now gives them the prompt for the story that they are going to create. Unfortunately, technology lets her down and the CD sticks. Once this problem is sorted out by one of the technologically savvy learners,

the journey resumes. The strange music plays again, transforming the classroom into a magical space. Debby explicitly encourages learners to retreat into their imaginations and leave everyday reality behind by concluding "Now we're in space."

Extract from field notes, 14 August 2007

> When the music is finished its second replay, Debby briefs them on their writing task:
>
> "You will now write a story about something from outer space coming towards you. It doesn't only have to be a machine. You **can create anything … set your mind free**.
>
> "I would like you to use one simile in this story."
>
> Debby then gives an example of a simile. "As green as an apple; as high as the sky."
>
> Debby continues: "And I'd like you to use one metaphor is you can. And use personification … but don't use too many. I'm going to put on a CD while you write. … I've given you an introduction but you can use any introduction you like. I don't want to see anyone **thinking** … you write. You have **some good ideas**."
>
> Debby hands out the task brief, which reads as follows:
>
> **As you were looking at the stars through a telescope you saw a spaceship coming towards you. It got closer and closer … Complete the story.**
>
> Below the task brief is a large picture of a telescope and stars.
>
> The class is quiet. They seem interested by this task. They are reading their briefs.

The mix of discourses is evident in the above extract from lesson 1. On one level, in keeping with the atmosphere of the lesson so far, Debby is trying to create an 'in-

between space' without constraints. She draws on the discourses of imagination, closely aligned with notions of freedom, choice and the outer limits of possibility ("You can create anything ... set your mind free." "You can use any introduction you like"). She implicitly draws on Sartre's version of imagination as freedom and detachment from reality. But alongside this imaginative talk is a more prescriptive and technicist discourse as the number and type of images are prescribed. What makes it seem technical and prescriptive is the absence of any sense of audience, meaning and purpose in relation to the instruction to use images. The social context of writing is not foregrounded, both in terms of thinking about audience and (it later becomes clear) in terms of collaboration with peers and the teacher. There is also a mismatch between the 'freewriting' approach ("I don't want to see anyone thinking ... you write.") and the expectation that learners will incorporate a set number of similes, metaphors and personification. But what is the purpose of these images in relation to the broader shape, purpose and genre of the story? What is the genre of the proposed story? At this stage none of these issues are clear.

Debby also tries to motivate the learners to create something original by saying: "you have some good ideas." Here she is encouraging learners to draw on their individual resources and initiatives for this task. This is a more low-key form of motivational discourse than that used by Fiona, possibly reflecting Debby's ideas expressed in the interview that there is a limit to what her learners can produce (and that you either have the gift to write imaginatively or you do not).

Extract from field notes, 14 August, 2007

> Back to the moment. Children are writing, their heads bent over their once blank page that is now rapidly filling up. They are using pencils to write, as instructed. Some are reading what they've written so far and deciding to make changes, rubbing a few words/sentences out and replacing them with new

ones. Pencils are moving, imaginations flying into space. ... The bell goes. The music plays on, the children write on.

This is a productive starting point for an "expanded process of composition" (Grainger et al., 2005), but what follows seems to be a compressed version of what might have been a much richer, more dialogical process. The prompt becomes almost an end in itself rather than a starting point. This suggests, in keeping with Debby's interview, that she sees imagination as being inspiration-based (the solitary individual being inspired by the 'muse') rather than an extended process that harnesses cognition, affect, and creativity within the parameters of social constraints and enablers. There are definitely aspects of Romantic views of imagination reflected in her practice, though they argued for a synthesis of cognition, affect and imagination.

2.2.3 Sharing stories: Peer and teacher response (lesson 2)

This section explores the response of the teacher, Debby, and the learners to the space stories. I make an intentional distinction between response and feedback in this section and section 2.2.5. Feedback has more evaluative connotations than response, while response evokes a more personal, affective and immediate reaction to a text. This distinction is particularly applicable to the analysis of Debby's lessons, though it may have broader implications.

In the lesson that immediately follows, learners continue writing well into the period. Debby leaves them to get on with their stories. She does not interact with them while they write and they do not interact with each other. By now Debby has changed the music and a rock number is playing in the background.

While the learners are writing, Debby comments to me that they need time to write and that she will not stop them while they are "into it." However, Debby later cautions against spending too much time on one writing task, as she claims that learners get bored (a sentiment that was shared by a number of the teachers

interviewed). This may partially account for Debby's decision to compress the sharing and drafting process that follows. Approximately mid-way through the lesson, Debby instructs the learners to read their story to a partner. Then she invites three learners to read their stories to the class as recorded below in my field note extracts.

Extract from field notes, 14 August 2007, lesson 2

> The children are reading to each other, talking to each other in English (which Debby says is a good sign) and having animated conversations. This peer sharing process seems to be quite open-ended. There is no instruction or guidance about what they are meant to be looking for.

Sajida (an Indian female student) is invited by Debby to read her story. She reads a delightful story about her own journey with an alien who speaks English! (apparently English is so pervasive that even aliens speak it!). She reads with expression and confidence. I mention Sajida's profile because I notice she is frequently called upon to read her work. Also because most of the learners are black and English is an additional language for them and I wonder if Sajida is an English first-language speaker.

> Next Mpho is invited to read her story. Mpho is racing through her story and it is difficult to follow. Debby tried to encourage her: "Read slowly … we're dying to hear your story." When she is finished reading Debby says, "lovely story" and then asks for one more learner to read their story.
>
> Debby: I want one more … who else enjoyed their story? Did you enjoy it?
>
> A few learners respond positively saying that it was nice.
>
> Dimakatso is the final reader. She reads very softly and quickly, it is hard to follow. Also about aliens. The bell goes. Dimakatso carries on reading.
>
> Debby: Very nice. Thank you. … I want your drafts in my box together with the task instructions.

Mission accomplished. Landing back on earth. End of lesson 2.

In the conceptualisation of scaffolding and mediation that I use, negotiation of meaning through peer and teacher dialogues is central to the development of imaginative writing. Hence I will now concentrate on what the field note extracts reveal about Debby's feedback practices.

One of the biggest issues that emerged from Wilson's study on peer feedback was learners' distrust of positive responses from peers and a lack of direction for revising (1994: 70). To that I would like to add a general fallback on error correction from learners and teachers, but especially in peer response sessions if there is not enough direction, training and focus provided. This does not have to include a feedback or response checklist if there is enough of a shared, negotiated understanding of what the crux of the task is (though response sheets are helpful). However, in this peer response session, as I noted in the field notes, learners are simply invited to share their stories with a partner and learners seem fully engaged in their own discussion. There is a place for undirected response sessions, but it depends on what kind of whole-class discussion follows.

In this instance, the whole-class sharing that follows is very limited in terms of the feedback given by Debby and the response provided by other members of the class. The ugly spectre of time running out probably partially accounts for the compressed feedback session but it is not only this. Time, like everything else, is related to values and priorities.

Using McCallister's notion of 'the author's chair' (2008) as a lens to analyse the whole-class feedback session, one can observe that there is little interplay between the writer, the teacher and the learners (see Chapter Three, 3.2 for more detailed discussion of this idea). While the student reads his/her story to the class, there is insufficient response from the teacher and no response (or invitation to respond) from the learners. Debby regards Sajida as one of the strongest (if not the strongest)

learners in the class. Sajida also seems to be a much more confident, fluent user of English than the other learners. Seen in this context, it is possible that Sajida is called upon to provide a good model of how the story can be written (possibly an example of McCallister's notion of 'showcasing'). I don't find this in itself problematic, but it seems that the opportunity to make this a learning experience for the class and for Sajida was missed.

A similar trend was followed in response to the readings of Mpho and Dimakatso, although the impact of their stories was compromised by their poor reading skills. Debby's response is positive and encouraging ("... We're dying to hear your story" "Lovely story", "very nice. Thank you ..."). However, these responses do not go beyond a basic level of affective response. A second level of affective response would incorporate how this line/image/part of the story made the reader feel. Although there is some peer sharing and class sharing, Debby does not seem to promote a developed sense of writing for an audience and how those response can reshape writing. From this perspective, Debby does not model the feedback process for the learners and does not invite learners to share their response with the class. There is no reflection on what elements of the writing make it a "lovely/very nice story" and what elements could be improved.

At the end of the lesson, learners hand in their drafts to Debby, which she will read and comment on. This is possibly a place where Debby can give more specific feedback and response. I never got to see the comments on those drafts as learners paste only the final version into their books. So I am not sure what kind of feedback she provided there. However, I will discuss Debby's whole-class feedback in 2.2.5.

2.2.4 Scaffolding and mediation (reflecting on lesson 1 and 2 in context)

Analysing lesson 1 and 2 in terms of scaffolding and mediation, a number of interesting insights emerge. I begin this discussion by focusing on the **outer layer** (teacher-based scaffold) that Debby constructed for scaffolding the space theme.

The texts included in the space curriculum provided the learners with access to a range of space experiences conveyed through a mix of genres: newspaper articles drama, and a Zodiac. Drawing on Vygotsky's notion of combinatorial imaginative work, Debby certainly provided a range of resources for learners to work with and rework imaginatively to create their own versions of intergalactic encounters. However, despite the interesting possibilities generated by the texts, Debby's treatment of the theme felt somewhat technical, with a focus on learning the content, the facts of space travel and the terminology. In other words, her mediation of the theme and materials did not always capitalise on its imaginative potential for play, negotiation, and learner (re)appropriation of the ideas on their own terms.

The horoscope activity, the dramatisation of the play script and the story written in this lesson promoted the children's personal engagement and imaginings, while the other activities seemed to provide limited openings. The dominance of comprehension-type questions with sentence-level answers prescribed a particular kind of response from learners. In terms of extended prose, the predominant genre on which the comprehensions were based was factual writing. However, the two short extracts from the play script (*Return of thee Deadeye*) did provide a lively and quirky example of dialogues between characters from outer space and their intergalactic apparatus. This also provided learners with a model of Science Fiction writing, albeit within the context of drama, while they were required to write extended prose. The two extracts were followed by conventional comprehension questions.

In summary, the activities and tasks that preceded this writing task provided a broad frame for knowledge and ideas about space travel, aliens etc. However, these activities did not prepare children to write this space story in terms of writing skills, other than providing the information, the interest, and the vocabulary**.** While the atmosphere is magical and inspirational for writing this story, there does not seem to be sufficient linguistic and genre preparation for this specific task. It is a good example of a theme-based approach, as all the reading and writing skills have been integrated into a coherent whole, but it falls short of being an "expanded process of composition" (Grainger et al., 2005: 24) for a number of reasons. Most importantly, Debby's mediation of the texts that comprised the space theme did not incrementally develop ideas for the space story. Each text was treated as a separate entity and served as a general backdrop to the task. The space story task was then superimposed on the preceding tasks, with the assumption that learners would draw on these resources and transform them into their own stories.

Moreover, learners are expected to make a big move in this task, from viewing space experiences as outsiders to inserting themselves into the narrative that they create. However, in the build-up there was little focus on personal responses, extended writing and thinking about how one would write and develop such a story. In addition, there also seemed to be limited talk, discussion and negotiation of learners' inner layers of scaffolding at individual or collaborative levels. This provides an interesting contrast to Fiona, who scaffolded the learners' entry into the Minotaur story (and her own) from the outset by getting them to imagine how they would feel in each situation and what choices they would make.

2.2.5 Modelling the feedback process and editing (lesson 5)

I observed a feedback and editing lesson on the space story a few days after lesson 1 and 2, and it is to this lesson (lesson 5) that I now turn. Debby begins this lesson by trying to calm the learners down, as today is Sports Day and they are very excited

about this event and the prospect of escaping almost a full day of lessons. Debby acknowledges this in her introduction to the lesson and assures them that it will not take long. The extract from field notes below is the introduction to the lesson and captures the general pattern of the lesson. The feedback lesson covers prepositions, tense usage, use of appropriate logical connectors to begin sentences, and sentence length.

Extract from field notes, Monday 20 August 2007, lesson 5

D: I know you're excited about today … it won't be a long lesson.

I was going through your stories and I've done a little bit of editing.

We're going to do a bit of editing on your stories today. A lot of you are still starting sentences with because, and, so. Please when you edit don't start sentences with and, because, so. You also repeat 'then' too many times. Then, then, then!

You know it's **wrong** so don't do it.

What's wrong with this sentence? "They put their weapons into the table."

Noise.

D: If you've got it put your hands up. If you haven't put your hands down!

Learner: … on the table.

D: On the table (reinforcing correct answer provided by learner).

Before you write your prepositions think about it. How on earth are you going to put a gun into the table?

You're also jumping around with tenses.

When you edit your work, **watch your tenses … Stick to the past tense** … it's easier for you to write in the past tense.

I wasn't completely sure whether Debby had gone through their stories and given individual, written feedback to each learner or if she extracted common errors to deal with in a whole-class context. From the way the lesson unfolds, it appears to be the latter. This is a very useful, contextualised way of dealing with grammar, as the learners are given the feedback while they are still working on their stories. Thus the feedback has direct relevance, and learners are generally motivated to apply the feedback immediately to their own work, after the editing session. However, deficit Discourses permeate this feedback session.

Firstly, Debby seems to be conflating editing and proofreading – she seems to be working with a narrow version of editing as error correction, where the part becomes the whole. One of the shifts that the process-writing movement tried to bring about was a delaying of surface error correction until the overall shape of the text and its meaning had been explored in depth. Perl (1980: 368) and Zamel (1987: 269) caution against a premature move into error correction. They both argue that a premature preoccupation with correctness and form, especially on the part of "less skilled writers", tends to inhibit a move beyond the surface concerns into a real engagement with the writing process and an understanding of how one might interest an imagined reader. Debby is **modelling** this version of editing for her learners (editing as surface error correction), and it is more than likely that learners will implement this version of editing at the end of the lesson when they get their texts back for reworking.

Secondly, the focus of the session is on gaps and error rather than what is present in their writing. If one looks closely at the extract, the emphasis is on "**what's wrong"** and instructions for fixing these errors – i.e. the discourse of deficit and prescription (language teaching as fixing something broken). The word 'wrong' is used three times in the first five minutes of the lesson, reinforced by a cluster of other related words throughout the lesson such as "big mistake", "correct", "incorrect" "error" and remedied by the discourse of instruction expressed through a cluster of words such

as: “Don’t” (twice), “Stick to …”, “keep”, “watch”. This cluster amounts to the language of surveillance and maintenance, double surveillance as Debby is keeping tabs on their errors and she is teaching them to internalise this error monitor.

While some basic grammatical details need to be prescribed, Debby’s explanations are at times presented as rule when it fact it is more about her preferred style and linguistic choices. Debby tells the learners that many of them are starting sentences with *because, and, so*. She concludes: “You know it’s wrong so don’t do it.” In modern usage, there is much more flexibility than her comments suggest, and all three of those conjunctions can be used to start a sentence if one wants to achieve a particular effect. It depends on the context, the intention of the writer and the way it has been used. Debby also reprimands them for repeating *then* too many times without exploring what they were trying to achieve with it. She also does not explore ideas for other connectors that can be used to develop the narrative. In all of this, there is an absence of a sense of an imagined or real audience for whom the stories could be made clearer, fluent and more exciting. Debby’s point about learners’ use of the past tense is another example of this. She suggests that they “stick to the past tense” as their tenses tend to get jumbled and concludes that “it’s easier for you to write in the past tense.” This point, however, is not linked to the genre of writing narratives nor related to how their jumbled tenses may confuse a potential reader. The linguistic and literary functions of tense choice have also not been explored.

Thirdly, the labels of second-language learner as struggling learner permeate the lesson. Debby, in all likelihood, intends this as a form of support for the learners (many of whom are struggling), but in the context of the error correction focus, it tends to reinforce a deficit discourse. This is evident in the following key moments:

Extract from field notes, 20 August 2007, lesson 5

> D: Keep your sentences short … some of you have written long, convoluted sentences. If you **struggle** with English keep your sentences short. If you notice that a lot of the books and poems we read …are written simply and **we understand** what they are writing about. **If you struggle with English don't write long sentences … you get your meanings all muddled up and I can't understand what's happening.**

Here Debby is giving advice commonly given to struggling young writers – that they should keep their sentences short and simple otherwise they will get tangled in a web of confusion (as will their reader). The word 'struggle' is used twice to underline the point. In some ways I can understand the logic of this approach, but I am not convinced that it is a particularly empowering solution to such a problem. Surely the purpose of this kind of task is to empower learners with effective and productive strategies for developing sentence-combining in ways that will take a story further? It is like telling an unconfident or incompetent driver to drive on quiet roads only, rather than teaching that person new driving strategies. Frequently, convoluted sentences used by young writers are a sign that they are grappling with both more complex linguistic structures and higher-level thought processes, trying to connect different ideas to each others. If teachers can read beyond the errors, on a second reading one can often begin to see the emergence of complex structures.

What is interesting about Debby's advice to learners about sentence length is the definite presence of a reader and audience, mentioned twice. Debby refers to texts that they have studied together and how the simplicity of style facilitates understanding of their message and meaning ("... we understand what they are writing about"). This is one of the few times in the lesson where Debby refers to herself and the learners as one plural first-person pronoun – 'we', as having a collective and shared experience. This brings to mind Grainger et al.'s notion of the

teacher “Journeying alongside the children” (2005: 156). This is mostly a lesson where Debby is outside the process, an authority figure trying to fix learners’ errors and a reader confused by learners’ “long, convoluted sentences”.

Debby also refers to the common error “should of” instead of “should have”. She underlines the point that this error is made by English first- and second-language learners.

> D: It came from one of your stories. … This is a very big mistake made by **not only** English second-language students.

I thought it interesting that Debby classified errors into ‘typical ESL errors’ and ‘English first-language errors’ and I wondered what her rationale was. It is likely that she intends this categorisation as a form of support for the learners, acknowledging that because English is not their first language certain errors are understandable or inevitable at this phase of their development as writers. However, one wonders how the learners read these kinds of comments and whether it contributes to a deficit construct of themselves as writers.

Fourthly, Debby doesn’t use any inspiring or good examples from their stories to illustrate the possibilities of what can be achieved. Towards the end of the feedback session she says:

> D: You’re going to take your stories back. We’ve read them to each other, I’ve taken them in. Some are very nice … now edit with a pencil. You must write your homework assignment neatly in your classwork book. Start editing straight away. **(Field note extract, 20 August 2007, lesson 5)**

I wondered why none of these good examples were included in the feedback, to balance the error correction and to provide alternatives. It seemed to be a missed opportunity. Although I did not discuss Fiona’s final feedback session in the relevant section, it will be productive at this point to sketch a few key points of difference in these two feedback sessions (Fiona’s and Debby’s). Like Debby, Fiona had a

structured teacher-led feedback session after she had taken their *Minotaur* drafts in and read through them. Both teachers provided feedback about learners' tense usage, sentence length, punctuation, and inappropriate use of 'then'. In addition, Fiona emphasised paragraphing. However, Fiona began with an overview of what they had done well, according to a shared set of expectations ("You created tension and some unexpected endings").

Her feedback about problem areas is framed in terms of alternatives rather than a discourse of absence and errors. At various moments Fiona makes reference to specific examples of things that work in the story, and this is offset against what needs to be reworked (e.g. "Lovely ending, yours [Rosa], but it could be broken up"). There are prescriptive moments (Fiona also expressed very set ideas about the use of 'then' in stories) but grammatical/linguistic usage is framed more in terms of a potential reader's response and the learners seem to have incorporated this into their own discourses. While exploring what is wrong with one of the learner's sentences, one of the learners identifies the error and provides the correction. Fiona then asks for an explanation. Eleven hands go up, and the learner who is chosen to answer says: "Because the reader doesn't like to read past tense and present tense." In this instance, and other such instances, one can glimpse the impact of Fiona's extended dialogue with the learners over the two weeks of this writing task.

As shown in the discussion above, the emphasis in both teachers' feedback sessions is predominantly on grammatical features of narrative writing. However, Fiona's session takes place in the context of extended prior sharing and dialogues about other aspects of writing, stylistic devices, meaning and audience. In addition, elements of these previous dialogues are woven into this discussion so that form and meaning are still interrelated. The pattern of interaction in Fiona's feedback session is still dialogical, even if it is less fluid than other lessons and interactions observed. Debby also involves the learners in the process, eliciting their ideas about 'what's wrong' and eliciting the right answer from them, but ultimately the interactions feel

somewhat "scripted" (Jacobs, 1990: 71), limited to providing the right answer and answering the teacher's questions, with limited initiative taken by learners. According to Jacobs, signs of the development of "unscripted" classroom interactions include an "increased movement back and forth between teacher and student responsibility" (71). Presumably, this move includes the students taking more initiative and more joint problem-solving.

3 Concluding comments about both teachers

I now return to the key questions at the heart of this chapter, and will answer them by drawing together the main chapter findings.

- ***How do discourses and pedagogy work together (or against each other) in Fiona and Debby's classes to open or close "in-between spaces"? (Dyson, 1997: 14).***
- ***What insights does this chapter provide about the relationship between Fiona and Debby's 'espoused practice', conceptualisations of imagination and their enactments of imaginative writing pedagogy?***

Looking at Debby's three lessons in the context of the two weeks that I observed, some clear trends emerge in response to the questions posed above. Debby created 'in-between' spaces at times in her practice. This was clearly evident in her introductory two space lessons and in other moments that I observed as well as in Debby's description of her practice in the interview. For example, during my observations this included two grammar games, the children's dramatisation of extracts from *Oliver Twist*, and the learners' personal responses to a paragraph about the killing of a kudu by a bull. In these lessons the learners were clearly very engaged, and Debby seemed to enjoy 'playing' with them. However, this was sometimes undercut within the same series of lessons by Debby's counter-discourses, as for example with the editing session that followed the space story

writing. Sometimes this contradictory discourse even co-existed in Debby's most imaginative lessons, such as the introduction to the space story writing.

Debby seemed to view imaginative spaces as separate spaces from the day-to-day routine of teaching. This was most strikingly reflected in the shift from 'going into space' (lessons 1, section 2.2.2) and then landing 'back on earth' in the feedback session (lesson 5, section 2.2.5).

In many ways these disjunctures between closed and open spaces in Debby's lessons make sense, in relation to her conceptualisation of imaginative writing as articulated in her interview. While she expressed excitement about some of the creative writing produced by the learners, ultimately she believes that there are definite limitations to the imaginative writing development of learners. These she attributed to a range of factors – such as age, genetics, race, class. She doesn't really believe imaginative writing skills are teachable, while correct grammar is. She also creates a binary between imaginative work and valuable, useful writing skills. The former is for escape and enjoyment while the latter has social capital. In this conceptualisation there is no room for a synthesis of functional and imaginative skills. What also seems to be implied, and reflected in Debby's classroom practice, is that higher-level thinking and imagination are not interrelated or two sides of the same coin. Finally, there is an individualistic view implicit in Debby's conceptualisation of imaginative writing and her practice. The idea that the imagination and imagination writing is a talent that only the chosen view have and that it cannot really be developed, locates imagination as in internal, individual trait rather than something that can be shaped socially, in a dynamic interaction between internal and external worlds. From this perspective, it makes sense that Debby does not engage notions of the social and ethical imagination.

The disjunctures also make sense in relation to Debby's history as articulated in her interview. She was trained to teach English in a very traditional way, which echoed

her experience as a pupil. In her forties, she encountered a colleague who transformed her view of English teaching. Consequently, she began to use theme teaching. In terms of the history of approaches to English teaching this represents a shift from a teacher-centred classroom, and a separation of skills towards active learning, and integration of skills. Yet elements of both these approaches were evident in the lessons observed, an example of the co-existence of old and new beliefs (Gusky, 1986). Debby's use of a theme-based approach to language teaching in the classroom also was congruent with her interview comments where she explained that her focus is on providing content and input on a specific topic, not necessarily on the linguistic and genre aspect of theme teaching.

There is a remarkable consistency between Fiona's 'espoused practice', her conceptualisation of imaginative writing and her enactment of these ideas in the classroom. Hence, the concluding comments in Chapter Six (1.3, 2.3) are applicable to this chapter. The enabling and collaborative discourses used in the interview were enacted and sustained in the lesson observed, as was the predominance of imaginative discourses. Fiona's pedagogy and discourses worked together to create an environment in which imaginative writing was valued, encouraged and actively taught. Learners were shown how to 'look' at their own writing and each other's through a shared metalanguage that was gradually developed. An important aspect of this development was Fiona's modelling of various key aspects of the imaginative writing process in the classroom, also in sync with her interview representations. This included her participation in the imaginative writing process, her feedback/response to learners' evolving writing during sharing sessions, and her use of learners' texts as examples.

Fiona's enactment of practice confirmed that she is working with a Vygotskian model of imagination and learning, albeit implicitly. This is evident in a number of elements of her classroom practice. Firstly, she sustained a synthesis of an imaginative and problem-solving **space** throughout the lessons observed. From the outset, she

encouraged learners to use prior knowledge, shared knowledge and teacher input as a springboard to problem-solve and work things out.

She continually set up tasks requiring learners to combine, recombine and reconfigure old and new knowledge, past experiences and imagined experiences, turning old narratives into new narratives. The extended process of working with *The Minotaur* was an example of this. Importantly, she engaged the learners and stimulated their collective imaginations through ongoing interaction and the collaborative construction of ideas and story at various levels (teacher and class, learners to learners, and teacher and learner one on one).

The 'in-between space' always seemed to be prised open in Fiona's class within her particular version of the imagination. Imagination was not constructed as a separate space but rather as an integral part of learning, thinking and writing. There was space for 'play' and a freeing of the imagination, reflected in the classroom arrangements and interactions between teacher and learners, and between peers. This was also reflected in the relative flexibility learners had to move around, to work in groups on focused tasks and to 'play' outside. All of this was framed by various levels of scaffolding: a teacher-based scaffold (outer layer), Fiona's mediation of multiple resources (including texts and learners as resources) and learners' inner layers of individually and collaboratively negotiated scaffolds.

However, when one space opens, another space frequently closes. In the case of Fiona, she did not seem to work with the ethical imagination in any significant way. The notion of myths and the specific myth of Theseus tended to be read in traditional ways, while there were unexplored possibilities for alternative interpretations, entailing different kinds of re/reading and re/writings (Gilbert, 1994). For example, Theseus is constructed as an archetypal hero in the original myth and in the classroom discussions that prepared learners to write their own versions of the

myth. Hence, the endings that learners were required to write were constrained by this framework.

In the next chapter, I provide a comparative analysis of Nhamo's, Nadine's and Jane's practices in relation to their learners' writing. Hence, I will attempt to answer some of the same questions raised in this chapter, but from another angle.

Chapter Eight: An instance in the wind – teachers' enactments of ideas about imaginative writing and their impact on learners' writing

1. Introduction

In the previous data chapter, I did a close reading of Fiona and Debby's classroom practice. In this chapter, I will provide a comparative overview of the classroom practices of Nadine, Nhamo and Jane, followed by an analysis of samples of their learners' writing. While my focus will be on comparing the practice of Nadine, Nhamo and Jane, I will draw on Fiona and Debby's practice where relevant.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to approach my research question from a different angle, to explore the consequences of teachers' conceptions of imaginative writing and practice for the kind of writing that learners produce. There are obvious limitations to this approach and I need to state these upfront. Although all three case studies focus on Grade 6 teachers and learners, the learners have different levels of English proficiency. The three teachers work in schools with different learner demographics and one cannot assume that all learners come to school with the same 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1991) and repertoire of linguistic skills in English. On the contrary, given South Africa's political and educational history, this is bound not to be the case. Firstly, English is a second or third language for all Nhamo's learners (School A), while English is a first language for almost half the learners at School C and for 65% of the learners in the Grade 7 class at School D (see Appendices 8 and 9: Language Survey Instrument and Results). In addition, the class-based compositions of the three schools vary, with Schools C and D drawing on a middle- to upper-middle-class demographic, while School A draws on a predominantly working-class demographic and urban and rural learners. This has implications for the level of education of the parent body, access to literacy resources at home as well as the role

of English in their home environments. In his recently published study of South African schools, Bloch concludes that "The differing social capital of poor and rich children is one of the strongest reasons for inequalities and relatively weak outputs in poor communities and schools" (2009: 124). All of these factors need to be borne in mind in the comparison of the kinds of texts produced by learners. However, within these constraints, it will still be interesting and valuable to explore relationships between teachers' ideas, beliefs, practices and the texts produced. Returning to Christie's notion of "curriculum genres" (1984: 2), what is the relationship between classroom discourses and the written texts produced by learners?

2. Comparative synopsis of practice/enactments

In the section that follows I provide a brief synopsis that contextualises the work of each teacher (2.1.). However, the bulk of this section focuses on analysis of the three teachers' practices across categories. These categories include scaffolding, and classroom discourses (2.2 and 2.3). I will not focus specifically on modelling as a separate category.

2.1 Tasks, themes, contexts and scaffolding (super-sleuths, webs and spring)

2.1.1. Nadine's theme, task and scaffolding

Nadine's initial theme for term three was "Who dunnit?" This theme focused on detective and private investigator work from an interesting and unexpected angle – the crimes of fairytale and nursery rhyme characters. The main extended writing task was a story about a detective who was tasked with solving the murder of Humpty Dumpty. This theme entailed an unusual rereading and rewriting of nursery rhymes and fairytales. I began observing Nadine's lessons towards the end of the Humpty Dumpty task (hence my discussion of her scaffolding of this task is based on my

reading of the learners' books and Nadine's description of this theme in the formal interview). Learners had already written the story and Nadine was in the process of marking them. Characterisation and creating characters through writing (dialogue and description) was the linking thread through many of the lessons. (For an overview of the skills and topics Nadine covered during the two-week observation period, see Appendix 4.)

Nadine scaffolded the Humpty Dumpty writing task in a number of ways. She focused on the development of vocabulary, descriptions and knowledge about detective work. This included a vocabulary exercise on private investigators, notes on super-sleuth skills, notes on DNA and fingerprinting, and a brief detective-story planner (a character sketch of an imagined detective).

The brief for Nadine's task was done in the form of a detailed story planner, consisting partially of Nadine's notes and instructions and partial learner ideas. There were three components: character, setting and plot. Learners composed their own character sketch as described above. The rest were notes and instructions, which learners copied into their books (see Appendix 7: Full Assignment Briefing).

2.1.2 Nhamo's theme, task and scaffolding

Nhamo's theme and activities were woven around the novel *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White. This is a classic 1950s children's book about a little girl named Fern who saved her pig Wilbur from the usual fate of pigs, with the help of a spider called Charlotte. The main extended writing task required learners to write a story about Wilbur's escape (i.e. the pig's escape) from his point of view. (For an overview of the skills and topics Nhamo covered during the two-week observation period, see Appendix 5.)

The scaffolding for Nhamo's writing task was embedded in the work done around the novel *Charlotte's Web*. In order to write the story about Wilbur's escape from captivity, learners needed to have a solid understanding of the plotline, themes,

dialogue and characters, particularly the main character Wilbur. Furthermore, they needed to 'inhabit' Wilbur's character, emotions, thoughts and experiences.

Learners already had a basic knowledge of the storyline, as they had seen the film version of *Charlotte's Web* before they began studying the novel. Nhamo built on this knowledge by taking them systematically through the first few chapters of the novel as described in the summary of tasks, themes and contexts.

Nhamo wrote the briefing for the main task on the blackboard:

> Imagine you are Wilbur. Write a story describing how you managed to escape from the pigpen and the barn. (Field notes, 4 October 2007, lesson 3)

He then provided fairly elaborate explanations of what he wanted them to do, and emphasised that he wanted them to become Wilbur, to think and feel in Wilbur's shoes. He did a brief brainstorm with the learners about possible titles for the story and ideas for writing.

2.1.3 Jane's theme, task and scaffolding

Jane's partial theme was spring, though she 'zig-zagged' her way into other topics along the way. Hence, it is difficult to pin her lessons down to a single theme. Even the spring theme took some unexpected and varied directions covering topics as far apart as the African Renaissance and the usual curricular coverage of spring i.e. reading and writing spring poems. In the interim, Jane facilitated debates about a wide array of contentious issues within a social justice framework. The two weeks culminated in collaborative and individual poetry writing about spring. This was the main writing task of the classes observed. (For an overview of the skills and topics Jane covered during the two-week observation period, see Appendix 6.)

Jane's scaffolding of the spring poem writing process was quite fluid in her movement between teacher-led whole-class interactions, individual and (mostly) collaborative work. There was a similar fluidity in her moves between the learners'

ideas, published spring poems and texts written by previous learners. Jane read them a prose text about winter written by a previous learner.

Jane's staggered and recursive use of this learner's text as a model consisted of two phases. After reading the text aloud she made brief comments about the sensory images used in the poem and how these enable the reader to visualise and feel. Like Fiona, she thus foregrounded the social aspect of writing, and the relationship between the written text, its images and the reader. She then asked the learners about their personal response to the text. Learners responded enthusiastically and were very eager to share their responses with the class, picking out specific images that engaged them.

Once learners had generated their initial ideas, Jane returned to the model text and helped them move beyond their intuitive responses to an exploration of how specific images work to evoke feelings. Learners began writing their poems in groups. Jane then moved into a more directive, instructional mode, now that the idea-generation process had been covered sufficiently, and foregrounded crafting techniques. She provided each group with feedback as they worked. The end result was group poems as well as individual poems.

2.2 Critical comments on teachers' scaffolding of writing tasks

Nadine, Nhamo and Jane each created different scaffolds and meditational processes for their respective writing tasks. Nadine broke her scaffolding into a series of small tasks mostly done individually by learners, while Nhamo's scaffolding consisted largely of teacher input and question-and-answer routines. Jane, on the other hand, gave the learners extended time for collaborative brainstorming, pre-writing (on flipcharts), collaborative and individual writing and reflection. This was interspersed with whole-class discussions and teacher feedback. While I view feedback mechanisms as a central aspect of scaffolding and mediation, for the purposes of this discussion the focus will not be on feedback, but rather the period leading up to the

writing task. Feedback will be discussed in detail in relation to discourses of imagination.

Having provided a synopsis of the teachers' scaffolding of specific writing tasks (up to the point of writing), I now offer a critical analysis and comparison of the teachers' practices in relation to the central question of this thesis and the main theoretical framework of this research as regards mediation and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978; John-Steiner and Meehan, 2000; Richardson, 1984 ; Bayer, 1996; Dyson, 1997; Daniels, 2001).

The key question is:

- To what extent do the teachers facilitate imaginative thinking and writing through their use of scaffolding?

All three teachers created an outer, teacher-based layer of scaffolding for the writing task. This was achieved through the framing of the writing task within specific themes and skills, so that there was both content and skill-based preparation for the writing task. In Chapter Three (3.2), I called this the **outer layer of scaffolding**, or **teacher-based scaffolding**. The question that remains is: How much negotiation was there between the teachers and the learners during the first layer of the scaffolding process? Secondly, was space created for an **inner layer** of scaffolding, the learners' constructions of their own scaffolds individually and collaboratively? Reframing these questions from the theoretical perspective of John-Steiner and Meehan (2000), how much collaboration took place between the individual minds of learners and their social environments? Finally, did the scaffolding of the writing tasks create scope for a "dialectic of creative synthesis"? (John-Steiner and Meehan).

Nadine created a teacher-based scaffold and some opportunities for negotiation by the learners of their own scaffold. An example of negotiated scaffolding was the learners' creation of individual detective character sketches prior to writing their stories (i.e. an individual inner layer of scaffolding). During this activity learners had

opportunities to engage with ideas for the story on their own terms and move beyond teacher input. From a social perspective, there seemed to be limited collaboration between peers, as all the activities preceding the writing task were done individually. However, it must be emphasised that I did not observe the lessons preceding the detective task, and thus my comments are based on my reading of the learners' written activities. Given what I observed of Nadine's teaching style, it is likely that ideas were negotiated and exchanged during informal classroom discussions.

This form of scaffolding, in which the scaffolding is predominantly teacher-based, is congruent with Nadine's comments in the formal interview about the need for 'controlled writing' and her belief that learners must improve by learning new vocabulary for each new task. At the same time, within this controlled framework, learners are allotted certain spaces to develop their own scaffolds, and probably to negotiate ideas through whole-class discussions. This is an interesting contrast to Fiona's use of structured freedom, as discussed in the previous chapter. Both provide a framework for learning and writing, but with quite different consequences.

Jane's scaffolding of the spring poems moved fluidly between the individual and collaborative, creating many opportunities for the learners to negotiate ideas with each other. Her poetry-writing lessons certainly provided the learners with more opportunities for negotiating ideas with each other than in Nadine's and Nhamo's classes. This is probably partially because she used a collaborative writing task at the outset, which then moved into individual writing. However, in the context of the other lessons observed, collaboration also seems to be an integral part of her pedagogy.

Jane created opportunities for multiple layers of scaffolding that operated interchangeably. By this I mean that she did not have an extended build-up to the poetry task in the way that Nadine did. However, in helping the learners to generate

poems, she moved quite seamlessly between input, discussion, formative feedback and the use of model texts. The learners had opportunities to construct individual and collaborative inner layers of scaffolding. However, the compressed nature of the poetry task meant that there was no scope for the same kind of detailed build-up used by Nadine and, to some extent, Nhamo over a long period of time.

While the poems were relevant to the spring theme, the previous activities on spring were more about other aspects of spring (political and social aspects) than spring as a season. Jane's overall theme definitely approaches spring from a fresh angle, but this variety of possible meanings was not really incorporated into the poetry-writing exercise. Hence, learners needed to shift into another mindset when approaching the spring poems rather than being imaginatively challenged to reconfigure these ideas in poetic forms.

3. Classroom discourses

In the discussion so far of Nadine's, Nhamo's and Jane's practices, I have touched on classroom discourses in relation to mediation and scaffolding. However, at this point I focus on classroom discourses in detail. I begin with a comparison of Nadine and Jane in relation to personal discourses, as there are some distinct similarities between them.

3.1 Personal discourses

Both Nadine and Jane have relaxed and fairly informal rapports with the learners. They both draw on personal discourses, albeit in different ways (and possibly with different consequences). Nadine shares personal anecdotes with the learners to reinforce certain learning points and learners are eager to share their anecdotes and experiences with Nadine and the class. Jane, on the other hand, is very explicit with learners about her personal beliefs and values and it is this aspect of the personal that she shares with learners (though this is supplemented by personal anecdotes as well).

Nhamo's use of personal discourses is substantially different to both Nadine and Jane. This difference needs to be contextualised before I elaborate on it. By the time I observed Nhamo's classes, he had only been teaching at School A for seven months (he started in April 2007 and I observed him in October 2007). In addition, he had recently moved from Zimbabwe to South Africa. So although he is an experienced teacher, he faced a number of new challenges, including a different education system.[9] This explains, to some extent, why he did not have a strong rapport with the learners. There seemed to be little spontaneous sharing of experiences and anecdotes between himself and the learners.

3.1.1. Learner participation patterns, and self-expression

There is a high level of participation in both Nadine's and Jane's classrooms, but again this plays itself out in different ways with each teacher. Nadine seems to alternate between fairly extended chunks of teacher talk and teacher–learner interaction. Jane's classes had a more sustained, continuous sense of dialogical interactions, between herself and the learners and among the learners themselves. In both classes, learners frequently initiated interactions and asked questions. However, there was a striking difference between question types. The vast majority of questions asked by learners in Jane's class tended to be about issues and content (e.g. Miss, why does Iraq fight? What's 9/11? Are there any women in government?), while Nadine's learners frequently focused on procedural issues (clarifying instructions). Learners also asked Nadine a number of questions about herself, which is not surprising given her openness with the learners. This may seem like a detour

[9] One of these challenges was the requirement to integrate literature and language, which was taught separately in Zimbabwe. Nhamo did not have his own classroom and had to teach in a number of different rooms. Even the blackboard was a restrictive space, as Nhamo was not allowed to erase the notes of the other teacher. Hence, he did not have much time to establish himself in the school and in his own classroom space by the time I observed him.

from my key focus on imagination, but on closer inspection question patterns and types are significant indicators of the extent to which learners are processing and creating their own ideas. It is also an indicator of the development of dialectical minds (Clarkson, 2008: 137) and a dialectic between teacher, learner and peers.

Maxine Greene (1995), in a discussion about the centrality of dialogue and questioning in reshaping learning and imagination comments:

> I have presented repeated reminders of what it signifies to move from the mechanical chain of routine behaviours to moments when the 'why' arises ... . All depends upon a breaking free, a leap, and then a question. I would like to claim that this is how learning happens and that the educative task is to create situations in which the young are moved to begin to ask, in all the tones of voice there are, "Why?"(6)

Greene is not only highlighting the importance of creating teaching and learning environments that encourage learners to ask questions, but is also underlining the importance of learners asking a range of question types.

In contrast, in Nhamo's class discussion followed a question–answer routine. As with Debby's classes, I seldom witnessed learners initiate questions or discussions. Where there were questions, they seemed to remain at the procedural level (but there were not many of these). Although he did not foreground personal discourses in his interactions with the learners, he did encourage the learners to bring themselves into their writing, as the discussion of his main writing task indicates. This is also congruent with his formal interview where he underlined the personal dimensions of writing, that the self is always embedded in one's writing.

3.2 Discourses of imagination: Three different versions of imagination & impact on pedagogy

What versions of imagination do the three teachers work with and how do these find expression in the classroom? How do these different discourses of imagination impact on the teaching and learning environment and how do they translate into writing?

As already noted in the previous discussion about **Jane's** practice, and in her interview (Chapter Five, 1.2), she works explicitly with a social justice and critical thinking agenda. She wants learners to develop a consciousness of social issues, to develop the confidence to have a 'voice' and to use that voice to take a stand on issues such as discrimination, injustice, and violence. Hence, current events and issues were woven into most of her lessons and these generated some discursive conversations. In her interview, Jane was fairly dismissive about imaginative writing and argued that imaginative writing is escapist and not educationally valuable. However, when I observed her classes it became clear that she is working with imagination from another angle. She facilitates learners' awareness of social issues and encourages learners to engage with these issues cognitively, affectively and empathetically – to put themselves in someone else's shoes. This social and ethical version of imagination dovetails with Jane's use of personal discourses as discussed previously. She works with a notion of the personal that is tied in with strong beliefs about social justice, and challenges her learners to go beyond themselves, beyond known worlds.

Nadine focuses on personal, expressive and imaginative discourses. She believes passionately in the importance of personal self-expression and that the personal is embedded in all forms of writing. She also draws strongly on affective, motivational discourses in her response to learners' writing. Elements of all these discourses are illustrated in her interim feedback to the learners about their Humpty Dumpty stories as follows:

> Your stories on Humpty Dumpty were amazing. I would have never thought of all those people who would have wanted to kill him. None of you made him into a nice guy. Your motives were amazing, your clues were great. I'm still reading. I loved your inspectors to bits. Long noses; beady eyes. Eyes in the back of his head.

In this initial feedback, Nadine compliments learners on the imaginative leaps they made in writing the story, and their invention of characters, motives and clues that go way beyond the conventional association with nursery rhyme and fairytale characters. She also compliments them on their descriptive use of language. In keeping with the genre of murder mysteries, learners have reinvented Humpty Dumpty as a character with some deep, dark secrets. Nadine's task has invited learners to creatively insert this benign array of characters into a murder mystery, resulting in a reconfiguration of plot, character and genre. I will expand on Nadine's feedback in the next sub-section. The point here is to highlight Nadine's foregrounding and valuing of imaginative discourses specifically in relation to learners' written tasks.

Although Nadine makes regular links to current events and contemporary media, her focus is more on creating awareness of social issues and possibly engaging the learners' worlds than critical thinking skills. In a discussion about the crimes and misdemeanours of various fairytale characters, Nadine mentioned that Little Red Riding Hood never obeyed instructions. One of the learners challenged Nadine about this statement and remained unconvinced by Nadine's response. There was a similar incident in Fiona's class, where two learners objected to the unrealistic perfection of good fairytale characters. Both of these openings were rapidly shut down by the two teachers. In these instances, it seems likely that learners are drawing on the plethora of alternative fairytales (Roald Dahl, Shreck 1–3 etc.).

Nhamo's use of imaginative discourses in the classroom was as elusive as it was in the interview. In the interview there was a striking contrast between his ideal of what writing can generate in one's life and in the classroom and the disempowering reality of classroom constraints. He emphasised the affective, personal aspect of writing, and how it is embedded in all writing regardless of the genre. He also recognised that imagination and thinking are interrelated and that imagination can be a tool for thinking. However, when he spoke about his pedagogy and classroom writing, these ideas seemed to dissipate in the face of institutional challenges and learner difficulties with English proficiency. This uneasy relationship between the ideal and the reality played itself out in the classroom and tended to limit the impact of his imaginative discourses and ideas. Nhamo's use of imaginative discourses is best illustrated by his briefing to the learners of the task on imagining Wilbur's escape. This was briefly discussed in relation to scaffolding and mediation, but I will now discuss it in more detail with an eye on the intersections between scaffolding and imaginative discourses.

Nhamo foregrounded imaginative and personal discourses in his briefing to the learners. The wording of the task briefing begins with the word imagine ("Imagine you are Wilbur. Write a story describing how you managed to escape"). The use of 'imagine' and 'you' immediately invites the learners to project themselves into the text, and become part of the story. In some ways this task is similar to Fiona's task, in that the basic plot and events have been provided but they have to creatively rework it by stepping inside the narrative. However, Fiona's task generated more challenge in terms of plot development, as learners had not read the relevant part of the myth by the time they wrote their stories. Fiona also was more explicit about the linguistic requirements of the rework – i.e. to rewrite it in a more descriptive and vivid style. For both tasks expressive language needs to be combined with the language of escape and adventure. However, Fiona builds a shared repertoire of expressive discourses with the learners while Nhamo mainly tells the learners to use an

expressive discourse. Furthermore, this task is framed by a series of lessons where personal expressive discourses have been limited, as discussed in the section on personal discourses.

Nhamo had already briefed the learners on the task, and he now primes them as they begin reading the relevant chapter together.

Extract from field notes, Wednesday 4 October 2007, lesson 3

> N: Let's look at Chapter Three, 'The escape'. As we read I'd like us to focus on your feelings. You as Wilbur, how you felt in the pen, how you felt when you were free. I also want you to look at the animals who encouraged Wilbur to escape from the pen. Was this good advice?
>
> So I want feelings while you were inside and outside. We are going to write as if we were Wilbur.

He is asking them to read the chapter as if they were in Wilbur's shoes as preparation for writing from Wilbur's perspective. The language he uses reinforces affect (feelings are mentioned four times), and his use of pronouns (how you felt, your feelings etc.) indicate the transition of perspective that learners will need to make during the reading and writing process. The focus is firmly placed on Wilbur's internal emotional world and the transfer from learners' internal worlds to Wilbur's world.

When Nhamo finishes reading the chapter with the learners he sums up the central theme and takes the transition into Wilbur's perspective one step further: "Today we'll be the Wilburs. We are now Wilbur. ... You need to think creatively." This moment in the lesson reminded me of a similar moment in Debby's space story introduction, when she declared to the learners: "Now we're in space." However, Debby had rearranged the classroom space for this lesson and created an atmosphere conducive for writing. The other interesting aspect of this extract is his brief shift to a collaborative discourse ("We are now Wilburs"). For that moment, perhaps he wants to be journeying alongside the learners.

Nhamo's instruction about the need to "think creatively" also illustrates another aspect of his imaginative discourse. Here he is drawing on a Vygotskian and Romantic version of imagination that synthesises cognition and imagination, congruent with the ideas articulated in his interview. Later in the same lesson he does a brief brainstorm with the learners about the ideas that they can bring into their creative writing. This is another interesting contrast to Debby, who seemed to envisage imagination and thinking as being separate functions.

3.2.1 Feedback and imaginative discourses

Nadine responds to their stories as a reader, rather than an evaluator. She shares her personal response with the learners. Another aspect of this response is her use of superlatives to communicate the pleasure she took in reading their stories ("amazing", "great"). Nadine is genuinely delighted by the quality of their stories. The positive tone of her feedback is also congruent with her belief that she needs to build learners' confidence in their writing. However, it is important to note that she has no problems communicating displeasure to learners in a very direct way when necessary. I observed this in her feedback to learners about oral presentations.

In a feedback session with another Grade 6 class, other elements of Nadine's imaginative discourse emerged. She used the personal pronoun 'I' seven times, and the first four times as an indicator of her personal response. One of the striking aspects of Nadine's feedback to both classes was a sense of pleasure and play. The learners enjoyed playing with language to create their stories, and Nadine enjoyed reading them. She tells learners: "I loved reading them, they were such fun."

Her final two sentences move into marker mode but from an interesting perspective.

> N: Your stories are great. When I mark I will just look at your creativity. I am not worrying about grammar.

In marker mode, she foregrounds the importance of creativity for this task and allocates grammar to the margins. One wonders whether Nadine and her learners

have a shared understanding of creativity. In the context of this task, and the 'controlled writing' preparation, it is likely that a shared meaning has been created. However, I generally found that the teachers used the term creativity in amorphous ways.

In a later feedback session Nadine briefly shifts into a prescriptive mode. She was concerned about learners' use of dialogue in the story, and decided to revise the rules of dialogue punctuation. In this instance, she moved into a prescriptive mode, focusing on grammatical correctness and not other aspects of dialogue (such as the use of language to create authentic and convincing dialogues).

Over the course of the two weeks that I observed Nhamo, learners did a substantial amount of writing. However, there seemed to be little follow-up per task other than the generic reminders about grammar, punctuation and paragraphing. Instead Nhamo tended to switch to the next task, often related, without explicitly consolidating what had been learned from the previous task. This was the case in terms of whole-class feedback. Individual written feedback per assignment also tended to be generic and general.

The feedback session about the Wilbur stories was incongruent with the briefing. Given the emphasis Nhamo placed on imagination and affect in the briefing session, one would have expected the feedback to concentrate on these issues. Instead it was brief and generic, as the following extract illustrates.

Extract from field notes, Wednesday 10 October, 2007

> N: Some of you were just taking what was in the book. You need originality. Spelling and punctuation, paragraphing, sentence structure need work. You need to give your friends your work so that they can correct your errors. … I was impressed with some of your work.

3.3 Critical comparative comments about discourses of imagination

It is clear that there is a significant intersection between the nature of feedback, and imaginative discourses. In some instances this is a reinforcing and consolidating relationship, in other instances feedback discourses (frequently prescriptive) undermine imaginative discourses. All five teachers tried to reach a balance between form and content, imagination and grammar, and these shifts took place in interesting but different ways in the five classrooms. As noted by Wilson (1994) this is not an easy task and one that teachers frequently grapple with as they try to balance their own versions of the curriculum with what they think is expected by the school authorities, parents and other stakeholders.

This tension was particularly evident in the classes of Debby and Nhamo. Both initiated their writing tasks with imaginative discourses and through their tasks offered the learners opportunities for imaginative thinking and writing. However, the feedback sessions shifted into a sharply different prescriptive discourse. Of course, it is inevitable that teachers shift between different discourses, but the challenge is to show the relationship between discourses, rather than replace one with another (in this case replacing imaginative discourses with prescriptive discourses).

Nhamo's feedback session on the Wilbur stories essentially undercut the imaginative discourse that he drew on in the extensive briefing, and ultimately creates the impression that what really counts in writing tasks, no matter the pretext, is correct structure and language usage. Similar to Debby, what starts as a creative journey ends in prescription. Like Debby, Nhamo mentions the good work produced by some learners, but these are not shared or used as models to generate ideas for the next task. Ultimately, in both their classes spaces for learners' imaginations were briefly opened but then closed and replaced by prescriptive discourses at the critical point of feedback.

On the other hand, Nadine drew on both imaginative and prescriptive discourses in her feedback to learners about their Humpty Dumpty tasks. She separated these two feedback processes, incorporating them into different lessons. While there were benefits to this separation, Nadine's move into the feedback about dialogues meant a shift into prescriptive discourses, and excluded the poetic and imaginative aspect of writing dialogue.

A similar moment was evident in Jane's poetry-writing lesson, where the imaginative discourses written on the board (imagination, creativity, play etc.) remained unspoken, while the technical aspects of language (also written on the board) were dealt with explicitly. Jane engaged with the learners while they were writing and offered them formative feedback. She did limited feedback work after the poetry writing but there was some sharing of the individual and group poems with the whole class. In fact, the only teacher who really did extensive formative and summative feedback, in keeping with McCallister's notion of the 'author's chair', was Fiona. The other four teachers were located along different points in a continuum.

3.4 Concluding comments on classroom discourses & pedagogical implications

Using Greene's notion of creating openings for imaginative work (1995), it seems that Nadine and Jane create different kinds of openings into imaginative worlds, thinking and writing. Both teachers are creating conditions of possibility for imaginative work but with different approaches and different versions of the imagination. In Jane's version, the personal and the political are fused. In Nadine's version, self-expression is coupled with some social awareness work but the crux is self-expression in different forms. As the discussion has shown, the classes are framed by different discourses, although some of the tasks are similar. For example, Nadine does a number of tasks with the learners which invite them to project themselves into the lives and experiences of others such as street-children and

migrant labourers. This was not covered in my two-week observation, but is evident in the learners' books and was discussed in the interview with Nadine.

Kearney's notion of the ethical imagination (1998) provides other useful ways of differentiating between Nadine's and Jane's version of imagination. Kearney makes a strong case for a hermeneutic dialectic between a critical *logos* and a creative *mythos*. He explains this idea as follows:

> Without the vigilance of hermeneutic imagination, myth remains susceptible to all kinds of misuse. Every mythology implies a conflict of interpretation, which raises important ethical stakes. It is our ethical responsibility to ensure that mythos is always conjoined with logos to prevent narratives of tradition from glorifying one specific community to the exclusion of all others. For tradition to be ethical, it must be inclusive. Ethical logos shares with poetic mythos the desire for freedom – our freedom to imagine others and others' freedom to imagine us. (91)

Here Kearney is arguing that the poetic imagination can be liberating provided it is combined with a critical and ethical imagination that enables us to move beyond ourselves, and the communities to which we belong. Jane and Nadine draw on elements of both with Jane leaning much more strongly towards critical *logos*, while Nadine leans more strongly towards poetic *mythos*.

Nhamo creates opening for imaginative work, and personal engagement. However, this is not sustained and developed fully. As mentioned previously, the ideas and beliefs that he articulated about imagination in the interview were not fully operationalised in the classroom, though traces of these ideas and beliefs were definitely present. There were tensions between the discourses of his interview, and classroom discourses used to frame the writing tasks, the scaffolding of the writing task and his feedback processes. These tensions, in turn, need to be located in his teaching context and his concerns about the limited English proficiency of his

learners. This issue will be explored further in relation to Nhamo's learners' writing (i.e. the viability of doing imaginative writing work with his learners, and the broader implications of this debate).

4 .Analysis of learners' writing

Having provided a comparative analysis of Nhamo's, Nadine's and Jane's practices, I now proceed to analyse selective samples of their learners' writing. The writing samples of Nadine's and Nhamo's learners will relate directly to the task described in the previous sections. However, the writing samples of Jane's learners will not relate to the poetry task described in the previous section. The reasons for this are numerous and will be explained in the relevant section. I will begin by providing an overview of the key patterns that emerged in the full sample of Nhamo's learners' texts, and will then proceed to analyse two texts in detail. I will proceed in a similar manner with the other two groups of learners' writing, but in less detail – i.e. I will provide an overview of the key trends emerging from Nadine and Debby's learners writing, but will not analyse any single text in detail. Examples of learners' texts will be provided exactly as they wrote them. One of the main reasons for choosing to focus on Nhamo's learners' texts in more detail is that School A is more representative of the average school in South Africa than the other schools in the study. In addition, Nhamo provided me with a full set of learner stories, while the other teachers gave me a smaller sample.

The purpose of this analysis is twofold. To some extent it assists me to answer the second half of my research question, providing some concrete evidence of the consequences of teachers' ideas and practice for the project of imaginative writing. However, as already mentioned, the scope of this analysis is limited to a small number of samples per teacher. This delimitation, in turn, is necessary in order to contain this research project. Learners' writing is not the central focus of this project, but is one of many indicators of the consequences of ideas and pedagogy. The

second and possibly more significant purpose of this analysis is that it enables me to develop an approach for reading learners' writing through the lens of imaginative theory. This in turn helps to concretise many of the central ideas discussed in this thesis and will result in a sharpened, more finely drawn understanding of these ideas.

There is a substantial body of research on school-level learners' writing, spanning at least three decades (Hillocks, 1986; Perera, 1984; Haas Dyson and Genishi, 1994; Haas Dyson, 1997; Dahl and Farnan, 1998; Fecho et al., 2006; Nelson and Van Meter, 2007). While the earlier work tended to focus largely on learners' linguistic competencies (Hillocks; Perera), much of the recent research (Haas Dyson; Dahl & Farnan; Fecho et al.) focuses on a larger repertoire of skills, issues and genres in a socio-cultural context. My analysis will have the most in common with the latter research (socio-cultural and multilingualism work), but will be more sharply focused on imaginative writing. Below are the categories that I have developed for the analysis of learners' texts.

Categories of imaginative writing for analysing learners' texts

1. **Voice and perspective**: Voice as expression of self or in persona of imagined other – use of first-person perspective – technical mastery – imaginative leap – going beyond the text – capturing emotions of character; projecting oneself into the text and going beyond the self (Ronald, 1986). The development of inner speech and a "writing inner voice" (Vygotsky, 1978).
2. **Reading–writing relationship**: text as springboard for combinatorial and transformational imaginative writing vs. reproduction and retelling.
3. **Use of linguistic resources** to create vivid, imagined world. This includes sentence structure and combining, images, and word choice.

4. Demonstrates a significant level of **ownership** of the text; writing and **agency**.
5. Abstraction, conceptual capacity; developing ideas; synthesis of affect and cognition; shows ability to work with both.
6. Develops **inner and outer landscape** of narrative genre (Bruner, 1986).
7. Writing as **imaginative play** (Vygotsky, 2004; Dahl & Farnan, 1998; Dyson, 1997).

Different combinations of these categories will be used for the analysis of the texts produced for the three tasks, depending on the nature of the task and the kinds of issues that arise as I analyse.

4.1 Texts produced by Nhamo's learners: An overview of the complete sample

I analysed 32 stories written by Nhamo's learners (the whole class). I then divided the texts into three categories: Category A consists of the seven best stories i.e. the stories that really showed engagement with the task requirements as outlined by Nhamo in the briefing session. Category B consists of average stories that show a basic level of competence in meeting the requirements. Category C consists of weak stories that for a range of different reasons did not meet the requirements. In the discussion that follows, I will provide an overview of the most striking trends in each category.

For ease of reference, I provide a brief summary of the task title and Nhamo's briefing:

> **Title:** Wilbur's escape
>
> **Briefing:** Write a story about Wilbur's escape from Wilbur's perspective. You must write the story as though you are Wilbur. Explore Wilbur's thoughts and feelings at each stage of his adventure. How did you feel in the pen? How did

you feel when you were free? In other words, I want your feelings while you were inside and outside the pen. Tell people how you escaped, how you felt and what happened.

In addition, consider the role played by other animals in encouraging Wilbur to escape. Was this good advice? Provide a title for your story.

Category A

There were seven stories in Category A (22% of total sample). All the learners in this category successfully sustained the use of the first-person perspective throughout the story. In addition, in four of the seven stories, the sustained use of the first person was an indication that the learners were able to make an imaginative leap from their own minds, worlds and feelings into the world of Wilbur, a piglet in captivity. The most striking aspects of these texts were the convincing evocations of Wilbur's feelings about his separation from Fern, his loneliness and boredom in the pen and his excitement about escaping. Bruner's notion of the inner and outer landscape of narrative (1996) is very useful for this analysis. He argues that narrative always consists of an inner and outer landscape: the outer landscape refers to action and the exterior world, while the inner landscape refers to thought, feelings and intention, the affective dimension of narrative.

Using Bruner's framework, the four best stories captured the inner and outer landscape of the narrative, providing convincing insights into Wilbur's inner world as well as sketching the context and action. These four stories were also framed with the learners' own ideas, demonstrating a significant level of ownership of the story. These stories illustrate the nexus of narrative, imagination, affect and linguistic resources. In order to make the stories work convincingly, the learners projected themselves into the text, combining their own experiences of loneliness, entrapment, and freedom with the information provided in the novel. It is these combinations and creative reworkings that enabled them to move beyond "heavily

scripted stories", which are frequently the product of this sort of exercise (Ellis, 2002: 42). However, given the nature of the task there were limits to the imaginative leaps that could possibly be made. I will expand on this point in relation to the detailed analysis of two learners' texts.

There were also limitations to the emotional range explored by these four learners. None of the stories moved beyond the expression of basic emotions (loneliness, loss, boredom, excitement) into more complex emotions such as Wilbur's depression and his ultimate ambivalence about freedom. This may be largely because these more complex emotions were not explored in class and they did not have the vocabulary or understanding needed to go a step further. In addition, some learners may feel uncomfortable with exploring their emotions (even in the persona of someone else) in a classroom setting. Stein (2008: 96) argues that "representing one's inner and outer worlds can be a powerful way of challenging the normative and conceptualizing alternative realities". She makes this argument in the context of her work with Gauteng primary school township learners. However, she cautions that appropriate support structures need to be set up to make this kind of 'transitional space' available. So, in considering the limited emotions in the learners' texts, there are a number of issues to consider.

The three other stories in Category A touched on basic emotions at times, but tended towards retelling the plot details. In other words, they verged on the outer landscape of narrative. These three stories demonstrate that the mastery of grammatical structures does not necessarily indicate that the accompanying imaginative moves have been made. Put another way, the consistent use of the first-person pronoun in a story is not the same as the creation of a first-person narrative perspective. The effect depends on the context in which the grammatical structure is used and developed alongside other aspects of a story.

Category B

There were seven stories in Category B (22% of total sample). The learners in this category partially or fully sustained the use of the first-person pronoun at a technical level but tended to exhibit a limited emotional range. I was interested by two of the learners, who began in the first person but could not sustain it. I wondered to what extent this indicated a loss of engagement with the process of writing the story itself, and possibly discomfort with exploring emotion. Four of the seven stories developed the inner landscape of the story, to some extent, while the other three stories veered towards retelling the plotline. Learners who focused on retelling generally were more reliant on the novel, particularly as regards dialogue. Dialogue was frequently lifted from the text with minor reworking (one or two word changes).

Category C

There were eighteen stories in Category C (56% of the total sample). Eight of these stories (Ci) were seriously underdeveloped, ranging from four lines to one paragraph. One of the eight stories was one page but underdeveloped in terms of its coverage of the key events. Seven of the nine learners sustained the use of the first person, while the remaining two learners used a mix of first and third person. As I read through these eight stories I was reminded of Nhamo's comment in the interview that many of his learners simply do not have the linguistic resources in English to produce extended writing, particularly vocabulary. Their writing certainly does raise important questions about the extent to which English second- or third-language learners without the required "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1991) can reasonably be expected to produce extended imaginative writing. This is really one of the nagging questions about my research project, one that I will revisit in my detailed analysis of the Category C text *How will I escape*, and in the concluding chapter (Chapter Nine). Suffice it to say at this point that a number of factors need to be considered to

explain this phenomenon, one of them being the teacher-based scaffolding used by Nhamo in the preparation for this task (and the lack of negotiated scaffolding).

The remaining nine stories were off-task (Cii), as well as frequently jumbled and incoherent. All learners used the first person, but three of the nine learners did not sustain it. Where it was sustained, it was accompanied by limited exploration of Wilbur's emotions. Most of these learners focused on retelling the outer landscape of the story and in some cases copying large chunks. One story consisted entirely of verbatim extracts from the novel. Interestingly, only two of the stories did not sustain the use of the first person and a few managed to create Wilbur's perspective. The bigger problem was incoherence and a lack of focus on the central aspects of the task – i.e. not describing Wilbur's escape but another aspect of Wilbur's experience. I wonder to what extent this problem reflects limited understanding of the story and the instructions, as well as a limited repertoire of writing skills. When considering Category C as a whole, one is left with the question dangling about the intersection between the limits of learners' imaginative and linguistic capacities and the limits of the teacher's pedagogy. It also raised questions about the effectiveness of the reading/writing nexus in circumstances where many learners do not fully comprehend the framework provided by the novel that is being used as a springboard for their writing.

4.2 Analysis of two texts

In the discussion that follows, I analyse two texts written by Nhamo's learners. Text 1 is the best text from Category A, read through the lens of the imaginative categories that I am using. There were other texts in Category A that were more polished but this text was possibly the most convincing and was firmly located within the 'inner landscape' of the narrative.

Text 2 is one of the more interesting texts from Category C (unsuccessful texts). Both texts exemplify many of the general features of their categories, but this analysis will

move beyond the general into the detail. I will not focus on surface errors (such as spelling and punctuation) but on the key linguistic, cognitive and affective features with relevance to imaginative writing as per categories provided at the beginning of section 4. I begin by discussing text 1, 'The pig that tried to escape'.

Text 1: The pig that tried to escape (Category A)

Writer: Lerato

> Hi! My name is Wilbur and I'm about to tell you my story about the pig that tried to escape.
>
> Once upon a time there lived a pig named Wilbur that's me. I lived in this farm owned by Mr Zuckerman. I lived there with other farm animals. I was taken away from where I used to live. I was sold because I was old enough to be raised by a little girl named Fern. Fern raised me up since I was a baby, when nobody would take me in because I was much smaller than all my brothers and sisters.
>
> Since I moved here I have been missing Fern, I've been lonely. I've always wanted to be free and today I plan to escape from the farm because I miss my home and my family. "Hi Wilbur don't you know how nice it is to be free." I wish wist [?] I could say I did, but I don't. "Do you want to be free Wilbur?"" Yes, yes of course, I really want to be free". Do you see the hole there? Yes! You go to the corner and knock it with you head as hard as you can, then you'll be free.
>
> I went to that corner and stared knocking down the fence and before I knew it it fell down and I was free at last. I ran all over the place jumping for joy. Then sadly I bumped Mr Zuckerman's legs and he grabbed and he tossed me into the barn. Mr Zuckerman was very angry with me, but I wasn't worried as long as I had some time of freedom. The End!

Lerato frames the story with her own ideas, showing that she has a sense of ownership of the text by referring to “my story”. She introduces herself to the reader in the persona of Wilbur, showing some audience awareness that is absent from many of the other stories (“Hi! **My** name is Wilbur and I’m about to tell you **my** story”). She also shows a familiarity with the narrative genre, framing it by preparing her audience for what is to follow, and drawing on the standard children’s story opening ‘once upon a time.’

An important aspect of her engagement with the text is the way in which she has projected herself into the text and taken on the role of Wilbur. This is reinforced convincingly through her use of language and the content that she chooses to foreground. Her extensive use of personal pronouns (me, I) and possessive pronouns (“my name”, “my story”, “my home”, “my family”) is supplemented by a range of explicitly stated and implicit emotions. Although she sustains the first-person perspective effectively throughout the story, there is a moment in the first two lines of the story where she almost slips into third person (“... about the pig that almost escaped”, “... there lived a pig named Wilbur”). She immediately corrects this, by adding “that’s me”. Here she seems to be making the transition between herself and her persona as Wilbur. This is possibly an interesting example of Ronald’s notion of movement between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ in expressive writing, embodying the stance of ‘I’ and ‘other’ simultaneously (1986: 231). The movement between the two stances facilitates reflection and empathy. What would it be like to be an animal in captivity? How would I feel in that situation? How do I feel in that situation? These are the sort of questions that are likely to be generated in the move from outsider to insider, spectator to participant (Britton, 1970: 113). It seems by the third sentence of the story she has made that transition, and she then successfully sustains the ‘participant’/insider role until the end of the story.

But what does this transition from ‘self’ to ‘other’, from ‘outer landscape’ to ‘inner landscape’ entail? And what role does the imagination play in this transition? I have

already established that using personal pronouns correctly (technical/mechanical mastery) does not facilitate the transition on its own. In Lerato's story it is the development of the affective dimension that makes the move possible and convincing, and this is facilitated by an **imaginative leap** into somebody else's 'shoes'.

For example, in the first paragraph, Lerato convincingly portrays Wilbur as a pig who has been abandoned, and rejected because he was the runt of the litter ("... I was much smaller than all my brothers and sisters", "... nobody would take me in"). Her use of the passive verb reinforces Wilbur's sense of powerlessness and portrays him as a victim ("I was taken away", "was sold"). In this context, the reader appreciates the importance of Fern's nurturance and the meaning of Wilbur's enforced separation from his mother figure.

In the second paragraph, Lerato explores Wilbur's feelings more explicitly, reinforcing his sense of loss and loneliness by mentioning three times that he is missing Fern, home and family. This sadness and pining is followed by Wilbur's formulation of a plan of action. Wilbur shifts from being a victim to being an animal with a mind, agency and free will. Lerato evokes this by using verb groups that indicate desire and agency ("I've always **wanted to be** free and today I **plan to escape** ..."). The dialogue between Wilbur and the goose then reinforces his desire for freedom ("Yes, yes of course, I really want to be free"). At a basic level, Lerato creates a world of emotion, thoughts and ideas as we see Wilbur grappling with difficult emotions and ideas about freedom, captivity and home. These affective and cognitive dimensions are almost inseparable in the way that they unfold.

An important aspect of this task, and of Lerato's text, is the relationship between reading and writing. To what extent can a task like this result in anything more than retelling, at worst be a glorified substitution exercise? A related question is: Does this task create conditions of possibility for imaginative writing beyond a basic level of

creative reworking (Vygotsky, 2004)? To answer these two questions, I will analyse the relationship between Lerato's story and the relevant section in the novel.

Lerato works with the basic plot of the novel but has written her version of the escape chapter almost entirely in her own words. The dialogue in paragraph two is an interesting example of reworking. She has taken the dialogue between the goose and Wilbur and has followed a similar structure (albeit overlooking some of the conventions) but has given it her own meaning. The original dialogue in the novel builds up slowly to the idea of escape and freedom, and Wilbur's response was uncertain. Lerato has made the conversation much more direct, and made Wilbur more certain of his desire for escape and freedom ("Yes, yes of course, I really want to be free"). So she has made substantial lexical and content changes, but only within the constraints of the task. At best, this could be considered a basic example of combinatorial imagination/fantasy. There are limits to its transformational capacity because their brief does not entail moving behind the scenes or beyond the pages of the novel. But it is a minor 'creative reworking' of the novel within the constraints of the set task which confines learners to specific parameters. It is certainly not simply an instance of reproduction.

Bruner's work (1986) brings another dimension of ideas to the debate about the relationship between narratives and retelling/rewriting stories and the **capacity for imaginative leaps**. He argues that narrative as a mode of knowing focuses on the vicissitudes of human intention (1986: 16). In responding to a narrative, a reader becomes engaged in a character's construction of reality as built on desired intention (not for what it actually is). The reader enters and engages with the world of **possibilities**.

It is this tentativeness, this potential open space, which Bruner defines as "subjunctivising reality" which gives readers the opportunity to project themselves onto the text through retelling the story and through "empathising with the

character's plight as representing their own plight" (1986: 36). We see both these trends in Lerato's text (engaging with possibilities and projection into the text), where she reinvents Wilbur as being much more certain about the quest for freedom than he actually is in the novel.

Bruner places great value on the reader's retelling of a story and his/her creation of a "virtual text". He argues that the reader's retelling of a story creates a range of personal, linguistic and affective possibilities. Although he does not specifically use the term imagination as an umbrella term for these possibilities, it is certainly implicit. He concludes that like Barthes, he believes that "the greatest writer's gift to a reader is to make him a better writer" (1986: 37).

In his analysis of readers' retelling of stories, Bruner found that as people progressed into retelling, they were more likely to adopt a subjunctive mode and to take ownership of the story, to tell the story as though it belongs to them. In making these transformations the readers incorporated the language of the text into their own written language. This incorporation and appropriation is evident throughout Lerato's text but on her own terms. This re/appropriation of language plays itself out in interesting ways in the last paragraph of the story. The language of action, the enactment of Wilbur's freedom, is expressed through similar but different words and phrases by Lerato ("I ran all over the place jumping for joy") but is quickly replaced by the language of captivity. Wilbur once again becomes a passive agent as he is "grabbed" and "tossed" by Mr Zuckerman, the farmer. The possibilities of escape are eliminated and Wilbur is resigned to his fate, comforted by his brief experience of freedom. Lerato thus manages to provide herself and the reader with a relatively "happy ending".

Lerato, like all the other learners, missed a significant aspect of Wilbur's emotional experience, his ambivalence about freedom, and his increasing distress and confusion about how to handle his freedom while he is outside the pen. This is a

good example of association and dissociation of the impressions acquired through external and internal experiences (Vygotsky, 2004: 25–26). Vygotsky unpacks this process as follows:

> Each impression is a complex whole consisting of a number of separate parts. Dissociation is the breakup of a complex whole into a set of individual parts. Certain individual parts are isolated from the background of the others; some are retained and others are forgotten. Dissociation is thus a necessary condition for further operations of the imagination (25).

The traces of external impressions are thus not fixed or static. They are subject to a dynamic process of selection, exclusion, foregrounding, and backgrounding. They are transformed through this selection process, sometimes exaggerated, sometimes minimised. Either way, our internal worlds and feelings have a significant impact on the manner in which impressions are transformed and re-imagined. It corresponds to deep-seated internal needs.

How does this relate to Lerato and her process of association and dissociation as reflected in her story? What were the external and internal experiences available to her? The novel *Charlotte's Web*, Nhamo's mediation of this experience in the classroom, and her internal world. I can't be categorical about how the process of dissociation unfolded but I can develop a hypothesis based on the available evidence. The novel presents an ambivalent experience of Wilbur's freedom but this was not foregrounded in the classroom discussion, where Nhamo presented the notion of freedom as being unproblematic. In addition, there was Lerato's own internal world, feelings and needs. As a girl in the beginning stages of adolescence, it is likely that the notion of freedom from social control resonates with Lerato. Vygotsky certainly viewed the onset of adolescence as a time of turmoil, and a critical phase in the development of an inner world. In the same vein, at her stage of development it is possible that she cannot relate to the notion of emotional ambivalence. The

interaction of all these external and internal factors resulted in Lerato creating an exaggerated account of Wilbur's desire for freedom and his experience of it. This embracing of freedom makes the ending quite intriguing, where Wilbur so easily resigns himself to captivity again.

The writer of text 2, the next text that I analyse, does unexpectedly escape the constraints of the task towards the end. It is to this text that I now turn my attention.

Text 2: How will I escape (Category C)

Writer: Thabo

> The once a pig called Wilbur. He am very friendly everyone tells me that. I once had a friend her family sold to the Zuckermans. She did not what to sell me so they sad she must not take me out of my pigpen. She visit me almost everyday.
>
> One day I was thinking of escape. I sore an untied wood I thought I could go trough I pushed and I pushed untiel I was out the farm was full of plants around I could nti see the gate I was hungry I can see a plate full of food I ran and eat and eat. I ran around and round for the fate but I cna't see the gate I looked back I can see the Zuckerman's I ran sa fast as I could and I can see the gate the Zuckmans could not see me. I got through the gate I ran to Fern's house and Wilbur was safe from danger. We lived happily ever after.

Thabo's text illustrates many of the features of the other Category C texts. It is not developed, it is partly off-task and the use of the first person is not fully sustained. At times it lacks incoherence, and this is caused by a combination of surface and deep structure errors. On first reading, it is difficult to look past the linguistic difficulties and see the working of narrative and imagination. Possibly, this mirrors Thabo's own struggle – to get past his own linguistic barriers to find his imagination and thoughts and translate them into a written narrative.

I am interested in exploring Thabo's linguistic resources alongside other interconnected factors that impact on his capacity to create an imaginative story. My point is not to set up linguistic resources as something separate, but to look at how they are interconnected with the functioning of imagination and thought, how they facilitate or constrain his writing. These issues in turn must be viewed in relation to broader socio-cultural resources: the classroom, the school, the family, and the community. I have limited information on the last two factors but will work with the available knowledge and try and fill in the gaps where possible.

On second reading, it becomes evident that Thabo is grappling with sentence-combining, and learning to create complex and compound sentences. As is typical of this phase of linguistic development, it is a stop-start process, partially obscured by his lack of punctuation to indicate the beginning and end of sentences. Sentence-combining is a crucial aspect of linguistic development as it facilitates and mirrors the accompanying cognitive and imaginative process. These include combining ideas, ordering them, creating a hierarchy of meaning-making, and creating webs of relationships internally and on the page. Taking the first paragraph as an example, sentences 2–5 ("He am very friendly" until "her family sold to the Zuckermans") and the final sentence of the paragraph ("She visit me almost everyday") are simple sentences. However, sentence 1 has an embedded clause ("called Wilbur"... embedded: who is called Wilbur) and sentence 6 is a complex sentence consisting of at least three clauses: "She did not want to sell me", "so they sad", "she must not take me out of my pigpen". Thabo's struggle with sentence-combining contrasts sharply with that of Lerato, who combines sentences with relative ease and competence.

Like Lerato, Thabo frames the story with narrative language typical of children's stories ("The once a pig called Wilbur" = **There** once **was** a pig called Wilbur; "We lived happily ever after"). However, his error in the first sentence (a missing verb and the use of a definite article instead of a demonstrative pronoun) detracts from its

possible impact. He also does not seem to have much audience awareness. He creates a writer-based text rather than a reader-based text for a **number of reasons**. **Firstly,** his linguistic resources are limited and this restricts his capacity to create a world on the page, an inner and outer landscape. For example, he seems to struggle to make the transition from self to other, from writing as Thabo to writing as Wilbur. It is only in the sixth sentence that he clearly identified himself with Wilbur ("She did not want to sell **me** ..."). Thereafter, he sustains the first-person narration, except for a brief slip in the second-last sentence of the story ("... and Wilbur was safe from danger"). However, his transition into first-person narration is limited to a grammatical move. He concentrates on the external aspects of Wilbur's experience, and does not create an internal world of feeling.

In many ways his text is elliptical, and this is **another reason** why his text never becomes reader-based. Significant elements of the plot are excluded from his telling of the story, including elements that were part of the task requirement. For example, there is a sudden leap in his story from Wilbur's arrival at Mr Zuckerman's farm and his escape, lacking the build-up that is essential for the emotional development of the story. In addition, the role of the goose in helping him to escape and their conversation about the possibilities of freedom are excluded.

His 'telling' of the story is also elliptical, with lots of embedded information that he assumes the reader will know. Writing, unlike speech and inner speech, requires "what might be called deliberate semantics – deliberate structuring of the web of meaning" (Vygotsky, 1962: 100). In Thabo's story the web of meaning is frequently unclear to the reader simultaneously in terms of content and linguistic structure. For example, in paragraph one he combines two sentences that are grammatically correct but do not make sense ("She did not want to sell me so they sad she must not take me out of my pigpen"). These two ideas are unrelated: something is needed in the middle to bridge the plot gap. In the novel these two ideas appear in two different chapters and are interspersed by important events.

Another elliptical aspect of Thabo's story is the representation of Wilbur's feelings. Like the majority of stories written by Nhamo's learners, Thabo focuses on the concrete actions, events and experiences when he recounts Wilbur's escape. He avoids abstract concepts such as feelings and thoughts, not incorporating any of the expressive language from the novel into his story. Although Thabo's focus is on the action of the escape, he appropriates limited language of movement from the novel (of which there is a rich variety). Instead he repeatedly uses the verb 'run'.

Vygotsky's theory of language development, thought and imagination provides some valuable insights into Thabo's repeated use of concrete language. As discussed in the literature review, Vygotsky regards the development of speech as playing an important role in the imaginative development of children. He argues that speech frees the child from concrete thought, giving the child the power to represent reality and to imagine an object not previously seen (1987: 246). Speech facilitates imaginative development and the development of abstract thought, while the products of imaginative activities generate further linguistic development. While play and drawing play important roles in early childhood, creative writing becomes an important vehicle for self-expression and imaginative development in adolescence. Finally, imagination is said to emerge in socio-cultural contexts through engagement with social tools (Vygotsky, 2004).

While Vygotsky is referring to the role of a first language in the development of children's thinking, I would like to take the concept and apply it to the acquisition of a second language (not something that Vygotsky really addresses as far as I am aware). At what stage in acquiring a second or third language can one move beyond concrete thought into abstraction, representation of self and others and imagining? The answer obviously has to be conditional and context-related. Equally important, what pedagogical moves can be made by the teacher to really push the imaginative development/writing of learners? What resources and tools can be made available in the classroom and school setting for this purpose?

It is important to bear in mind that writing an expressive text such as Thabo's is not simply about language. To understand Thabo's struggles, one needs to take a range of factors into account. In her literacy work with primary school children in Gauteng, Stein (2008) noted "the limits of language in the representation of feeling, desire and pain" (97) and the need to approach literacy work from a number of angles and modes. Many of the learners she worked with were adept at expressing themselves through performances, and drawing, but much of the nuance and spark got lost in the process of translating these ideas and feelings into writing. This loss in the shift from visual and oral modes is summed up in the relevant chapter title "How do I smile in writing?" Stein's ideas provide a beginning for answering the questions at the top of this page, and I'd like to return to it in the comparative conclusion of this chapter and in Chapter Nine.

Despite Thabo's struggle with writing this story and harnessing his imagination, he does show moments where his imagination forges ahead. The second paragraph, although it feels very concrete on a first read, does implicitly explore Wilbur's sense of desperation and his hunger for food and freedom. Despite the constraints of the task, which requires a faithful rendering of the story from a first-person perspective, Thabo changes the ending to one that is more resonant with his own fantasies, desires and needs. Instead of getting tricked back into captivity by eating the food offered by Mr Zuckerman, Wilbur helps himself to copious amounts of food ("I ran and eat and eat") and then he manages to escape from the farm. It is at this point that Thabo finally evokes Wilbur's feelings ("I ran to Fern's house and Wilbur was safe from danger. We lived happily ever after.") It is interesting that in the second part of the compound sentence, Thabo switches into third person. He concludes with the traditional "happily ever after" fairytale ending. Wilbur is safely reunited with his beloved Fern and back at home. Thabo's ending possibly provides insight into how the task might be reconfigured in the future to provide more openings for the learners.

4.3 Texts produced by Nadine's learners: an overview of the sample

I analysed eight stories written by Nadine's learners. I then divided the texts into three categories: Category A consists of three excellent stories, the best stories in the sample set. Category B consists of one good story. Category C consists of four stories that show a basic level of competence in meeting the requirements but are not as well developed as the stories from the former two categories. These stories range from average to weak. All the stories met the task requirements, to greater or lesser extent. As a result, I do not a category for stories that were very weak. All stories were written with a reasonable level of fluency.

In the discussion that follows, I will provide an overview of the most striking trends in each category. I will discuss the three category A texts in the most detail as a way of gaining insight into the features of imaginative texts. I will attempt to answer the question: **What do these texts reveal about the strengths and limitations of the learners' writing and of Nadine's writing pedagogy? What is the relationship between them?** For ease of reference, I provide a brief summary of the task title and Nadine's briefing:

> Write a story about a detective who solves the crime of Humpty Dumpty's murder. Try to create a vivid character with a distinctive appearance, personality and method of working. Think of a setting in which your detective will usually operate and describe in detail. Develop the Plot. This should include the detective's visit to the crime scene, his examination of the clues and his interviews with suspects. It may also include a confrontation with the culprit. At the end of the story the detective should explain to a friend or relative of the victim how he discovered the real villain.

Category A

There were three stories in **Category A**. The marks awarded to these three stories by the teacher ranged from 17–18 out of 20. I generally agreed with Nadine's assessment, although there was one other story that Nadine awarded 17/20 which I placed in Category C .

The three stories of Category A share a number of similarities. They all move beyond the scaffold provided by Nadine. While the writers clearly benefited from the various layers of teacher scaffold, they are not constrained by it or reliant on it in a lockstep way. They find a way of writing that reconfigures the inputs provided by Nadine, their knowledge of nursery rhymes and fairytales from visual and written texts and their own ideas. All three writers also have a rich repertoire of linguistic resources to draw upon.

The scaffolding for the task and the briefing that followed clearly gave learners a structure if they wanted it, but also left scope for learners to develop their own ideas. This is immediately clear in the three different opening sentences of the story:

> Long, long ago in a time of castles, kings and magic. There was an egg called Humpty Dumpty. (Tebogo)
>
> "There we go again" Mr Fox says answering the phone "Hi boss" Jack said "There's been a murder" chief John said "tell me something I don't know" Jack said (Lebogang)
>
> Night of the 13th October. Humpty Dumpty was outside the wall of the church waiting for his daughter Nadine and his new son-in-law Brett to come to the car to go to a wedding party. Suddenly BAM he drops down dead. (Kathy)

As the opening lines show, Tebogo has framed her story as a traditional fairytale while Lebogang has framed her story as crime fiction, a hard-boiled detective tale. Kathy, on the other hand, uses a television-style crime programme frame, which

frequently starts with the time and place of the action. These different framings also highlight the synthesis of genres that the task required. All three learners draw on both genres as their stories develop, though their writing styles tend to be predominantly detective genre.

The character sketch was an important part of their task preparation so it is interesting to see how this was integrated into their stories and how it was developed. Many of the learners did not integrate their character sketch into the story, which I thought was a pity. A number of learners simply referred the reader to the character sketch. They all used the name that they gave to their imagined detective in their character sketches and one or two small details, but few of the descriptions were fully utilised. What kind of transfer occurred from the character-sketch exercise to the story for Tebogo, Lebogang and Kathy, the three Category A writers? If they did not use the exact wording, did they implicitly work with the idea of the detective that they created?

The three writers certainly create convincing detectives and introduce new aspects to their main character as they develop the plot. However, they lost some of the quirky details from the original sketches. Tebogo tells her story through third-person narration. As the story develops, the narrator reveals some of the inner thoughts, feelings and reflections of her creation, Detective Joe Walker. For example:

> As Joe asked all these questions, Cinderella was becoming tense. Mr Walker suspected something, but he kept it to himself and thanked Cinderella for her time. It was dark when Joe was done with the questioning, so he thought he would go to question the next suspect tomorrow morning. ... Mr Walker woke up feeling confident that today was the day he would find the murderer of Humpty Dumpty.

Joe's character is also revealed through dialogues with the suspects, but this is not developed in detail. Tebogo's preferred mode is narration and storytelling, and she is

able to sustain interest and pace throughout. However, none of the delightful descriptions from the character sketch have found their way into the story. These would have further enhanced the characterisation of Joe Walker.

Kathy begins her story with a lively description of Detective Charles (DC) and his arrival at the crime scene. As soon as DC is notified about the crime, he moves into action mode: “Off runs DC with his long fabric coat and hat straight into his 1994 Mazda car off to the crime scene. ... DC jumped out of his car like a male rock star.” Although Kathy barely uses any of the descriptions from her character sketch, there is a definite sense of continuity between the ideas developed in her character sketch ideas and the portrayal of DC in the story.

As she develops the story, she moves from DC’s external landscape to his inner world: “DC was anxious to solve the case. He felt more and more depressed for every second he wasted.” DC’s inner world includes reflections on the case and his evolving theory about it. When he returns to the murder scene he notices three letters next to Humpty’s remains: BBW:

> What could that mean. It could mean Bye Bye wife or could be who killed him like Ba Ba Willie or Big Bad Wolf, Big Bad Wolf! I know it’s him, DC shouted. He’s the only creature I know who enjoys hurting and killing people.

In this moment, Kathy makes an intertextual reference to the genre of crime films, where it is common for the psychopathic perpetrator to leave his/her mark behind as a way of playing mind games with the public. This is a good example of the writer’s use and creative reworking of multiple resources from the classroom, her knowledge of fairytales and popular culture. In an earlier section, she managed to insert JK Rowling and Harry Potter into the story, an element from her own private world and her reading practices.

Kathy also uses dialogue in the scenes where DC interrogates his suspects, further developing a sense of an intrepid and robust detective. The language of her

dialogues is convincing and authentic but the conventions of dialogue punctuation are missing.

Lebogang's strength is her use of dialogue to create Detective Jack Fox. Her dialogue is sophisticated, vivid and polished. Her mastery of dialogue conventions is the best in the sample, though not completely correct. Through her use of dialogue she portrays Jack Fox as being somewhat cynical and verging on insubordinate to his boss, Chief John (who turns out to be the murderer).

> "Its Humpty Dumpty in fairy land" chief said "Oh the gossip manger" Jack said fooling around "Whatever Jack" chief said in a very angry voice.

Lebogang draws on ideas from her character sketch effectively and illustrates these ideas through dialogue. The difference between her character sketch and her initial portrayal of Jack in the story is a good example of the move from telling to showing narratively.

As the story develops, and Jack begins investigating in fairyland, Lebogang shifts from third-person narration to first-person narration. This is an interesting switch, possibly made to facilitate the exploration of Jack's inner voice intensely, and also his reflections as he begins to build a theory about the crime. This is certainly how Lebogang utilises this shift, transitioning from the banter of the detective's external world to Jack's own private thoughts. However, she does not create the detective's internal world as successfully as the other two writers. Instead she moves into a telling/reporting mode, using endless compound sentences with the conjunction 'and' used repetitively. This may be her response to the last part of the task instruction to "explain to a friend or relative of the victim how he discovered the real villain." This part of the instruction does invite the learners to shift from a narrative mode to an explanatory/telling mode.

The narrative structure and plot development of the three Category A stories are much more sophisticated and imaginative than the stories in Category C. This is

where one can see the differential ability to write imaginatively with and beyond the teacher's scaffolds. It is in these moments that one can glimpse the strengths and limitations of Nadine's teacher-based scaffolds. While the character-sketch exercise enabled learners to create their own detective prior to writing the story, the ideas about plot and clues were given to the learners as notes. In other words, the learners did not engage with the relationship between plots and clues on their own terms prior to writing.

However, despite this pedagogical limitation, all three writers developed their plots in interesting and convincing ways. They were able to draw on their knowledge of various fairytale/nursery rhyme characters to create plots, clues and motives. Most importantly, Kathy and Tebogo situated the clues in the context of specific scenes and a plausible, broader plot. The reader see the clues emerge and watches the detective make sense of them. In other words, they may have worked with the clues provided by Nadine, but they created their own context for their use. All three writers, especially Kathy and Tebogo, displayed an excellent understanding of narrative structure and their stories moved with pace and fluidity from one scene to the next. Kathy divided her story into three clearly differentiated chapters. Lebogang developed her plot in detail, but halfway through the story slipped into a plodding reporting and listing style. This is a pattern that was common in the Category C stories, but without a developed plot such as Lebogang's.

Category B

There was one story in **Category B**, written by Brenda**.** Nadine awarded this story 15 out of 20. This story shared many of the qualities of the Category A texts but was not as well developed. The Category A stories ranged from 2–3 pages, while this story was approximately one and a quarter pages. Although length is not always a guarantee of quality, in the analysis of these Grade 6 texts across all the samples, I

have found that length is an important indicator of the conceptual and linguistic capacity to develop ideas.

Brenda's story successfully synthesises the fairytale and detective genre. She incorporates a number of fairytale characters as well as developing Detective Denzel Macrick's character fairly well. She is the only learner who really integrates some of the descriptions from the character sketch into her story, giving nuance to her description of Denzel (a black man who wears a white suit with white shining shoes, and drives a BMW). Brenda's story is written in the first person but she does not completely succeed in creating his inner world. She stays largely at the level of his external world, but does include some brief reflections on his evolving murder theory. The characterisation of Denzel and the plot is also not developed through dialogue. As a result, the plot unfolds in an explanatory way, and the clues tend to be listed. However, her plot ideas are quite convincing and she creates detailed motives for the co-conspirators: Red Riding Hood and the Three Little Pigs.

Category C

There were four texts in **Category C.** Nadine awarded three of these texts between 12 and 13 out of 20. The fourth text was awarded 17 out of 20. It was well written and had sparkling moments, but I felt it had more in common with the Category C than Category A texts.

The openings of all four stories were quite evocative and engaging. Two of the writers used fairytale frames, while the other two used detective-genre frames. Within the first two paragraphs, three of the four writers introduced the reader to their detective in his/her characteristic setting. Candy's description of Detective Ron Smith had a delightful sprinkling of humour:

> Detective Ron Smith was sitting at the police station one Wednesday morning getting his employer of the month picture taken (4th time in a row), when all of a sudden, his partner John Parkman called him on his first case of the day,

> apparently one of kings men saw something white (egg white) and called Detective Parkman anyway ...

In three of the four openings, it is clear that learners really benefited from the character sketch exercise, from the combination of the teacher's scaffold and their own opportunity to negotiate the character sketch individually prior to writing. However, these benefits were indirect, as only one of the three writers directly integrated any details of her character sketch into the story. The fourth writer did not provide any internal or external descriptions of her detective. All writers used the name that they had given the detective in their character sketches.

Despite these promising openings, none of the writers really succeeded in developing the characters of their detectives in terms of dialogue or inner voice. All four writers used a third-person narrator. Only two of the four writers used dialogue and these dialogues had definite limitations. Jane's use of dialogue was quite lively and showed Detective Parker to be a relentless interrogator, but she used no punctuation at all. None of her dialogues develop a sense of Parker's inner thoughts and feelings. Leigh's dialogue tends to be mechanistic and procedural, almost like a 'think aloud protocol', where Detective Rooibos is listing clues and trying to match them to suspects. This dialogue does reflect inner thought (as she appears to be talking to herself) but at quite a concrete level.

Related to this focus on the external world of the main character is a problem that emerged with plot development. Plot development is limited and tends to resort to listing of the physical clues and the clues in the body language of the suspects. For example, Kay writes of one of the suspects:

> Bravo was always touching his nose and drumming his fingers on the table. This means that he was very nervous and was supposeably telling a lie.

Kay has diligently drawn on class notes for this detail but has not reworked it and integrated it into the story on her own terms. She is simply reproducing the teacher input.

The four writers also tended to leap from making a list of suspects to making an arrest with limited motivations and explanations given, though some did this better than others. Candy describes the moment when Detective Parkman has his epiphany:

> Lucky for the detectives around Humpty Dumpty's wall was sand, which led to lots of evidence such as: small footprints (that looked like mouse's feet) hand prints & a few white hairs. "Well now we need to come up with a list of suspects" said Parkman, "the only suspects I can think of are, "Pinky and the brain: "of course that explains the small foot prints and the white hairs, Lets get them to the police station and questions them rite away!

The story then ends seven lines later, with a brief and unconvincing conversation between Brain and Pinky, in which they accuse each other of the crime, and Brain ends up taking the blame. Brain and Pinky are given no context as fairytale characters and one wonders how they fit into the fairytale culprits theme.

I would like to end this section by returning to comments Nadine made in the interview about the detective story, and then reflect on the unintended consequences of some pedagogical ideas. When I interviewed Nadine, she was in the middle of this task and learners had not submitted their character sketches and stories yet:

> N: I want to see how they are going to describe the detective, because they've been **given** information, they've **got** lots of it. And although I'm **controlling** it in a way, I'm not controlling it. Because they are going to write **their own thing** about the detective, I've **given** them examples, I've **told** them how

> detectives look, how they do [their investigations] ... one of the kids said, well can the detective be a woman? I said absolutely. (Interview, 19 July, 2007)

Nadine feels strongly that each writing task should be a learning experience, and must give learners opportunities to improve. Hence, her belief in 'controlled writing' as in her experience without proper planning and structure, learners produce "rubbish". What is interesting about the extract from the interview above is Nadine's use of the language of transmission ("given", "got", "told", "controlled"), despite the fact that she genuinely wants them to "write their own thing" and make the story their own. As the overview of her learners' writing has shown, she has created a definite scaffold for the task, and learners have definitely benefited from this structured task. However, the disadvantages of a teacher-based scaffold with a limited inner layer of learner-negotiated scaffolding become evident when one looks at the difference between the three categories of writing.

The Category A writers were able to use Nadine's scaffold as a launch-pad and to take the stories in their own directions. However, the scaffold is probably not aimed at those learners anyway, who could write good stories with limited scaffolding. The learners in Category C benefited from the combinations of teacher input and the opportunity to negotiate ideas individually through writing their own character sketch. However, when it came to plot development they got stuck in the teacher scaffold and resorted to reproductive writing.

From the perspective of John-Steiner and Meehan (2000: 35), this kind of scaffolding has elements of transmission, and at best is likely to generate a superficial internalisation of knowledge with a limited impact on the combination of ideas and the potential for transformation. This really brings me to one of the key challenges facing writing teachers, especially in relation to the development of learners' imaginations and imaginative writing. How much scaffolding is too much? How much is too little? What combinations of scaffolding across modes and different

configurations (teacher-led, individual, pair, small group, whole-group sharing) are likely to generate the optimal levels of learner imaginative engagement and ownership of the writing process? There is obviously not one specific answer to this question, as the answer would need to be embedded in a context. (For example, Nhamo's learners may have coped a lot better with this kind of structure than they did with the task on Wilbur's escape.) But I hope to be able to sketch some general principles and recommendations at the conclusion of this chapter and in the conclusion of the thesis.

4.4 Texts produced by Jane's learners: An overview of the sample

In my analysis of the writing of Nhamo and Nadine's learners, there has been a direct match between the tasks and scaffolding discussed in section 2 and the products of the tasks as analysed in sections 4.1 and 4.2. However, as regards Jane I have chosen not to analyse the products of the poetry task. Instead I will analyse stories learners wrote about refugees in South Africa and the experience of being victims of xenophobic violence. While this may seem methodologically messy, there are various reasons for this decision which override the need for neatly packaged, perfectly symmetrical data analysis. Firstly, the focus of this project is on imaginative extended prose narratives, not poetry. Secondly, given Jane's emphasis on social justice discourses, analysis of personal narrative texts about refugees are likely to provide more insights into her pedagogy than collaborative and individual spring poems. Thirdly, from my perspective as researcher, I believe that it is important to explore the impact of a critical literacy and social justice approach to teaching and learning and its potential impact on imaginative writing. Jane is the only teacher in the study for whom this is her central agenda. Looking at her pedagogy in relation to the stories produced by her learners brings another dimension to this study.

I analysed five stories written by Jane's learners. I will not present my analysis of the stories per category as I did with the other two teachers. This is the smallest sample

and the differences between the stories were not that dramatic in terms of quality, although clearly some were better than others. Instead I will provide an overview of all five in relation to one central issue: self–other transitions, and the related shift from storytelling to reflection and advocacy. I will discuss the first story (Karen's story) in more detail than the other four. Below, I provide a brief summary of the task as described by Jane in the post-observation meeting.

The task emerged spontaneously as a response to current events, as a way of 'letting the outside world in'. There were two things going on that week: the earthquake in China and xenophobic violence in South Africa. Jane explained how the task emerged from class discussion about these two events:

> The kids were talking about it. We'd been talking about human rights and I had used the School D Refugee School as an example. Once again I try and get the kids to put themselves in others' shoes ... make them take their shoes off. I asked them to go home and think about three topics and pretend that they were someone caught up in the earthquake or the xenophobic violence. The next day they read their stories to the class and we discussed it. (Post-observation meeting, December 2008)

Jane emphasised the integration of a task like this with religious studies and life skills. School D is a Catholic school and has an ethos of compassion and empathy. Hence, Jane sees a writing task such as the one described as developing learners' capacities for compassion and empathy, and cutting across subject boundaries.

Of the total sample of 13 tasks, eight learners wrote about the earthquake in China and five learners wrote about xenophobia. I will focus on the latter. The five stories illustrate the impact of Jane's interweaving of personal and imaginative discourses in her classes. By imaginative discourses, I refer to the specific version of the ethical and social imagination that Jane works with, as discussed in section 3.4 of this chapter. What is particularly interesting about these texts is the manner in which

learners move between self and other (Ronald, 1986), between spectator and participant (Britton, 1970), and inner and outer landscape (Bruner, 1986).

Karen's story

Karen, who writes the most convincing story, frames the story with herself as spectator:

> Gooday I am Karen and I will be talking to you about the refugees in Alexandra.

At this point she creates a distance between herself and the experience of the story. She is about to tell the story to an imagined audience. Her story has a social purpose and this purpose becomes clearer towards the end, when she moves into advocacy mode. Immediately after the opening line, she shifts into narration mode from the perspective of an imagined victim of xenophobic violence. The 'I' in the story thus shifts from the stance of herself to the stance of 'other'. She however does not name the narrator or give any background. Instead she moves directly into the recounting of this traumatic event. Somehow, this absence of back story makes her story more convincing. We do not know the age, nationality, gender of the narrator.

> I was walking down the street, when I heard a noise, **a noise like no other**, it sounded like a scream, but it was hard to make out where it came from because at that moment a big **mob** of people **circled around me**, **pushing** me to the ground.
>
> **The mob** pushed me to the ground, crushing my leg. As I lay there confused and frightened half to death I heard them shouting **"Why are you here?" "You don't belong!" "Go home!"** I **blinked** and not shortly after they began to beat me. One man slapped me and kicked my leg leaving my leg in agony.

Karen uses menacing images to capture the growing sense of threat posed to the unnamed refugee by an increasingly dehumanised mob. The noise is "a noise like no

other", the mob "circle" around her like vultures circle a rotting corpse. The power of her text is not in the explicitly stated emotion, but in the use of her images and descriptions, particularly in her use of strong verbs ("circled", "pushing", "crushing", "I blinked"). In the second paragraph the "mob of people" becomes simply "the mob", indicating their increasing dehumanisation. On reading this, one gets the sense that the victim is losing consciousness, and is becoming increasingly distant from the situation.

When the narrator regains consciousness she makes her way home, "smoke swirling around me" only to discover that her house has been reduced to a "heap of rubble". The only remnant she can find is her grandmother's doll that has been passed onto her. The story ends with her picking up the doll and describing her emotional response to this moment. The moment of finding the doll is a powerful one, as the reader is shocked to realise that the narrator is probably a young girl. It is also a strong image of loss, innocence and emotional damage.

In the final paragraph Karen moves back to herself as narrator and she shifts to advocacy mode:

> Please help these people because the only thing separating us from them, and that is we are all people but they are people in need of great help.

In her final paragraph she tries to break down us–them binaries by asserting that "we are all people". She makes a plea to her audience to "help these people", to take some form of social action, although she does not state explicitly what this would entail. Karen illustrates her capacity to move beyond herself, to engage empathetically with her subject matter, and she calls on her audience to do the same.

Looking at the opening and closing frame of her story, one is struck by the different sense of audience and purpose across the sets of texts of the three teachers. Many of Nadine's learners showed an understanding of audience and purpose as

entertainment, telling a good story. However, in Karen's story (and most stories in this set), an altogether different notion of audience and purpose is illustrated: telling a story to highlight a critical social issue and to engage with the audience affectively and discursively, to move the audience to action. This view of audience and purpose obviously has to do with the nature of the specific task, but has certainly been framed by the classroom discourses that go beyond this particular task.

Prakesh's story

Prakesh fuses himself and the refugee narrator into one person, holding both stances simultaneously.

> My name is Prakesh Desai and I am a victim of the ways that the locals are treating refugees. The locals are ataking us with iron bars, stones, sticks and guns. **They come hunting for people like me.**

He begins his story by giving the refugee narrator his name. There is thus no linguistic distance between himself and the experience, and no external framing of the kind that Karen used. In the last line of the introduction Prakesh uses the chilling image of hunting, similar to Karen's image of being "circled", and the implication of the dehumanisation of both victim and perpetrator. Prakesh creates a fairly convincing story, but despite his fusion of self with the narrator, his story is not always quite as convincing as Karen's story. At times, he stays on the fringes of the inner landscape of the story. His recounting of being attacked is an example of this:

> They had noticed my foreign accent so they hit my forehead with a knobkierrie, leaving me with an open wound. I **was** also **kicked and punched**. I **was saved** by a local woman who took me to a clinic. My head **was** heavily **bandaged**.

His repeated use of passive verbs reinforces his sense of powerlessness but somehow the overall effect is a feeling that the story is told at a remove, almost as if he is a spectator of the experience. However, in his final paragraph he moves quote

powerfully into the inner landscape of his subject, reflecting on his feelings of fear, disillusionment and uncertainty.

> At this moment in time I am so terrified. I am wondering all of this is going to stop. I am still in the hospital because I am so scared to go back home. I thought that by coming to South Africa I would get a better life but now I think that I was wrong. I feel like going home to Zimbabwe.

In both Karen's and Prakesh's texts, there are moments of the synthesis of affect and cognition in ways that are facilitated by the imaginative moves that they make. Put another way, we see a dialectic between Kearney's notion of "critical logos" and "creative mythos" (1998 : 91).

Abdul's story

We see a similar synthesis in moments of Abdul's story. However, Abdul approaches the writing of the story from a different angle to the other four writers. He writes in the persona of a journalist reporting on the issue. He thus writes as a spectator who takes an explicit position on the issue. His story begins in typical reporting style, then moves into sharper focus on one specific story about Ana Matusi. Abdul uses this example as a springboard to explore broader issues:

> She (Ana Matusi) is not alone as there are more like her who is suffering and displaced. The evil of this violence is due to locals complaining that the foreigners are taking their woman, jobs and bribing councellors for houses.
>
> These attacks leave me sad and angry as this is not what South Africans stand for. During Apartheid South Africans were protected and welcomed in foreign countries. Foreigners are people to and **we** should treat them as **we** want them to treat **us**. Xenophobia has affected many South African communities and I am deeply concerned and frightened too as this would end up as a blood bath. Hopefully the government will now stand up and do something about it.

Abdul's concluding call for action is both articulate and impassioned, reasoned and emotional. Like Karen, he is clear about the social advocacy purpose of his writing and he has used a range of strategies to influence his imagined reader: 'factual' information, and a human interest angle and argument.

Refiloe's and Thandeka's stories

I will comment briefly on the last two texts, mainly to highlight the contrast between them and the aforementioned three texts. Refiloe and Thandeka both merged themselves with the imagined refugee narrators, using their own names to tell the story. They both sustained this first-person narration throughout, not moving into a spectator role as Karen and Abdul did. Although their stories were quite well developed and detailed, neither writer really moved significantly beyond the outer landscape of narrative. The language used tended to be the language of recounting events and actions rather than really showing the ability to step into the shoes of their imagined narrator. Their use of language tended to be somewhat bland and concrete. This brings me back to the questions I raised towards the end of Nhamo's section about the role of learners' linguistic repertoires in doing imaginative writing. Did they struggle to engage empathetically with the subject or were they limited from taking their stories further by their limited linguistic resources? My sense is that the latter is the case as they both put a lot of effort into developing their stories and a sense of the background and experiences of the narrators. This raises further questions about pedagogy. While the fairly impromptu nature of the task, and class discussion as preparation, was sufficient for the other three writers, Refiloe and Thandeka probably needed more scaffolding into the task. On the other hand, the task was for their journals, which is an 'ungraded zone', and it is likely that in the reading and sharing that happened the next day more insights emerged.

5. Conclusions

I now return to the key questions at the heart of this chapter, and will attempt to answer them by drawing together the main findings of this chapter.

- What are the consequences of teachers' conceptions of imaginative writing and practice for the kind of writing that learners produce?
- What is the relationship between classroom discourses and written texts produced by learners?
- To what extent do the teachers facilitate imaginative thinking and writing through their use of scaffolding and mediation?

There is a strong and interesting relationship between the teachers' conceptions of imagination, classroom discourses, scaffolding and the imaginative writing produced by the learners. Put another way, significant traces of classroom discourses and the assignment scaffolding were evident in the text produced by the learners, to the extent that there were times when one could make direct links between micro moments in the assignment preparation phase and specific parts of the learners' assignment.

Having provided an overview of the findings, in fairly general terms, it is necessary to sum up the findings in more specific ways, per teacher. I will focus on Nhamo in more detail than Jane and Nadine, as the section on his learners' writing was the most comprehensive, and also raises pivotal questions with broad relevance for the imaginative writing project in South African classrooms.

The sample texts from Nadine's class highlighted both the advantages and disadvantages of her 'controlled writing' strategy. The best writers (Category A) benefited from the structure and were able to move beyond it to construct vivid texts with a sense of ownership. However, the learners in Category C got stuck in the teacher-based scaffold and resorted to listing and reproduction.

The sample texts from Jane's learners, on the whole, reflected a strong sense of audience, social purpose and social advocacy. These texts highlighted learners' capacities to project themselves imaginatively, cognitively and affectively into another person's shoes and social context. It is likely that this capacity is build cumulatively through Jane's consistent framing of her classes with social justice discourses. However, the stories written by Refiloe and Thandeka required more scaffolding, once more raising the question about the kind of scaffolding needed to cater for linguistic repertoires of different learners.

Having analysed Nhamo's lessons in terms of scaffolding, personal and imaginative discourses, it becomes clear that there is a tension between his use of imaginative discourses and enactment of ideas. This in turn intersects with the predominance of teacher-based scaffolding, the limited presence of personal discourses beyond the specific writing task on Wilbur, and the predominance of 'scripted', question–answer interactions. The analysis of Nhamo's classes reinforces the argument made in Chapter Three that while discourses of imagination are an important aspect of imaginative teaching, they will not necessary be fully effective unless they are enacted at various discursive and pedagogical levels. While Nhamo's briefing for the writing task foregrounded imaginative discourses, the process leading up to the task did not create a range of "openings" (Greene, 1995) for learners to engage with the story from their own personal perspectives. In addition, and very importantly, the feedback provided by Nhamo after he had marked the story focused on prescriptive discourses rather than imaginative discourses.

What are the consequences of Nhamo's pedagogy for learners' writing? Perhaps it is most productive to begin with the benefits that accrued to learners in the sample of 32 assignments. The four best stories (from Category A) provided indicators of the possibilities generated by Nhamo's pedagogy. These stories illustrate the nexus of narrative, imagination, affect and linguistic resources harnessed productively for the task at hand.

On the whole, learners did master this first-person narration, even if it was simply at the grammatical level for some. However, the majority of learners verged on the edges of retelling, and reproduction. Yet even in the analysis of one of these weakest texts (Thabo's text), on the second and third reading there were signs of life, of **an awakening imagination** trying to break through linguistic and other barriers.

While the four best stories (from Category A) provided indicators of the possibilities generated by Nhamo's pedagogy, the stories of the eighteen learners who did not grasp the task raise questions about how Nhamo's pedagogy could be extended to build bridges between the resources that learners bring to the classroom and the demands of imaginative writing classes. Stein (2008) and Beynon's multimodal work (2004), discussed in Chapter Five (3.2.3), provides a way of thinking about this challenge that opens up possibilities for imaginative ways forward; a way out of the impasse of deficit and defeat. These ideas will be elaborated on in Chapter Nine.

The broader implications of the findings of this chapter will be discussed in Chapter Nine alongside the other conclusions and findings of this thesis.

Chapter Nine: Conclusions

In this concluding chapter, I highlight the most significant findings from the four data chapters to answer the overarching question of this research project:

> *What is the relationship between teachers' conceptions of imaginative writing and their enactment of imaginative writing pedagogy in the classroom?*

I also examine the theoretical findings of this research, and consider their contributions to future research into writing pedagogy that is focused on a Vygotskian approach to imaginative writing. Thirdly, I reflect on my approach to writing this thesis and the extent to which I have attempted to model imaginative writing within the constraints of the academic writing genre. Finally, I examine the implications of this research for teacher education and writing pedagogy.

1. Overview of argument in context

At the outset of this thesis it was established that imagination and imaginative writing have been marginalised in local and global educational research, and in South African curriculum documents. This thesis has a strong advocacy component, drawing on findings from classroom-based research as well as theoretical synthesis, to make a call for action, to release imagination from its 'playpen' and to locate it at the centre of curriculum, thinking, and writing.

There are frequent reports in the South African media about various studies that show that South African learners are emerging from different phases of the schooling system with very low levels of literacy (Swart, 2009; Blaine, 2009), the most notable being the PIRLS study (2008) and more recently the National Benchmark tests[10] (Yeld, 2009). Some may argue that in the midst of this basic literacy crisis it is indulgent and

[10] National Benchmark tests were conducted at all South African universities with first-year students in January 2009. The aim of the tests was to assess entry-level academic literacy, literacy and mathematics proficiency, and to address concerns about how to interpret the new National Senior Certificate.

irrelevant to conduct research on imaginative writing. In response, I make the claim that it is precisely such a narrow, back-to-basics conceptualisation of literacy that limits learners' literacy development. I look forward to engaging in this debate and challenging the pervasive assumptions – i.e. that a literacy crisis must be dealt with by dishing out low-level, unchallenging, unimaginative pedagogy. In this vein, one of the most revealing findings of the PIRLS study was that teachers serve this kind of 'fare' to learners, and that literacy pedagogy is pitched at too low a level.

Instead I work with a Vygotskian version of imagination that synthesises cognition, affect and creativity, and that regards imagination as central to human functioning, higher-level thinking and achievements. In addition, I draw on the philosophical work of Kearney and Levinas to foreground the ethical imagination. Hence, social justice and critical thinking are essential elements of imagination. Finally, this thesis synthesises contemporary Vygotskian ideas on imagination and learning with writing pedagogy research. From this synthesised perspective, imagination and imaginative writing are a fundamental component of any response to the current South African literacy crisis. *We need more, not less!*

2. Findings from interviews and classroom observation (data)

In this section, I return to the key research questions of this thesis and answer them in relation to key findings from my fieldwork. At the outset, this research set out to answer the following three overarching questions:

- How do teachers conceptualise the imagination and imaginative writing?
- How are these ideas and beliefs enacted through classroom writing practices?
- What is the relationship between teachers' conceptions of imaginative writing and their enactment of imaginative writing pedagogy in the classroom?

2.1 The relationship between teachers' personal writing histories, their conceptualisations of imagination & imaginative writing and their enactment of imaginative writing pedagogy in the classroom

The findings of this research suggest that there is a complex relationship between teachers' personal writing histories, their conceptions of imaginative writing, their enacted practice and the institutional contexts in which they teach. In many ways, these findings highlight the fact that these relationships are more nuanced than previous research suggests.

2.1.1 The impact of school and university writing histories on teachers' imaginative writing pedagogy

A significant aspect of teachers' personal writing histories was their school and teacher training writing histories. These followed non-linear, unpredictable patterns, generating new insights on the notion of teachers' "apprenticeship of observation" (Johnson, 1999). While all of the teachers had predominantly negative experiences of school writing, they had all been exposed to at least one positive role model or inspiring experience either at school, or during further studies at college/university. This exposure had significant impacts on their conceptualisation of English as a subject, writing, reading and pedagogy. The significance of one powerfully positive role model or mentor cannot be underestimated and can reverse years of negative exposure. However, the sustainability of this varies across the case studies.

Nhamo and Debby taught the way they were taught in the earlier phases of their careers but shifted, after exposure to alternative ideas and role models. However, despite the fact that they both critiqued and rejected their "apprenticeship of observation" after their exposure to new ideas, neither fully sustained the implementation of the new approach. Both their practices reflected a co-existence of old and new approaches (Gusky, 1986), and manifested in the interviews and the classroom observation as contradictory discourses.

Jane and Nadine viewed their "apprenticeship of observation" as powerful lessons in how *not* to teach. Jane in particular articulated her determination never to silence her learners' voice, which she regarded as a hallmark of South African apartheid education. Fiona also rejected key aspects of her "apprenticeship of observation", but was positively and powerfully influenced by her Grade 12 English teacher, who changed her "whole thought process about English".

2.1.2 The importance of conceptualisations of imagination and imaginative writing

Previous research concludes that in order for teachers to teach writing effectively, it is imperative that they engage with their own writing (Hairston, 1982; Crowhurst, 1988; Winer, 1992). One of the central findings of this thesis is that teachers' personal writing practices have less of an impact on their imaginative writing pedagogy than one would expect. Teachers' *conceptualisations* of imagination and their related *beliefs* and attitudes have a more significant impact on their pedagogy than their personal writing practices.

This is not to undermine the value of teachers engaging with their own writing and writing process. Rather, I argue that we need to extend the parameters of what it means for teachers to be 'involved' in the imaginative writing process (Grainger et al., 2005), with teachers engaging in their own writing as one of many elements. Teachers' participation in the imaginative writing process can take many different forms. This may entail writing alongside the learners, as Nadine does, or it may entail 'journeying alongside the learners', as Fiona does, without necessarily producing her own creative writing. These two case studies suggest that there are multiple ways for teachers to access their imagination and this should be viewed holistically. This finding reinforces the argument of Grainger et al. (2005: 166–167) that teachers need to develop their creativity and imagination in a number of different contexts in order to be empowered to teach writing with passion and conviction.

A crucial element is the extent to which teachers value imaginative writing work and view it as an integral part of writing and learning. For example, Fiona and Nadine are both passionate about teaching imaginative writing – they believe it is critically important. Equally important, they use 'enabling discourses' to refer to its possibilities for themselves as teachers and for their learners. These two elements (conviction and belief) are closely related to their 'enabling discourses' and work together to create classrooms of imaginative possibilities. Fiona does not do any imaginative writing herself, but is able to facilitate her learners' imaginative writing. It is important to mention that Fiona is a passionate reader, and her interest in the reading–writing relationship may well compensate for the absence of her own imaginative writing practices (i.e. she has a sophisticated understanding of crafting). Both Fiona and Nadine access their own imaginations and creativity through teaching.

Conversely, Debby values imaginative, expressive writing in her own life but has serious reservations about its educational value and argues that it cannot be taught. She believes that it is an innate talent that only certain learners possess. Debby's conceptualisation of imagination has a far more powerful impact on her espoused and enacted practice than the fact that she engages in the writing process in private.

Values and beliefs that embrace imaginative writing, while a necessary precondition for productive practice, are not necessarily enough. They need to be coupled with a well-developed pedagogy and implemented in institutional contexts that are conducive to imaginative writing. Fiona and Nadine's strong convictions and beliefs dovetail with well-developed conceptualisations of imaginative writing and specific pedagogical strategies that enable them to enable learners. In addition, they both teach at schools where there is a reasonably well-developed and shared trajectory of skills development from one grade to the next.

As suggested above, institutional constraints also play a role in framing the teachers' sense of possibility. Some contexts are more enabling than others. The ethos that pervades the school, the pedagogy used by teachers in lower grades, and the linguistic resources that learners bring to the classroom all contribute to the teachers' conceptualisations of imaginative writing and their espoused and enacted practice. However, this does not determine the teachers' conceptualisations or practices. These factors interact dynamically with the teachers' conceptualisation, beliefs and histories to produce practice. For example, Nhamo articulates a strong belief in the value of imaginative writing, and the importance of the imagination, but claims that he is constrained from implementing these ideas by contextual and institutional factors, and the limited linguistic resources of his learners. In a similar vein, Debby explained that in the lower grades at her school teachers tended to focus on sentence-level work rather than extended writing. In addition, writing is not valued in the school and there is a limited shared set of ideas about how writing should be developed over the primary school years.

2.2. What are the consequences of teachers' conceptions of imaginative writing for classroom practice and the kind of writing that learners produce?

One of the aims of this research is to identify practices that promote imaginative thinking and writing as well as practices that inhibit the development of imaginative writing. A central aspect of my conceptualisation of classrooms of imaginative possibilities is the notion of opening and closing "in-between spaces" (Dyson, 1997: 14). I have analysed instances of teachers opening and closing imaginative spaces in relation to pedagogical strategies used.

2.2.1 The relationship between structure, freedom and imagination

One of the central questions I have constantly revisited in relation to the five case studies concerns the relationship between structure and imagination. I have been investigating what kind of pedagogical structures awaken learners' imaginations and what kind of structures inhibit or limit learners' imaginations. The key conceptual tools such as scaffolding, mediation and modelling are all integral components of pedagogical structure. I have developed the concept of structured freedom to encapsulate an imaginative writing pedagogy in which the structure provided is fluid and permeable and ultimately enables learners to move imaginatively beyond the teacher-based scaffolds and create their own texts. Fiona's espoused and enacted practice is a model of this concept in action. In contrast, Nadine uses a 'controlled writing' approach and sets the learners free to take stories in their own direction once a structured framework for writing has been established.

2.2.2. Discourses and pedagogy in the classroom

The findings of this thesis highlight the importance of key elements of practice (such as mediation, scaffolding and modelling) working together, pulling in the same direction and being framed by reinforcing discourses. All five teachers drew on imaginative Discourses (i.e. discourses that value imaginative writing and thinking, regarding it as central to learning) at times, and strove to promote imaginative writing. However, the ultimate effectiveness of this was largely determined by the manner in which imaginative discourses were sustained and integrated with other discourses.

Teachers draw on a range of different Discourses to construct their ideas about imaginative writing and their practice in the interview and in the classroom. The range of Discourses that emerged include empowerment Discourses, deficit and elitist Discourses, prescriptivist and functional Discourses, enabling Discourses, social and collaborative Discourses vs. individualist Discourses and social justice Discourses.

The Discourses used were, in turn, underpinned by the versions of imagination that teachers implicitly or explicitly embraced. These versions include Vygotskian, Romantic, Sartrean, Platonic and the ethical imagination. However, these underpinnings were not necessarily fixed or consistent. In some instances, one lesson could reflect a combination of two or more of these versions of the imagination.

Teachers frequently used competing Discourses in the interview and it was fascinating to see how these competing Discourses were enacted in the classroom, and their impact on pedagogy. All the teachers used imaginative discourses in the initial phases of the writing process, while briefing learners on a new task and using prompts to inspire the learners. However, the tension between competing discourses frequently became apparent in the teacher feedback session. For example, Debby encouraged the learners to set their minds free, while Nhamo urged his learners to "think creatively". However, the time allocated to this imaginative journey was relatively short and followed by highly prescriptivist feedback. In these instances, the co-existence of imaginative discourses, prescriptivist and deficit discourses, in the interview and in the classroom, ultimately resulted in the sidelining of imaginative discourses. Debby and Nhamo both conveyed the underlying message that what really counts is grammatical correctness, despite the imaginative starting points of the two tasks. In the same vein, Debby and Nhamo modelled the feedback process as one that focuses on surface errors rather than meaning.

In contrast, Fiona used imaginative discourses consistently in the interview and in the classroom and this was reinforced by a range of pedagogical strategies that created structured freedom and a classroom of imaginative possibilities. Nadine also sustained a strong focus on imagination in her overall feedback to learners on their detective stories. In contrast, the dominant discourse in Jane's class was one of social justice and it was this version of imaginative possibilities that she enacted and sustained across all her lessons.

The importance of a sustained focus on imagination as an integral part of the learning process emerged as a significant finding. For example, Debby seemed to view imaginative activities as separate from the day-to-day routine of teaching, while Fiona sustained a focus on imagination throughout. The challenge teachers encountered was to show relationships between discourses rather than replace one with the other. Fiona modelled these relationships by showing learners how to use grammatical knowledge to enhance self-expression and the overall impact of their imaginative texts on readers.

2.2.3 The impact of pedagogy, discourses and conceptualisations on learners' imaginative writing

There is a strong and interesting relationship between the teachers' conceptions of imagination, classroom discourses, scaffolding and the imaginative writing produced by the learners. Put another way, significant traces of classroom discourses and the assignment scaffolding were evident in the text produced by the learners, to the extent that there were times when one could make direct links between micro moments in the assignment preparation phase and specific parts of the learners' assignment.

The kinds of scaffolding used by teachers had a significant impact on learners' "uptake" and "deep or shallow internalisation" (John-Steiner & Meehan, 2000) of ideas for their writing tasks. Where there was a dominance of teacher-based scaffolds, learners had limited opportunities to negotiate their own inner layers of scaffolding, individually and with peers, and ultimately did not fully take 'ownership' of the writing process and the text. However, this did not occur consistently, as learners displayed different levels of resourcefulness within the same classes. This is inevitably the case, and needs to be borne in mind. Put another way, not all the findings can be attributed to the teacher and his/her pedagogy and conceptions of

practice. There are clearly demographic and linguistic differences across and within each research site.

One of the recurring questions and issues raised by teachers in this research is whether English second- or third-language learners without the required "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1991) can reasonably be expected to produce imaginative extended writing. To what extent do the research findings provide new insights on this critical question?

Throughout this thesis I have unequivocally rejected this defeatist position. While there is no doubt that learners' limited linguistic resources pose another layer of challenge to the existing challenges, I argue that this defeatist position says as much about the limitations of teachers' imaginations as it does about learners.

This is not intended to simply substitute constructions of learner deficit for teacher deficit (and I hope it is not read as such). Rather this argument points towards gaps in teacher language education, both pre- and in-service. Teachers need to be enabled to work imaginatively across a range of contexts, and the starting point is the development of their own imaginations. If one views imagination as a central and integral part of learning, thinking and human functioning, as I do, then it is untenable to view it as something unattainable. But clearly a statement of belief is not sufficient to address the problem. What is needed is a carefully developed pedagogy of imaginative writing that is flexible enough to be adapted in different contexts.

Grappling with the issue of multimodality provides a key to begin to answer the crucial question raised by Nhamo and to a lesser extent Debby. Stein's work (2008) provides the beginning of a way out of the impasse of deficit and defeat. She advocates multimodal strategies such as movement, performance, drawing and storytelling to enable learners to smile and feel and imagine in writing. Both Stein and Beynon highlight the importance of transitioning from storytelling to storyreading and storywriting. Stein (2008) discusses the possibilities of teachers

helping learners 'translate' their ideas across modes through structured mediation and scaffolding.

The pedagogical implications of this approach are that one needs to create multiple spaces and activities for ESL learners to draw on the full range of their resources. The notion of resources needs to be broad, including linguistic, imaginative, cognitive, personal, social, and cultural dimensions. This in turn resonates with Stein's multimodal approach, as well as Grainger et al.'s notion of the "expanded process of composition" (2005). It also creates many spaces and openings (Greene, 1995) for learners to slowly transform fragments of ideas into stories over time (McCallister, 2008). These ideas, together with the key findings of this thesis, have the potential to generate a productive and powerful imaginative writing pedagogy framework with a strong Vygotskian orientation. By its very nature, it needs to be a flexible framework that teachers can adapt to their own context rather than a prescriptive blueprint. In the section that follows, I will articulate this framework explicitly and locate it within the broader theoretical framework of this thesis.

3. Theoretical synthesis

At the outset of this thesis I identified gaps in writing pedagogy research locally and globally as regards explicit conceptualisations of imagination and their implication for writing. I also identified a problem with writing pedagogy research i.e. a lack of theoretical rigour in its formulation and the tendency to draw on theory implicitly and in diffuse ways. If pedagogy is about choices, then it needs to be far more explicit and rigorous about what ideas and theories are drawn on and their implications. The alternative is a scenario where teachers and teacher educators draw on pedagogical ideas in diffuse ways and draw on a mix of prevailing discourses with a limited theoretical basis. In this thesis I have begun to fill this gap theoretically. I have developed a layered conceptualisation of imagination that draws on both philosophical and educational theory (**see figure 4**).

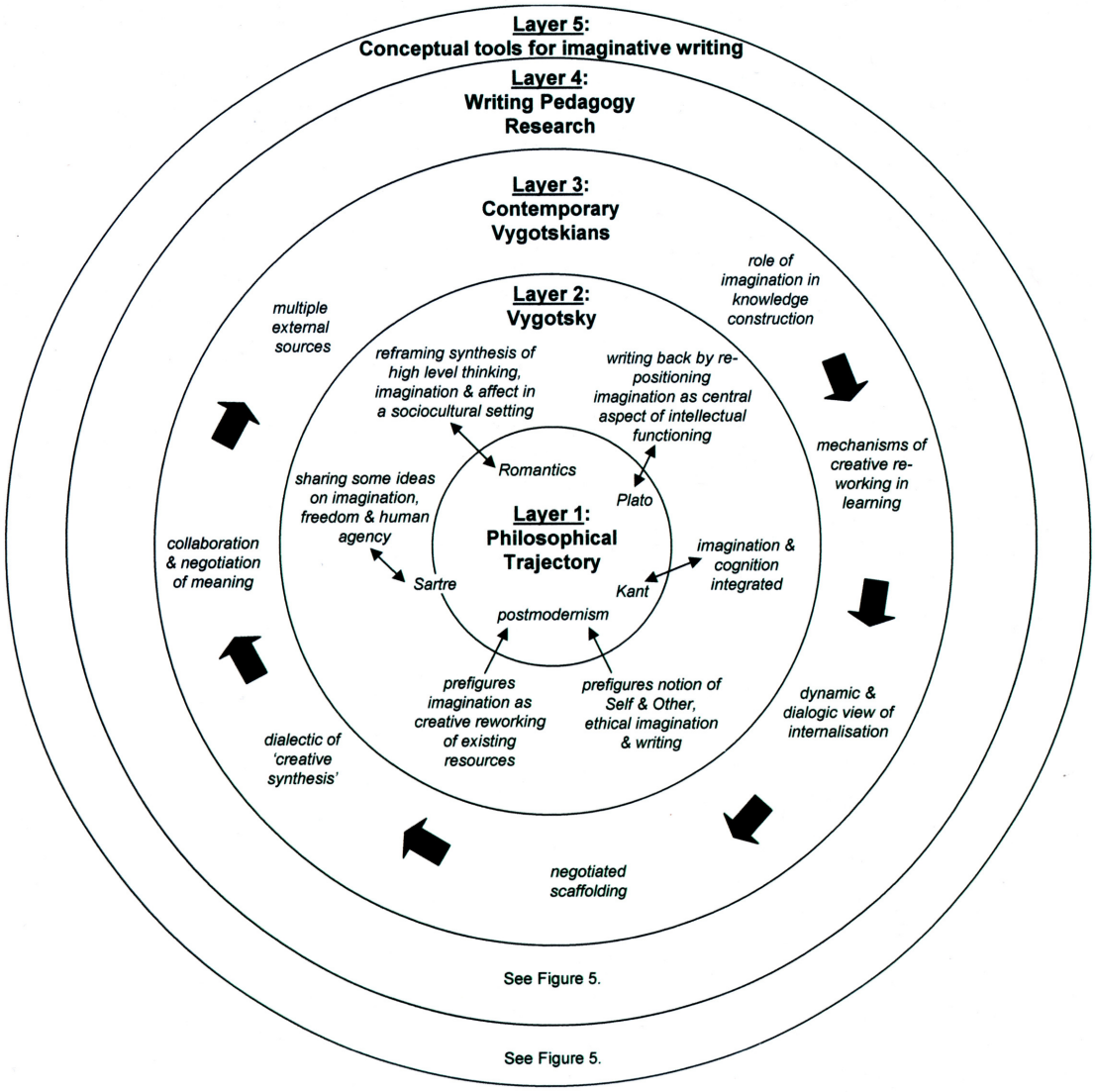


Figure 4: Layered conceptualisation of imagination and imaginative writing

The **first layer** of this conceptualisation is comprised of a historical and theoretical overview of different versions of the imagination constructed by western philosophers from classical times to the present. While this aspect was presented chronologically in Chapter Two, this narrative of the imagination's role in western intellectual thought is by no means linear, and older versions of the imagination have not necessarily been replaced by more current versions. The data clearly illustrates that traces of older versions of the imagination remain and continue to shape the way teachers engage with imaginative writing (sometimes in combination). These are powerful discourses that continue to frame the way we see the world and act in it, powerful discourses that continue to circulate. Below is a brief summary of these key ideas and versions:

- Platonic versions of the imagination as reproductive and subordinate to reason.
- Kant's view of the imagination as productive of new knowledge and meanings yet still a separate faculty of the mind.
- Sartrean versions of imagination as the key to freedom, as a process of detachment which entails creating something out of nothing; focus on human agency and initiative.
- Romantic versions of the imagination as central to intellectual thought, an integral part of cognition and closely related to reason yet socially decontextualised; forging links between intellect, imagination and affect.
- Post modern versions of imagination; Human imagination is no longer a source of original creation of meaning. Instead, ideas are constantly recycled through an endless play of linguistic signs; the ethical imagination, self and other, moving beyond individual narratives to other narratives.

While this historical and theoretical overview is significant in its own right for reasons outlined above, the central theorist of this thesis is Vygotsky. The historical trajectory

thus serves another purpose, to highlight the trajectory of Vygotsky's ideas on imagination. Hence, the **second layer** of this conceptualisation explicates Vygotsky's ideas on imagination and shows "dialectical synthesis" in action. He writes back to classical notions of the imagination and builds on the Romantic notions of imagination but takes it into new directions, synthesising cognition, imagination, affect and human agency all within a socio-cultural context. He builds on previous intellectual thought and points to the future development of ideas, as evidenced in the work that emerges concurrently and after the 1930s. For example, Sartre and Vygotsky, who were contemporaries, shared convictions about the relationship between imagination, freedom and human agency.

Vygotsky's concerns with empathy, identification and writing beyond the confines of direct experiences prefigures ideas about relationships between self and other as conceptualised by Levinas (1969), Kearney (1988, 2002) and Rorty (1989). In addition, Vygotsky's notion of constructing imaginative writing and thought from pre-existing social resources resonates, to some extent, with post modern ideas of the constant circulation and reconfiguration of existing ideas.

Vygotsky provided a rich framework for understanding imagination but did not fully unpack what this would mean in practice in educational settings. The **third layer** of this conceptualisation addresses this gap through discussion of contemporary Vygotskian ideas on imagination and learning. Hence, the third layer provides a learning theory in which the mechanisms of "creative synthesis" are developed in relation to Vygotskian key concepts such as internalisation, mediation, negotiated scaffolding and collaboration. Together, the **second and third layers** move the conceptualisation from the philosophical abstraction of Chapter Two to consideration of imagination in educational, and developmental contexts. However, these conceptualisations still remain at an abstract and technical level of explanation.

Layer four consist of writing pedagogy research particularly the work of Grainger et al, 2005; Dyson, 1997; McCallister, 2008;and Richardson 1994. The model culminates in **layer five**, the development of specific conceptual tools for imaginative writing. **Layer five** is thus a synthesis of writing pedagogy research and contemporary Vygotskian ideas on imagination and learning (John-Steiner and Meehan, 2000; Moll, 1990; Daniels, 2001; Bayer, 1996). Hence, there is a gradual move from macro, historical and philosophical framing towards the specifics of tools for classroom practice. These conceptual tools are represented in **figure five**.

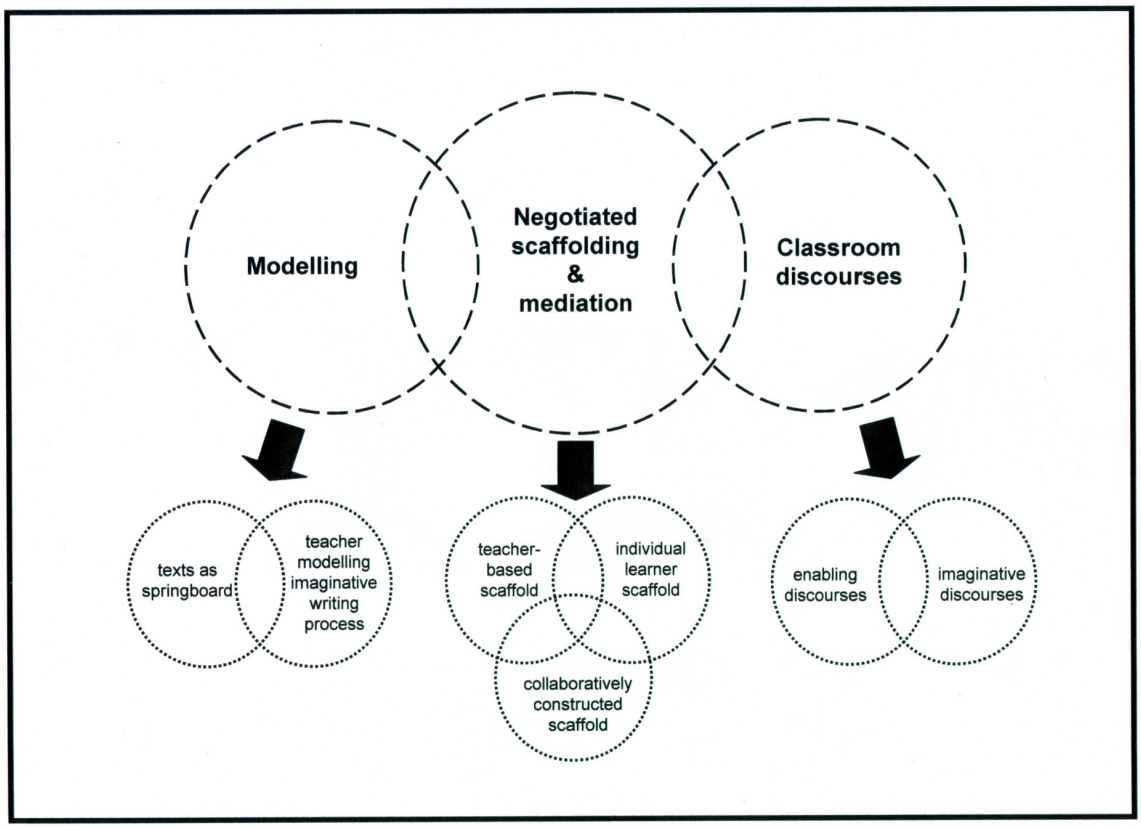


Figure 5: Conceptual tools for imaginative writing

The synthesis of writing pedagogy research and contemporary Vygotskian ideas is a lens of analysis but it has also been transformed through the data analysis process. Through the data analysis one begins to see how "creative synthesis" and imaginative writing pedagogy work in practice. Hence, the data analysis adds new layers of understanding to the theory, and to some extent, reconfigures it. The "dialectical synthesis" that Vygotsky modelled in his own work thus continues in this work, generating a framework for imaginative writing pedagogy that is synthetic and grounded in theory and data analysis. What emerges from this synthesis are well-developed conceptual tools for classroom implementation.

The key conceptual tools are: negotiated scaffolding and mediation, modelling and classroom discourses. A central aspect of this model and these conceptual tools is the creation of "openings" and imaginative "in-between spaces" that facilitate the dynamic interplay of these salient features. Hence, the intersecting circles in **figure 5** are porous and the in-between spaces are represented through the intersections. Emerging from the presences and gaps in the data, I have extended the notion of 'negotiated scaffolding' to include outer and inner layers. The outer layer is constructed by the teacher who creates a framework and boundary for learning and imagining, while the inner layer consists of individually and collaboratively constructed learner scaffolds. It is important to note that this model is not fixed, linear or rigid; hence the use of intersecting circles to represent the reconfigured scaffolding model in **figure 5**. While the teacher usually established the boundaries, teachers and learners can move recursively through these various configurations of scaffolding. Hence, what is central to this model is the interplay and the overlap between the various layers of scaffolding, and its interplay with the other key conceptual tools – modelling and classroom discourses.

Modelling is not conceptualised as a rigid offering of genre templates. Instead, modelling is seen as a fluid dynamic process in which teachers model the imaginative writing process for the learners and collaborate with them to construct shared ideas

about writing. In addition, model texts are springboards for the learners' own imagination, not sources of imitation and reproduction, nor unattainable objects that are valorised. This reconfigured version of modelling thus feeds into the various layers of negotiated scaffolding.

Finally, everything that happens in the classroom is framed by classroom discourses. This model develops the concepts of enabling and imaginative discourses and attempts to counter deficit discourses, and the dominance of prescriptive discourses. The argument has repeatedly been made that these two discourses work productively in relation to the other salient features of the model. I.e. imaginative and enabling discourses must be reinforced by other elements of practice, particularly negotiated scaffolding and a fluid, dynamic conceptualisation of modelling.

Hence "creative synthesis" happens at the edges of the intersecting circles of this model, as illustrated in figure five, and the concept of 'structured freedom' emerges from the interplay of all the salient features. This in turn provides one possible solution to the binary that recurred in the teachers' discourses (and frequently surfaces in writing pedagogy literature) of structure vs. freedom, grammar vs. meaning, form vs. function, and most importantly imagination vs. higher level thinking.

Any model of pedagogy requires a corresponding and related model of assessment. Arising from the synthesis of Vygotskian ideas and writing pedagogy research, I have developed seven categories for analysing and evaluating imaginative writing that will enable teachers to look at learners' writing through a layered lens. These categories have been applied to the analysis of learners' writing in Chapter Eight (section 4).

4. Methodological reflections

This research has been a dialogical and creative process, shaped and reshaped by the stories and voices of the five participating teachers, voices of other researchers, my two supervisors and colleagues from my community of practice whose questions and comments have altered the way I think and see the world. In Vygotskian terms I have internalised many of these ideas. This process is an enactment of a socio-cultural view of knowledge construction. It illustrates the following argument made by John-Steiner and Meehan: "Just as interdependence with mentors is crucial during formative years, sustained interaction with one's peers is essential thereafter" (2000: 38).

The dialogical process of knowledge construction is one important methodological aspect of this thesis. However, the question of writing, how to assemble and represent this knowledge construction journey, is equally significant, and possibly more complex. I began this thesis determined to make it 'my story', and to tell this story in a "vital", "readable" way (Richardson, 1994: 516) within the constraints of academic discourse. I stated in Chapter Four that: "I refuse to erase myself from the text in the name of scientific notions of objectivity that are not entirely applicable to qualitative research." Throughout the thesis I have attempted to weave together rigorous academic research and argument with personal and imaginative elements. Just as the teachers have modelled and enacted certain versions of imaginative writing pedagogy to their learners, I have tried to enact the central ideas of this thesis through writing.

On reflection, this has been more complicated than anticipated and only partially successful. There were two problems that emerged in relation to my personal style. Firstly, personal idioms and discourses are by their very nature tentative, and academic discourse demands a certain level of authoritativeness and certainty, especially in relation to theory. Secondly, in the data analysis chapters, my personal

voice as researcher in earlier versions was intrusive, and at times sounded too judgemental. In the final edit of this thesis, I have dealt with these problems while still retaining a vivid personal voice where appropriate. My view of academic writing has not changed, but I have realised that, as with all discourses, one needs to make compromises, seizing in-between spaces and openings where possible.

5.Implications and recommendations

My PhD journey is almost over, and another journey awaits in the wings. What remains is to consider the recommendations for implementation of the findings and future research, the limitations of this thesis and finally some concluding thoughts.

5.1 Recommendations for implementation of findings

- Language teacher education programmes must provide opportunities for in-service and pre-service teachers to engage in a range of imaginative writing courses alongside writing pedagogy courses. This will create opportunities for a powerful combination of experiential, theoretical and pedagogical learning.
- Teachers' evolving conceptualisations of imagination and imaginative writing should be foregrounded and explored alongside exposure to ideas about different versions of imagination and their implications for teaching writing.
- Central concepts such as scaffolding, mediation, and modelling need to be explored in teacher language education, particularly writing pedagogy courses, in more nuanced, in-depth ways than is currently being done. Concepts such as structured freedom and multiple layers of scaffolding can be used productively to create classrooms of imaginative possibilities.
- Enabling and deficit discourses must be explored in detail. Pre-service and in-service teachers need to become aware of the impact of these discourses and

beliefs. They need to develop awareness of the beliefs and ideas they bring to the classroom, and the discourses they draw on.

- In the same vein, misconceptions about ESL learners and the limits of imaginative writing need to be debunked. Instead, teachers must be enabled to develop their own imaginative repertoires and those of their learners through a range of multimodal strategies.
- Teacher Language Education courses must have a substantial component that provide opportunities for teachers to work with a range of learner texts, and new ways of looking at texts through the lens of imaginative writing pedagogies must be introduced.

5.2 Limitations and recommendations for further research

As discussed in Chapter Four, the demographic profile of the teachers who participated in this study was limited to four white, middle-class women and one black male, the only English additional-language speaker in the study. In addition, township and rural schools were not included in this study. It would be worthwhile to conduct further studies that extend these demographics.

In addition, it was beyond the scope of this study to deal with imaginative writing pedagogy and new technologies, particularly blogging, facebook and online writing courses. This is clearly an area that needs further exploration in a South African context. However, availability of suitable resources would clearly be a limitation in many schools.

While this thesis has drawn upon western intellectual ideas about imagination, it would be productive to explore African and Asian intellectual traditions on imagination and to examine the alignments and disjunctures between these different lenses. Exploration of African traditions could be particularly productive, given the context of this study.

Finally, methodologically this thesis highlights the generative nature of a dialogic and inductive approach to conducting qualitative research with teachers. In particular, the member check meetings have opened up further possibilities for research in two ways. Firstly, the notion of reflexive practitioners can be productively extended to include external representation of teachers' practices and their reflections on these representations. All teachers commented that it was valuable to see themselves through a different lens and to be exposed to ideas of other teachers, when reading the relevant chapters of this thesis. This can be likened to a mirror with an unfamiliar frame, a mirror with some alterations, throwing up representations of their practice alongside the practice of others. Secondly, it highlights the need for teacher support groups, and the creation of networks and structures for teachers to share and exchange ideas about imaginative writing.

Metaphorically, this thesis has thus come full circle. At the outset, I referred to Abrams' two metaphors of the mind, the mirror and the lamp (1953). He argues that prior to the eighteenth century the mind was viewed as a mirror that simply **reflected** reality while Enlightenment thinkers reconceptualised the mind as a lamp, with capacity for **reflection**. I end this thesis, by reworking the mirror and lamp image in the context of this research, and future teacher education research. The mirror provides a reframed, altered reflection of the teachers which generates further thinking and critical engagement. Hence, the mirror is no longer a mere reflection, but becomes a potentially powerful tool for reflexive transformation. The mirror has thus assumed some of the characteristics of the lamp.

5.3 Closure (and openings)

September 2009

I am back at work after a year-long sabbatical and beginning to implement the findings of my research. The PhD research and writing has been a journey that has enriched my thinking, understanding and teaching. I already feel that my sense of imaginative possibilities as a teacher educator has been extended. I begin the semester with a creative writing course and a course on teaching imaginative writing for fourth years. I am able to take the students to new places intellectually and imaginatively, to share a part of my journey with them. The combination of the experiential creative writing course and a course on teaching imaginative writing is powerful.

The findings of this thesis generate rich and exciting possibilities for imaginative writing work in intermediate classrooms and beyond. While imagination is implicit in much writing pedagogy research, it has seldom been conceptualised in explicit and detailed ways. This does not mean that excellent imaginative writing is not being done. Rather, what I argue is that a substantial conceptualisation of imagination and imaginative writing in writing pedagogy literature will enhance the teaching of writing, and facilitate more effective and productive teaching of imaginative writing. In turn, this has significant implications for pre-service and in-service teacher training. Questions of imaginative and imaginative writing must move to the centre of teacher training, especially for language teacher education.

March 2010 (postscript)

I am doing final revisions and conducting member check meetings with the five teachers who participated in this study. I begin the member checks thinking that the main purpose is to check the trustworthiness of the study, making sure that teachers feel that I have represented their ideas and beliefs with integrity. However, I soon realise that each meeting, like the initial interview, takes its own unique shape and

direction. The teachers do not limit their responses to comments about the sections that concern them. They respond to ideas raised by other participants, and begin to see new possibilities in these for teaching imaginative writing. Nhamo is inspired by Nadine's work, but raises questions about feedback, collaboration and grammar. Jane begins to see another version of imaginative writing that resonates for her, and modifies her initial position about the limited value of imaginative writing. The teachers want to meet each other and exchange ideas.

It is in these final interactions that I see the potential contribution of this thesis to the dialogical construction of knowledge. I am hoping that this process will be replicated many times over through the dissemination of these ideas to teachers and teacher educators. I hope that ultimately readers will expand their sense of possibility and be inspired to open imaginative spaces in their classrooms and beyond.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Outline of Interview Schedule for teachers

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. In preparation for this interview, I'd like you to think about your own writing history, your experiences of writing at School/University and your thoughts about teaching writing. The interview will explore this topic, using the following categories as guidelines:

1. YOUR CURRENT WRITING PRACTICES

Describe your own writing practices. Which genres of writing play a role in your life? (For example: report writing, personal narrative writing, diary writing)

Think of one or two metaphors that encapsulate your own attitude towards and experiences of writing. Take your time to think about this. Can you elaborate on the meaning of these metaphors?

2. YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE – PRE SCHOOL ENTRY

- Experiences of reading and writing before you went to school

3. YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES - SCHOOL

- Significant memories of writing at school (positives and negative)

4. TERTIARY EDUCATION

- Significant memories of writing at university and learning to teach writing

5. IN THE CLASSROOM

- Your approach to teaching writing: implicit theories/beliefs, pedagogy and practice

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule for teachers

YOUR CURRENT WRITING PRACTICES

1. Describe your own writing practices. Which genres of writing play a role in your life? (For example: report writing, personal narrative writing, diary writing)

2. Do you enjoy writing? Why/why not?

3. Think of one or two metaphors that encapsulate your own attitude towards and experiences of writing. Take your time to think about this. Can you elaborate on the meaning of these metaphors?

4. What do you see as the purpose of writing in your own life and in the classroom?

YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE – PRE SCHOOL ENTRY

5. Can you share some memories of how you learned to read and write?

6. As a child were you aware of reading and writing before you went to school? E.g. were there any printed materials in your home or community? What was the role of reading and writing during your childhood?

7. Can you tell me what you remember about anything in your life before school that involved reading or writing?

8. Did anyone read or tell you stories? Do you have any specific memories of such moments? If yes, how did these experiences shape your attitude towards reading and writing?

YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES - SCHOOL

9. How did you learn to write? What were your early experiences of writing?

10. Was there anyone significant in your life who helped you to develop your writing skills? E.g. a teacher, parent, sibling, friend, grandparent etc. What support networks helped you to progress with writing?

11. A lot of writers claim that reading played a very significant role in their development as writers. What role did reading play in your own development as a writer?

12. How would you describe your own experiences of writing at school? (You may want to differentiate between writing in primary and high school.) Describe both positive and negative memories, where applicable.

13. What kind of writing dominated your schooling experience? What approach did your teachers take towards teaching writing? (Again you may want to differentiate between primary and high school.) Highlight your most striking memories.

14. How has the way you were taught writing influenced the way that you teach writing?

15. Describe the difference between your experiences of writing in a first and additional language. For example, if you studied through the medium of English but this is not your first language, how did this impact on the development of yourself as a writer? Do you prefer writing in your first language or additional language? Why?

TERTIARY EDUCATION

16 Where did you learn to teach writing and how? What space did writing occupy in your training as a teacher?

17. Do you think that your training adequately prepared you to teach writing? Why/why not?

IN THE CLASSROOM

Teaching writing: implicit theories/beliefs, pedagogy and practice

18. What do you think is the best way to teach writing? What activities help? Describe them.

19. How do you teach writing? Describe it to me; talk me through it step by step.

20. What are your reasons for teaching writing it the way you have just described? Explore the ideas and beliefs that underlie this practice.

21. What do you perceive as obstacles/difficulties with teaching writing?

22. What are the difficulties children have with becoming good writers?

23. What do your learners enjoy about writing activities? What do they dislike about writing activities?

24. If there's a gap between your ideal writing pedagogy and practice, what are the obstacles? If you had all the resources and time available would you change the way you teach writing?

25. What kind of writing genres do you teach? Is there a balance between personal narrative and expository/argumentative writing?

26. What role does personal narrative writing play in your writing classroom? What connections do you see between personal narrative writing and other genres that you work with?

27. Tell me about the role that writing plays in your classroom. I.e. differentiate between extended writing and writing in response to worksheets, assessment etc (differentiation between extended writing and sentence level writing; closed vs. free production practice; reproductive vs. productive writing).

APPENDIX 3: Extended list of observational guidelines

How the teacher mediates all phases of the writing process

Introduction to writing tasks and creation of atmosphere

The layout of the classroom

What do the visual displays reveal about the role and position of writing in the classroom? Is it a writing-rich environment? What kind of visual texts are displayed?

Use of pre-writing and writing 'warm-up' tasks

Types of topics for writing

How writing topics are negotiated (role of teacher and learners)

Range of genres used for reading/writing tasks and linkages across genres

The scope of writing tasks

The role of the drafting process

The role of peer feedback and collaborative work

How the teacher manages feedback processes at formative and summative levels

The role of written texts as models and springboards for writing

The role of multimodal texts and the use of different modalities to inspire and facilitate writing

How the links between reading and writing are made

How writing activities relate to the outcomes and assessment standards of the Revised National Curriculum Statements

Appendix 4: Nadine's tasks, themes and contexts

During the two weeks that I observed Nadine's classes, she covered the following skills and topics. She provided the learners with interim feedback on their stories. This included some grammatical input on correct punctuation of dialogue and direct speech. There were two more exercises on the crime theme, both with visual stimuli as triggers for further work on characterisation and dialogue.

Other activities included prepared reading and prepared speeches, a class debate, and the introduction to a new novel (*The Place of Lions* by Eric Campbell). The two-week observation period ended with a short character writing exercise about the new novel. Characterisation and creating characters through writing (dialogue and description) was thus the linking thread through many of the lessons.

Appendix 5: Nhamo's tasks, themes and contexts

During the two weeks that I observed Nhamo's classes, he covered the following skills and topics. He introduced the novel *Charlotte's Web*, and read and discussed chapters with the learners. The introduction was followed by a short dialogue writing exercise and a character categorisation exercise where Nhamo discussed Wilbur's character with the learners according to the categories that he provided. This was followed by a tense exercise (based on a paragraph from the novel), the creative-writing task about Wilbur's escape, and a debate about animal rights. In the final lesson that I observed, Nhamo briefed the learners on another creative-writing task, a story about an animal. This is much more open-ended than the task about Wilbur's escape, and other than a template about the elements of story, not much in the way of guidelines or preparation is provided.

Appendix 6: Jane's tasks, themes and contexts

During the two weeks that I observed Jane's classes, she covered the following skills and topics. She was on the tail end of a theme on the Elizabethan world and dealt with the vocabulary of its social structure and hierarchy. She linked these ideas to contemporary South African politics and gender issues. She then introduced the spring theme via the African Renaissance and Nepad. This was followed by reading, talking and writing (answering comprehension questions) about a newspaper article on this topic. Jane made links to current events and issues throughout these lessons. The Nepad work was followed by a debate about whether schools should be used as site for military recruitment in the UK. This was something Jane read about in the papers the previous day and decided to include in her lesson. (This flexible approach is congruent with comments made by Jane in the formal interview and our post-observation discussion.) Commenting on the routine of "weekly and term planners", Jane emphasised that she cannot be restricted by what's on the term plan. She needs to be able to respond to current events and issues.

Learners also did worksheet-based writing, which mainly entailed answering comprehension questions. Jane seems to privilege talk, discussion and debate over writing and this is congruent with comments she made in the interview prior to classroom observation. Other topics covered included a grammar lesson, lots of dictionary work, introduction to a project on apartheid via Gerald Sekoto's art and music, reading an autobiographical text (an extract from *Down Second Avenue* by Es'kia Mphahlele) with a strong focus on interactive reading strategies, and finally the reading and writing of spring poems.

Appendix 7: Nadine's assignment briefing

Character: Write a character sketch of a detective. Try to create a vivid character with a distinctive appearance, personality and method of working. Sherlock Holmes wears a deerstalker hat, plays the violin, solves crime by observation and deduction or careful reasoning or through wisdom, common sense and by applying his sharp intellect.

Physical features: What sort of eyes? Small beady, drooping eyelids, slit eyes? Has he got a moustache? Thin, handlebar, odd shaped etc. Nose: long, sharp, pug, skew, beak like etc Is he tall, short, stocky, thin, overweight etc How does he dress? Immaculate, sloppy, impeccable etc. He may even have a great sense of humour.

Setting: Think of a setting in which your detective will usually operate and describe in detail. The Orient Express, the Blue Train, northern suburbs, Hillbrow etc. What other settings can you think of?

Plot: 1) There are many ways to plot a detective story. 2) The victim or friend or relative of the victim comes to see the detective. 3) The detective examines the scene of the crime and interview witnesses and suspects. Clues could be included in this description. 4) One of the suspects could be an unpopular character who has an excellent motive for the crime and a weak alibi. 5) The police may well arrest this person. 6) The detective by employing this special method finds out the real villain. 7) A dramatic scene in which the real villain is confronted and captured. 8) There may be a fight or a car chase. 9) At the end of the story the detective should explain to a friend or relative of the victim how he discovered the real villain.

Appendix 8: Language survey results (of classes observed at schools A-D)

School and class	Results
School A, Grade 6	21/31 learners (68%) speak one or more African language at home. 10/31 learners (33%) speak one or more African language and English at home.
School B, Grade 7	2/22 learners (9%) speak English at home. 9/22 learners (41%) speak one or more African language at home. 11/22 learners (50%) speak one or more African language at home and English.
School C, Grade 6	11/24 learners (46%) speak English at home. 5/24 learners (21%) speak one or more African language at home. 8/24 learners (33%) speak one or more African language at home and English.
School D, Grade 7	15/23 learners (65%) speak English at home. 7/23 learners (31%) speak one or more African language at home or a foreign language. 1 learners (4%) speaks English and one other African language at home.

Note: Afrikaans is included as an African language.