THE FORMATION OF WRITER IDENTITY THROUGH WRITING RESPONSE GROUPS IN THE CLASSROOM

ANDREA PITERS
The Formation of Writer Identity through Writing Response Groups in the Classroom

by Andrea Piters

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Education Wellington College of Education

Te Whanau o Ako Pai ki te Upoko o te Ika

2004
Supporting the formation of children's identity as writers in the context of interaction within a writing response group was the focus of this study.

The children in the study were in a composite Year Seven and Eight class. The children were randomly placed in groups of five or six members. Talk in the groups, students' writing journals, and the teacher/researcher's journal were analysed from a socio-cultural perspective to investigate how the group contributed to the formation of children's literate identity.

The analysis revealed that responses served to acknowledge children's writing as interesting and worthy of attention. The acknowledgement created a social energy that contributed to growth in children's writing, enabling children access to the roles they desired in the classroom.

The study highlighted the importance of children being able to form an identity as a writer to enable them to successfully engage in literacy activities.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr Joanna Higgins who helped me to find the significance of the small things. Your support, encouragement, and above all, your patience have been invaluable to me throughout this study.

Thank you to Dr Don Miller who helped me to organise my own writing. Your commitment to making helpful responses to my writing guided me towards completion, while your good humour offered me the chance to enjoy my study once again.

To my teaching partner at the time of the study, and the children in our class, I am very grateful for the chance you gave me to try out something different. Your willingness to co-operate and respond to my ideas and questions helped to make this study exciting and rewarding for me.

To my friends and family, thank you for listening to my ideas and encouraging me to complete this work. A very special thank you to my husband, Mark. You have been so incredibly patient and generous with your time, and endured many hours of my 'thinking aloud'.

To my sons, Mason and Anton, thank you for showing me all the wonderful toys you made and for sitting beside me as I worked away on the computer.
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... It seems to me that practice often leads theory. Because our guiding theories are so often tacit - unacknowledged, unexamined, unarticulated - our practice as teachers can sometimes move ahead of our theory. We find something 'works' in our classroom (it feels right, provokes thought or interest) and so we try it again, even though we do not understand it well enough to explain why or to defend it. Our teaching practice can sometimes point our guiding theories in directions we did not know they led (Brooke, 1994, p. 2).

So it was with this study.

The present study grew from the researcher's interest in the teaching of writing. The study investigated how talk in writing response groups contributed to the formation of a child's identity as a writer. Examined in detail were two questions:

1. During writing response group sessions, what information is offered through the responses given about a piece of writing, or to the writer, that positions the writer in particular ways in the classroom?

2. How do the responses given in the writing response groups enable students to renegotiate and re-position themselves in the writing classroom?

What teachers could do to support the formation and development of children's identity of themselves as writers to facilitate greater engagement in writing becomes the focus of this study.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

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What teachers could do to support the formation and development of children's identity of themselves as writers to facilitate greater engagement in writing became the focus of this study.
The study drew upon three theories: the Writing Process; Identity Formation; and interaction of children in the context of Writing Response Groups. The study argued that quality writing instruction must give attention to these three areas.

This study has been informed by the research and writing in the early 1980s of Donald Graves. Graves was synonymous with "The Writing Process", and aspects of this remain the approach adopted by most New Zealand teachers of writing today.

The work of writers and researchers in children's literate identity in the classroom, particularly as such identity related to children's engagement in writing, contributed significant ideas to the study. Brooke, Mirtz, and Evans (1994) and Lowe (2002) argued that experiences which enabled children to form a positive literate identity were more successful than any teaching strategy or teaching practice designed to focus on the skills of writing.

Writing response groups have been recognised as an integral component of writing, and their theory and practice has been well documented by Gere (1987). In this study the writing response groups offered a successful way of bringing the writing process and writer identity formation together.

1.1 Theory of the Writing Process

Graves (1983a) described the writing processes of children in the primary school. His work was met with enthusiasm by research and teaching communities throughout much of the Western world in the 1980s, and is credited with having enormous and long lasting influence with the ways writing has subsequently been taught in schools (Smith & Elley, 1997). Nonetheless, there have been considerable criticisms of its success and effectiveness. 'Process Writing', as an interpretation of Graves' work came to be known, offered a limited description of the multi-facets of writing. While drawing attention to what the writer did to gain control over writing, Graves' description of the writing process did not sufficiently describe what it meant to be a writer, or how children in the primary classroom would best
learn to view themselves as writers. This study relied upon a theory of identity negotiations to explain how children come to see themselves as writers.

1.2 Theory of Literate Identity

Brooke (1991) presented a theory of Identity Negotiation to offer an explanation of the interactions between children in the writing classroom, and the links between roles offered to children and what they learnt about writing. In particular, Brooke promoted writing response groups as an effective way of teaching children about the processes of writing, and allowing for identity negotiations to occur.

Lowe (2002) argued for the power of story as a meta-narrative that allows children to attach meaning to their literacy experiences, and renegotiate and revise their stories to support their continued engagement as learners.

1.3 Theory of Writing Response Groups

Many current theories of the teaching of writing have advocated the inclusion of writing response groups in the writing classroom to address issues of how to best teach writing to children (DiPardo & Freedman, 1988). While such theories supported Graves' notions of writer ownership, control, and voice in writing, they recognised the contribution of the peer group to creating dialogue about writing, enhancing both the writing and the writer's sense of themselves as a writer. The supportive arguments extend beyond the Vygotskian premise that the genesis of reasoning for oneself lies in social interaction, to the strength of peer group learning to position children in their literate communities as particular types of literate people (Brooke, 1991; and Dyson, 1989).

The work of Dyson (1989) described the power of the peer group to develop a social energy to create growth in writing, and to promote a child's awareness of what it means to be a writer.
1.4 Purpose of the Present Study

Using Gere's (1987) claim that, "The voices students hear in writing groups contribute directly to what they internalise and later use in writing" (p. 84), this study sought to investigate how talk in writing response groups contributes to the formation of a literate identity in children.

The simple act of allowing time for children to gather together in groups to talk about their writing made the point that their writing was important and worthy of being shared and discussed (Dyson, 1989). However, the real potency of these groups and the talk that occurred within them was revealed when the effects of the talk upon the writer were investigated. From the teacher/researcher's view, there was a sense building that "These children seem to think I like them, and that I want to hear what they have to say in their writing" (Researcher's Journal). This seemingly inarticulate, non-theoretical notion initiated a significant change of direction in the understanding of what happened during writing response group time, and in the current study.

The present study aimed to consolidate what teachers know about how children gain control over the writing process, with theories of identity negotiation - particularly literate identity - through writing response groups in the classroom.

1.5 Overview of Chapters

Chapter Two describes the impact of Graves' description of the 'Writing Process' on the teaching of writing in Western world primary schools. The underpinning concepts of writer ownership, control, and voice are described. Calkins (1994) has extended Graves' ideas throughout the 1980s with a revised image of the writer as someone who lives their life with a special sense of awareness. Criticisms of Graves, and the Writing Process Movement, illustrate the incompleteness of 'writing process' as a methodology in teaching.
Chapter Three introduces Brooke's (1991) theory of Identity Negotiation, and its relevance to the teaching of writing. Drawing upon the work of Dyson (1989) and Lowe (2002) this chapter brings the writing process movement together with writing response groups to literally give children a voice in the writing classroom.

In Chapter Four an historical perspective of the place of writing response groups and their revolving inclusion and marginalisation in education is presented. The benefits to writers of writing response groups are discussed, with special attention to the features of self-sponsored groups and their place in the classroom.

The methodology used throughout the study is presented in Chapter Five.

A discussion of what was learned from the study is given in Chapter Six. Analysed from a socio-cultural perspective, the talk in the groups represented a metaphor for 'giving life' to children's writing, and allowing children to experience roles not usually available to them in the classroom.

The concluding chapter reinforces the importance of children having opportunities to participate in writing response groups. Through interactions with supportive peers, children create and benefit from a social energy. This energy allows writers to achieve self-determined literacy goals.
CHAPTER 2

THE WRITING PROCESS

This chapter provides a background to how the teaching of writing in New Zealand schools has developed since the 1980s. The main focus of this chapter is the "Writing Process", which was described by Donald Graves in the early 1980s, and is credited with revitalising writing instruction in many Western countries. However, the approaches suggested by Graves have not offered a 'solution' to writing instruction problems, and in many ways they have probably contributed to more confusions than guidance.

This chapter describes Graves' earlier contributions (during the 1980s) to the teaching of writing and describes how his ideas have changed as a result of continually developing theories, as well as in response to the practices that developed. In more recent years (cited in Newkirk, 1994), Graves has emphasised the importance of social interaction to children's writing. The discussion in this chapter illustrates the scope for the inclusion of writing response groups within the writing process to meet the need for social interaction.

2.1 The Emerging Focus on the Writing Process

The 1980's were a time of enormous change in the teaching of writing in many Western countries. In the aftermath of the Dartmouth Conference, a focus on the process of writing, rather than the product of writing, began to influence the study and teaching of writing in the United States. Emerging from this was a focus on the 'writing process'.

Much of Graves' work was formed from a combination of Piagetian cognitive theory and socio-cultural theory. Graves' (1983a) observations and studies of children's writing in schools, led him to conclude that most school approaches to the teaching of writing placed unnecessary road blocks in the way of students. Graves observed that many teachers prescribed topics for children to write, and dictated the amount of time children spent writing. Initial drafts differed little from the finished piece of writing. This was not the case with the 'Writing Process' approach. Graves (1983) has shaped the way we teach writing in schools today. The focus is on the process of writing, rather than the product. Writing Groups flourished once again within this supportive educational climate.
The philosophy supporting the writing process recognised and valued that children use writing as a tool for thinking and learning (Ministry of Education, 1992; Smith & Elley, 1997). This was based upon the principles of how published authors write, and how children in schools could best learn to write (Power, 1996).

Prior to the 1980's much of the teaching of writing in schools throughout the Western world focussed on the product of writing, and surface features such as the correctness of spelling, punctuation, and grammar (Ministry of Education, 1992). A piece of writing was more likely to be judged on the surface features than the writer's on-going control over the writing process. Consequently, the writer's role was more likely to be controlled by the teacher's expectation of surface feature accuracy, rather than exploring and understanding ideas.

While the field of research in the teaching of writing includes substantial contributions from researchers and teachers, it is Donald Graves' description of the writing processes of young children that has been particularly significant in many Western countries (Ministry of Education, 1992; Hood, 1997). Graves' work has had enormous influence in the teaching of writing, and on much of the research about the teaching of writing. Smith and Elley (1997) wrote, "More than any other person, Donald Graves (1983) has shaped the way we teach writing in schools today" (p. 41). For this reason, the literature review in this chapter focuses upon Graves' influence.

2.2 Graves' Views of the Writing Process - Children Want to Write

Much of Graves' work was formed from a combination of Piagetian cognitive theory and socio-cultural theory. Graves' (1983a) observations and studies of children's writing in schools, led him to conclude that most school approaches to the teaching of writing placed unnecessary road blocks in the way of students. Graves observed that many teachers prescribed topics for children to write, and dictated the amount of time children spent writing in order to complete the piece. Initial drafts differed little from the finished piece of writing, except perhaps a 'neater' appearance, with less spelling and grammatical errors. The control and ownership of the writing process for these pieces of writing resided with the teacher,
rather than with the writers. Graves warned that by directing children's writing choices teachers ignored children's strong desire and motivation to write:

Children want to write. They want to write the first day they attend school. This is no accident. Before they went to school they marked up walls, pavements, newspapers with crayons, chalk, pens or pencils ... anything that makes a mark. The child's marks say, 'I am' (p. 3).

Graves (1983a) offered alternatives to the teaching of writing which were in marked contrast to what was happening in many classrooms. Graves' work came at an almost perfect time, when educators were turning their attention to how writing was taught to bring it into line with developments in the teaching of reading.

2.2.1 Underlying Concepts: Voice, Ownership, and Control

It was Graves' (1983a) opinion that recognition of a writer's voice was undervalued in many writing programmes, and as a driving force in children's growth as writers. He attributed this to a lack of teacher knowledge about the processes involved in the writing craft, and a lack of knowledge about children's developmental growth in writing. Graves claimed that voice was the writer's personal imprint on their writing, noting that voice influenced the choice and organisation of information, in relation to the writer's choice of topic, and how the topic is written:

Not only is it the dynamo for the writing, but it contributes most to the development of the writer. It pushes the writer into confronting new problems through interesting topics, gives energy to persist in their solution, then carries the writer on to a new set of issues (p. 229).

By not harnessing the power of voice, or worse still, by ignoring and undervaluing a writer's voice, the teaching of writing was working in opposition to the motivation and enthusiasm of children in the classroom. It was for these reasons that Graves (1983a) felt it important to make the writing process explicit. In so doing, Graves hoped that teachers would be better
able to teach children, and answer their questions about writing, using research-based knowledge of how many children, and published authors, go about writing. By being able to identify the stages that children, as writers, worked through as they wrote, Graves considered teachers would become more aware of how children were learning to control the writing process, and be better able to respond to their learning needs. For these reasons the two underlying principles of Graves' (1983a) view of the writing process have been child ownership and control. These are energised by 'voice'.

According to Graves (1983a), children achieved ownership of their writing when they chose their own topics for writing. In this way children used writing to make sense of their own lives. Control over the writing process also involved children in making choices and decisions about what to do next in their writing. By experimenting with the choices they could make with writing, children were learning to take risks as a writer, and learning about the process of writing.

Ownership and control of the writing process were not learned within a vacuum (Graves, 1983a). Graves always intended that teachers would be active in modeling and monitoring children's growing control of the writing process. He recognised the need for teachers to intervene with children's writing to illustrate difficulties they did not perceive themselves, and to help children choose solutions to these problems. Graves intended that intervention would be aimed at helping children to become aware of the problems and possible solutions in their writing, and guiding children towards making appropriate solutions.

2.3 Key Features of the Writing Process: Recursive Nature, Revision Process, and The Writing Workshop

The term 'writing process' described the experiences of a writer as they crafted a piece of writing, and recognised the growth and development of writers as they experienced the writing process over time. Learning to take control of the craft demanded constant revision of the content of the writing, and of the processes of writing through writing drafts and having some drafts conferenced.
2.3.1 The Recursive Nature of Writing

The writing process is recursive in nature, rather than linear (Graves, 1983a). Writers continuously interact with their writing, moving through the process in unpredictable directions (Graves, 1983a; Calkins, 1994). Graves described the writing process in terms of the writer's interaction between rehearsing, and composing. These two stages cover the first consideration of an idea for writing, through to final publishing. Graves points out that the two stages may well overlap - they are not discrete:

The writing process has many beginning points. It can begin as unconscious 'rehearsal'. A person observes a child at play, sees two dogs fighting, or recalls a humiliating moment in college while reading a daughter's paper. The more a writer writes, the more choice and rehearsal increase and occur at unpredictable moments. Facts restlessly push their way to the surface until the writer says, 'I'll write about that' (Graves, 1983a, p. 221).

The pattern followed by most writers is to 'select, compose, read, select, compose, read…' (Graves, 1983a). In this way the writer does not necessarily complete their selection of what they will write about before they write. While composing, Graves believed the writer should focus on discovery of their subject, and voice. Discovery in the early parts of the writing process should not be compromised by the burden of surface feature accuracy, particularly spelling. Rather, the writer should be focused on clarifying their subject and organising ideas. Graves did value accuracy of surface features in published work, but accepted that in the writing process the time to attend to many of these features should be in later drafts. During, or after, the process of composing the writer may read what they have written and decide to revise by selecting a focus to continue with, or even selecting parts of the writing to delete. This interactive, recursive pattern would continue as the writer continued with the writing.

The use of the term drafting to describe writing during the composing stage, signals that the writing is tentative in nature. According to Graves' view of the writing process, the experience of writing one piece of writing served as a rehearsal for other pieces of writing in future.
'Invented spelling' allowed the writer to concentrate on their ideas, and was an example of Graves' belief that writing should not place unnecessary roadblocks in the way of writers. Being able to make use of 'invented spelling', which approximated correct spelling for the writer, enabled the writer to continue to write without interruption and perhaps a loss of ideas. Graves expected that children would be able to identify these invented spellings, perhaps by circling them, and be assisted to make some corrections by a teacher who recognised features over which the writer was gaining greater control, and needed only minor assistance to master.

### 2.3.2 The Process of Revision

Graves (1983a) claimed that children would reread and revise their writing, but would need help to see where the revision was needed. Graves believed the revisions children made in their writing were dependent upon the force of their voice in the writing, what they saw in their writing, and their level of development as writers. Graves described five concepts young children acquired about writing that dominated what they would revise. Graves considered it important that teachers understand these concepts so that the teaching would 'follow' and 'extend' the child's perception of what they are doing when they are writing, through the use of questions, and response to work in progress.

According to Graves, the young child's self-centredness limited their ability to recognise and solve problems in their writing (1983a). The emergent writer concentrates on the acts of handwriting and spelling, and may engage in repetitious writing of similar sentences as they endeavor to gain control over their writing. Such repetition contributes to the child's growth in writing, allowing them to become secure in their ability to write particular words with accuracy, and developing the confidence to share what is meaningful in their lives. Understanding the value of this centering for a child's growth in writing assists the teacher in helping a child decide when to expand their writing repertoire.

As children develop experience as writers, they extend their concept of revision to the content of their writing. Teachers play an important role in empowering children to recognise
the changes they may need to make to their writing to match the changing vision they have for their writing. As children revise their writing they discover the significance of what they have written, finding and recognising their voice with increasing strength.

Graves stressed that each part of the writing process is important, and should be valued within the class programme. Children need to know that drafts are a medium for discovering intent in writing, and that drafts represent a temporary stage of the writing process. In this way, children will accept that the ideas and words they record can be changed to more closely match their intent in writing.

2.3.3 The Writing Workshop

The concept of writing as a craft is supported by Graves’ (1983a) workshop environment for the teaching and learning of writing. Graves used the metaphor of a ‘writing workshop’ to describe the environment in which young writers could develop their writing craft. In the workshop environment, writers could develop a piece of writing through different stages - like a craftsperson might shape a piece of work within their workshop. The writing workshop environment also allowed the teacher to respond to individual needs, rather than attempting to teach all class members an idea or skill for which they may not have been ready.

Most important about Graves’ (1983a) view of the writing workshop, was that it should allow for children to work on their writing at individual rates. Consequently, while some children could be entering the first part of the cycle of selecting ideas to write, others could have their writing conferenced by their teacher or peers, while other children may be publishing their writing. Control of the process of writing was the writer’s responsibility, rather than the teacher’s. Yet, Graves saw it as the teacher’s responsibility to help children gain control over their writing, rather than be allowed to repeat poor decisions that were not developing their writing. This was accomplished through sensitive, and responsive teaching during conferences.

Teaching in the writing process should occur when help is needed most (Graves, 1983a). Graves claimed that sensitive teaching could occur during the child’s writing as teacher and
child conferenced. While writing itself follows an unpredictable order, conference structures should be predictable. This is beneficial for two reasons: the writer knows what to expect from the conference and is able to prepare for it, and the predictable structure enables children to initiate and respond sensitively to the writing of other children. Conferencing focuses should be guided by the stage a piece of writing had reached. A first conference should focus on helping the writer to a clear discovery of their subject, while subsequent conferences should focus on organising information. Discovery of the subject would promote the writer's voice, and this was what Graves believed would contribute the most to the writer's development. Toward the end of the writing process was the time Graves considered attention should be turned toward the surface features of the writing. Graves represented these ideas in the form of a conferencing triangle (cited in Heenan, 1986).

**Figure 1: Graves' Conferencing Triangle**

```
First conference

Questions that lead to the discovery of subject

The child's world from which the topic is born

Second conference

Questions that focus on organisation

Specific mechanical skill

Third conference

Publication

Implicit in the conferencing triangle is Graves' belief that in final conferences teachers should attend to the surface features that children are gaining some control over, or need to learn to further their writing. This idea was quite contrary to the traditional approaches many teachers
of writing might have used. Rather than correcting all errors, Graves suggested that teachers help children to recognise the errors they were frequently making, but had almost gained control over. These were the errors that children were ready to learn from, and could successfully correct by making small changes to what they already knew. Other errors would need to be corrected, perhaps by the teacher, before publishing.

2.4 Influences on the work of Graves

Graves (1983) based much of his theory for the teaching of writing on two influences: his own research, and the work of Donald Murray. Graves gained prominence in the field of writing through his research in classrooms. Graves had conducted research in the United States (a doctoral dissertation, and research for the National Institute of Education) on the composing strategies of young children, covering the ages of six to ten. Also involved in the research for the National Institute of Education were Lucy Calkins and Susan Sowers, both of whom have continued to contribute to knowledge about writing through their individual research. Graves had also conducted a study on the status of writing in schools for the Ford Foundation. The research conducted by Graves, and by Graves, Calkins, and Sowers, led Graves to conclude that children's motivation to write was often negated by the teaching practices of many teachers. The strategies of successful learners and teachers partly informed the theories Graves developed.

The second great influence on Graves was the research and writing of Donald Murray. Murray's interests in the teaching of writing centred on the composing processes of published authors. Murray interviewed and collected many authors' descriptions of what they did as they wrote. What he concluded was that many authors claimed they did not always know what they would write when they sat down to write. Rather than have a script 'in their head', many authors described the way they let the words they wrote instruct them in what to write next. Murray (1982) described a writer as using writing as "... a process, a way of seeing, of hearing what he has to say to himself, as a means of discovering meaning" (p. 4). Murray employed similar strategies of 'discovery writing' for teaching the writing process to students
in his university classes. These teaching experiences, and the writing experiences of his students, further informed Murray's research and writing about writing.

Graves (1983) melded the ideas he gained from his research and from the work of Murray, and sought to bring the successes of Murray's university writing programmes into primary schools (Smith & Elley, 1997). The result was the introduction of the writing process and writing workshops in primary schools throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand during the early 1980’s.

While the appropriateness of these influences upon Graves' work was to become an area that brought a great deal of criticism to the 'writing process', their value in revitalising writing instruction throughout the western world, and shifting the focus from the product to the process of writing, has been immense.

2.5 Extensions to the Principles Graves Developed

Many researchers and teachers were making vast contributions to writing instruction at a similar time as Graves in the 1980s. At many points their theories have converged and become less distinguishable. Yet, Graves' writing process has remained the best known and enduring. At the same time, the writing process has undergone many revisions in response to practice and the continuing development of our understanding of how children learn to write.

While Murray (1982), Calkins (1994), and later Atwell (1998) have not significantly departed from Graves' initial ideas about the teaching of writing, they have offered differing emphases.

Murray (1982) has contributed to, and influenced the teaching of writing in considerable ways, not least through the impact of his work on Graves, and Calkins. In his work with university students in writing courses, Murray developed strategies and questions for guiding writing conferences, which reflected his view of writer ownership and control as being central to writing, and in particular, to revision of writing.
During conferencing, Murray (1982) advised responders to look beyond what writers need to know, to what they need to experience. He focussed on the writer's experience of the writing process before he offered any response. By constructing a sense of the writer's purpose and discovery in writing, Murray was able to respond from the writer's perspective of the text. This was a way of recognising and maintaining the writer's ownership and control of the writing. The questions Murray asked served to teach the writer to 'listen' to the drafts of their writing, to recognise and decide what needs to be done next. Murray claims, "Too often we tell students to listen to what we have to say when students should listen to their own drafts" (p. 63).

Murray (1982) saw revision as a critical stage in the writing process, and an opportunity for the writer to make meaning clear: "Revision is not just clarifying meaning, it is discovering meaning and clarifying it while it is being discovered" (p. 88). As the writer makes their meaning clear, they continue to discover meaning, and according to Murray, it is through the process of revision writers discover their voice. The ongoing discovery of voice continues to provide the writer's motivation for revision.

Murray's influence also reached Lucy Calkins, who has credited the writing conferences given to her by Murray as a catalyst in her own research on writing:

Whatever happened during those conferences, it not only made the trip worthwhile, it also transformed my writing and teaching of writing. It would be impossible to give adequate credit to Murray for all I've learned from him - even the words rehearsal, drafting, revision, and editing are words he selected (Calkins, 1994, p. vi).

Calkins (1994) claimed that, "Conferring is at the heart of the writing process" (p. 223). Conferencing is the time when children share their writing and receive sensitive and appropriate responses from others. Most importantly, Murray (1982), and Calkins (1994) describe the goal of the writing conference as being for children to learn to interact with their
own developing writing, finding and recognising their voice. This is best achieved when teachers provide a predictable routine within the conference.

Calkins (1994) described three phases of the writing conference: researching, deciding, and teaching. Before the teacher - or any other responder - commented on a piece of writing, Calkins believed they should talk to the writer to enable the responder to research how the piece has been written. Having shared her writing with Murray as part of her own study, Calkins remembered the question "How's your writing going?" which he asked before he even looked at her writing, as forcing her to assume responsibility for her writing, and for the conference she was about to have. Calkins believes Murray's question served the purpose of 'researching' how her writing had begun and progressed. Calkins' answer provided the information needed by Murray to build a theory of herself as a writer.

Looking at the writer - rather than the writing - should be the first objective of the conference (Calkins, 1994). By forming a theory of the writer, teachers are in a better position to let the writer instruct them on what needs to be taught. When the teacher reads the child's writing - or alternatively, listens as the child reads their writing - they need to read as a reader - or listen - and respond to the writer: "Our job for that moment is to enjoy, to care, to be reminded of our own lives, and to respond. We cry, laugh, nod, and sigh. We let the writer know she has been heard" (p. 227). Too often, teachers read like teachers - looking for the weaknesses and errors in a child's writing and deciding how the child should make corrections (Calkins). By responding to the writer's experience of writing, teachers are in a better position to understand the writer's learning needs.

The second and third phases of the conference require the responder to use the information they gained about the writer's experience of writing, and their impression of the writing, to decide what the teaching point - or points - could be. While teaching points need to focus on the discovery and development of ideas during initial conferences, subsequent conferences will direct focus on organisation of ideas, and finally on surface feature accuracy. Calkins recognised that peers, as well as teachers, can fulfill the role of responders to writing. In
order to learn to be successful in peer conferencing, implying responding appropriately to the needs of the writer, Calkins suggested the necessary skills are taught during mini-lessons.

Calkins (1994) encouraged teachers to teach children about the writing process through mini-lessons. Calkins stated the mini-lesson was the teacher's "forum for making a suggestion to the whole class - raising a concern, exploring an issue, modeling a technique, reinforcing a strategy" (p. 193). Responding to what learner writers were trying to do as they wrote, was a guide for teachers on what to teach during the mini-lesson. Getting alongside children as they wrote and shared their writing, may have let teachers be invited into the children's worlds to share what was important to them. Calkins hoped teachers would delight in the learning of their students, and let themselves be surprised and instructed by the students.

In her first edition of 'The Art of Teaching Writing' (1986), Calkins believed it was the struggle to make meaning through writing that contributed to a writer's sense of authorship. In the second edition of the same book (1994), Calkins claims that a sense of authorship comes from living with a special sense of awareness:

The recognition that writing begins not as deskwork but as lifework has radical implications for how we and our students rehearse for writing. Whereas some educators imagine that rehearsal for writing begins with listing and choosing among topics, brainstorming ideas, mapping alternative forms, and experimenting with various leads, most writers say that rehearsal for writing is not a string of exercises that warms up a writer just prior to the process of drafting but a way of life. Rehearsal is not even something that occurs in conjunction with any one piece of writing; it is a state of readiness out of which one writes (p. 24).

Calkins' (1994) departure from her earlier work was an example of the way she extended ideas about the writing process, as Power (1996) credited her with doing. It is also an example of the recursive nature of research in writing - the way experience and reflection create a dynamo for greater understanding about writing.
The work of Cambourne (1988) complemented much of Graves' work. At a similar time to when Graves was developing ideas about the writing process, Cambourne was developing a theory of literacy learning that was different to prevailing views. Cambourne's conditions for language learning - both oral and written - were at the core of the whole language movement. In particular, Cambourne specified the importance of demonstration within meaningful and purposeful contexts. For Cambourne, demonstrations provided a variety of information to learners about how language was constructed for different purposes, thus allowing learners to understand the sub-parts and the whole, as well as the relationship between these. This shifted the focus from what Cambourne referred to as learners possessing 'functional literacy', to learners who "... have access to, and who can control, those written forms which make higher level thinking and knowing possible" (p. 202).

Elements of the type of demonstrations Cambourne (1988) described are evident in mini-lessons and modelling described by Calkins (1994), as well as throughout the conferencing stages of the writing workshops described by Graves (1983a).

2.6 The Writing Process and the Impact of its Interpretations

While the Writing Process Movement was gaining popularity and introducing a new vitality to the teaching of writing in schools around the world, the translation of ideas into practice was a major source of misunderstanding in the teaching of writing (Graves, 1983b). Without the theoretical background to support Graves' writing process these misunderstandings have impacted significantly on how writing was taught in schools.

The misunderstandings fall into two broad categories: Oversimplification in the description, and subsequent interpretations of the writing process, and secondly the formation of orthodoxies associated with what came to be known as 'process writing'. To some degree the oversimplifications and orthodoxies can be linked with problems and assumptions in Graves' early research. The two categories described here are not entirely separate to each other, but illustrate the way the work of Graves and others became distorted. By uncovering the oversimplifications and orthodoxies that have swamped the writing process, we are able to
retrieve what is important in the teaching of writing, and articulate a theory of writing that will inform our practice.

2.6.1 Oversimplifications of the Writing Process

Power (1996) offered an insight into what she regarded as oversimplifications of the writers' workshops and pedagogy of the writing process. These oversimplifications, according to Power, pervaded writing classrooms and contributed to the lack of enthusiasm among students for writing, as reported by many teachers. Some of Power's criticisms are directly attributed to the early work of Graves, Murray, and Calkins. Other criticisms include the intersecting movements of Whole Language Instruction, and the Poets and Writers in Schools, and National Writing Project, both of which flourished in the United States of America during the 1980s. For the purposes of this review, only those criticisms directly pertaining to the Writing Process Movement will be discussed here.

The first issue Power (1996) identified as having been oversimplified was teacher knowledge. According to Power, the pervasive idea that teachers know all they need to know about the teaching of writing, has excluded 'outside expertise' from teaching, and limited the teaching of writing. Power claims that most teachers are not confident of their knowledge of the writing craft, and should accept, and pursue, outside expertise to continually extend their teaching repertoire and enable them to respond to the needs of the students in their classes. Without a developing knowledge of the writing craft, Power believed many teachers tended to respond to the writer (what Calkins (1994) refers to as researching in conferencing), but were not able to make appropriate decisions for teaching the writer what to attend to in their writing.

Writer's workshops implied, according to Power (1996), that once the structure and organisation of routines within the writing workshop were established, students would become better writers. Power believed the perceived implication of the workshop environment was that the active 'teaching' role of the teacher was diminished. Adding to this oversimplification was the popularity of the whole language movement. This movement created a tendency for writing to be included within the whole language classroom without
the subject, and the process of writing being taught. In the process writing movement this
notion is promulgated by the popular statement cum orthodoxy: "Children learn to write by
writing". While children certainly need to practice the craft of writing by writing, this alone
will not teach children what they may need to learn. This criticism highlights the need for the
teacher's knowledge and role in the teaching of writing to be given importance. Power stated
that children did need the teacher's instruction in the craft of writing, and that this instruction
needed to be tailored the individual needs of the child.

The issue of the teacher's role during the writing process has attracted much attention and
criticism. Smith and Elley (1997) were emphatic that Graves always intended that teachers
would have an active role in the writing process, particularly during conferences. Indeed,
Graves was often quoted as claiming that, "The teaching of writing demands the control of
two crafts - teaching and writing. They can neither be avoided, nor separated" (Graves,
1983a, p.5). Yet, his work was oversimplified in such an enormous way that what Graves
actually wrote, often had little similarity to what was written about Graves and his work.

Attacking one of the main premises of the writing process, Power (1996) cited the
conclusions of Livingston's (1984) critique of the 'Writers in the Schools' programmes.
Power argued that there was a lack of differentiation between a child's writing process, and
the processes of a professional writer. Graves (1983a) based much of his work on applying
models of how professional writers wrote to the teaching of writing to children in primary
schools. Power claimed that this lack of acknowledgement "... inhibits a child's ability to see
ways their writing can improve" (p. 11).

These criticisms were further supported by Campbell and Green (2000). Campbell and
Green, in describing the Australian experience of 'process writing', stated that in many
classrooms there was " ... a dependency on the inner resources of the children themselves"
(p. 140). Such a dependency was the result of a failure to understand the writing process'
underlying concepts of writer ownership and control. It was Graves' belief that children
should be supported in their experiences of writing, and guided in making appropriate
choices of topic and direction through responsive teaching.
Graves believed that children should make choices in their writing, but he expected that children would need to be taught how to make these choices. However, perhaps as a reaction to the traditional teaching practices that had preceded the writing process, teachers tended to let children choose topics and make decisions about their writing without any teacher intervention (Power, 1996). This resulted in children being given the opportunity to direct their writing, but lacking the skills to make appropriate choices, or to evaluate the successes of their choices.

2.6.2 Orthodoxies of 'Process Writing'

Almost as soon as Graves had written about the writing process, teachers began talking about 'process writing'. Hood, pers. comm. 16.3.03, in distinguishing between the terms 'the writing process' and 'process writing', described process writing as a programme that had a range of orthodoxies teachers were expected to obey. The process writing model implied certain methods of organisation for the teaching of writing, which, in turn, withheld ownership and control of the writing process from the child.

While Graves (1983b) accepted that the use of orthodoxies was a natural part of the 'aging' process of new ideas, he also stated "... orthodoxies are creeping in that may lead to premature old age". Graves described those who created orthodoxies in the teaching of the writing process as trying to take shortcuts with a process that is very complex. These orthodoxies, such as 'Every piece of writing must be published', often lead to very prescriptive methods for the teaching of writing. Rather than the underpinning philosophical principles that supported Graves' (1983a) description of the writing process, particularly child ownership and control over their writing, teachers focussed on the teaching methods they could employ in their classrooms to teach writing. Teachers became more concerned with implementing orthodoxies that required children to revise, conference, and publish every piece of writing, than responding to the needs of the writer.

Around the world, teachers enthusiastically adopted Graves' (1983a) writing process, but with disappointing results (Graves, 1983b; Hood, 1995; Ministry of Education, 1992). Most
notably, the writing children produced was not of the high standard expected. Teachers became disillusioned with what they thought was Graves' 'process writing' and looked for other ways to get the results they expected. Unfortunately, the results that teachers saw were more a measure of how well the writing process had been understood, interpreted and implemented in the classroom, than a reflection on the value of teaching the writing process. Less fortunate still, was that 'process writing' was linked with supposed falling literacy standards in classrooms around the world.

In part, the misunderstandings of Graves' description of the writing process (1983a) may have been due to Graves' reluctance to be prescriptive about teaching the writing process. This was a seemingly deliberate action by Graves who recognised the problems inherent in attempting to describe the writing process as though it occurs in the same systematic fashion for all writers. Graves (1983a) cautioned his readers not to be fooled into thinking of the writing process as a linear process, with a set order of action from the writer. He wrote, "Though the order is unpredictable, what is involved in the writing process can be described with profit" (p. 221). Murray, too, identified that a key problem in trying to describe the writing process is that elements of the process become separated from the other elements, as though they are isolated from each other. Rather than being described as a process of interaction, parts of the writing process have been presented in a prescriptive order of logical steps. Consequently, these steps have formed part of the pedagogy of many teachers, without an understanding of the whole process of writing (Hood, 2000).

2.6.3 The Reception Scene for the 'Writing Process' in New Zealand

The New Zealand introduction to, and experience of, 'process writing', was similar to that of other countries. There was a climate of change in New Zealand education during the early 1980's. The teaching of reading was very much focussed on the reader's on-going control over the skills needed for reading. Reading was child-centred, so that the teaching of reading was designed to support children in learning the skills they needed. In contrast, the teaching of writing had remained mostly unchanged, and focussed on the finished product rather than the learner.
While New Zealand researchers and educators, including Sylvia Ashton Warner, Marie Clay, and Don Holdaway, were influencing world trends in the teaching of reading, we were relying on overseas research to provide the route to equal success in the teaching of writing (Ministry of Education, 1992). Graves' research was sound, but our willingness to assume the practices of the writing process may not have been matched by our readiness. In short, we may have jumped in too quickly, and without the theoretical preparations necessary to ensure success. This resulted in a focus on what we needed to do in our classrooms, rather than why Graves' writing process offered the solutions we thought we needed. Hood (1995) commenting on the New Zealand experience of process writing stated, "It is a shame that most teachers, practical people that they are, seem more interested in the how than they why" (pp. 4-5). The problem with this practical focus was that the theory and pedagogy supporting the writing process was lost, or distorted.

In their haste to keep abreast of writing process popularity, teachers and teacher educators repackaged Graves' description of the writing process into a way of organising the classroom for teaching writing. The tendency to view the writing process in terms of what the classroom timetable and organisation might require, resulted in differing interpretations of the writing process. It is now obvious that there was insufficient support structure in terms of classroom teacher readiness to bridge the gap between the product focus and Graves' process focus.

Without an understanding of the place and value of concepts such as voice, and writer ownership and control of the writing processes, teachers were merely repackaging what they had previously been doing in their classes. Under such conditions Graves' writing process could not deliver the desired results.

2.7 The Future of the Writing Process Movement

Just as Graves (1983a) has described the writing process as recursive, Tobin and Newkirk (1994) call for the writing process movement to be recursive, too. While research is emerging surrounding these trends, further research is needed to strengthen the writing process
movement by retrieving what is valuable, and introducing new perspectives gained from research. Such sentiments are echoed by Power (1996).

Research in writing since the mid-1980s gave greater attention to the social processes children used in their writing (Dahl & Farnan, 1998). In an interview with Newkirk (1994), Graves revealed his research focus had changed, too. Graves explained that he now placed much greater emphasis upon what he considers to be the significant influence of social interaction on children's writing development. This led Graves to firmly echo assertions made by Calkins that, "Conferring is at the heart of the writing process" (p. 223), not simply to teach the writer what they need to experience, but to let the writer experience what it means to be a writer.

The importance of teacher knowledge and understanding of the writing process as described by Graves (1983a) is necessary for good teaching and learning of writing. Smith and Elley (1997) agree on the need for continued research on the teaching of writing, "There is a need for further empirical and qualitative study of process writing, but it should be informed by a proper understanding of Graves' position (p. 56)".

2.7.1 New Directions for Future Research

While acknowledging that responses come from two sources - the teacher and other students - the responses Graves (1983a) generally referred to, came from the teacher. Calkins (1994) also focussed mainly upon teacher conferences. Neither researcher recognised the powerful potential of peer groups to acknowledge the work of a writer as interesting, and worthy of attending to, nor the contribution this makes to a writer's awareness of their writing voice. Nor do they recognise the potential of a peer response group to present themselves as a legitimate audience for, and critics of, each other's writing as claimed by Dyson (1989).

Hood (1997) asserted that Graves' research was sound and remains supported by current beliefs about literacy learning in New Zealand. More recently, Graves has stated his desire to focus upon interactions between writer's and their peers (cited in Newkirk, 1994). Rather than a description of the writing processes of young children, which so dramatically
transformed and confused our thinking about the teaching of writing over the past twenty years, what we need now is a clearly articulated theory of the social processes of writer's and their writing. Such a theory will give greater attention to the way children assert ownership and control over their writing through interaction with supportive peers. That theory continues to be developed by researchers such as Dyson (1989), Lowe (2002), and Brooke (1991) in describing identity negotiations, the social worlds of the writer, and the importance of teachers making access to valuable roles to revise the child's engagement in writing activities available in the classroom.

In order to 'set the scene' of how identity is formed, it is necessary to begin by addressing the idea of identity, followed by the idea of role.

3.1 Identity Formation

Drawing upon the theories of identity formation, Brooke (1991) stated that a person's self-understanding is a dynamic force, changing in response to changes in social groups, as well as through consequences of the social groups experienced. The use of the term 'dynamic force' illustrated Brooke's view of a person's identity being in a continuous state of formation and revision.

Brooke (1991) named his theory 'Identity Negotiation', and claimed it...
CHAPTER 3
LITERATE IDENTITY: UNDERSTANDING THE SELF AS A WRITER THROUGH INTERACTIONS WITH PEERS

This chapter is organised around a cluster of ideas concerning children's understanding of themselves as writers. An understanding of the self as a writer is a dynamic process of development, changing in response to interaction with others, as well as a result of interaction with others. Lowe (2002) uses the term 'story' to describe children's understanding of themselves, and introduces the claim that a child's 'story' has the potential to determine their success in learning. The third related idea developed in the first part of this chapter concerns the roles children are able to access to learn about writing. The roles children have access to shape and reinforce the 'story' they hold of who they are as writers. Gaining access to different roles has the potential to change children's 'stories' of themselves, enabling children to more successfully achieve their goals.

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Brooke (1991) named his theory 'Identity Negotiation', and claimed it, highlights the development of the self within a complex arena of competing social forces. From such a perspective, individual identity (at any point in time) is best seen
as a dynamic construct which comes into being through mitigation or compromise with the social definitions of self surrounding the individual. A person's identity arises through negotiation with the many groups which provide these definitions (p. 12).

Lowe (2002) argued that people seek to make sense of events in their lives, and to attach meanings to them by creating stories. Lowe considered story not simply as a narrative, but as a meta narrative "an ongoing construction that gives sense to our world and our experiences" (p. 1). Lowe's use of the word stories illustrated the dynamic quality of identity formation, and a person's use of a story to reference new experiences with previous experiences. According to Lowe,

"We construct ourselves through stories that we encounter, interpret and devise. Our experiences in the school years are imprinted in the form of stories. Many of these stories cluster around an idea of self - a theory about who we are in the world (Lowe, p. 21)."

Brooke (1991) and Lowe (2002) captured in their descriptions of identity formation that a person's self understanding was continuously constructed through experience. We now turn our attention to how a person's self understanding is affected by social interaction by looking at the roles available through social experience.

3.2 Roles

All social activities have established expectations of what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. (Brooke, 1991). The expectations produce a range of roles that participants in the activities may take. Participation in social activities is a sign of a person's degree of acceptance of the roles that are prescribed, and agreement to fulfill the obligations of a role, or a rejection of them (These ideas are developed further in a following section of this chapter).
The relationship between social interaction and role expectation is credited with the formation of children's identity within different contexts (Brooke, 1991). Brooke claimed that through interaction with the social groups that surround them, children form their identities. The dynamic nature of identity formation highlighted the individual's ability to respond differently in different contexts, resulting in a context-specific sense of identity.

If the social contexts in which we live assign role expectations to us, and if these contexts are plural and conflicting, then the task of forming an identity within such contexts is largely a task of working out stances towards these roles (Brooke, 1991, p. 22).

However, it is not a context's ability to offer a range of roles to the individual, but, rather, it is a context's ability to delimit the roles available to the individual that affects the individual's identity formation. Increasing children's opportunities to access the roles they believe support their attempts to be particular kinds of literate people allows children to successfully achieve their goals.

3.2.1 Roles in the Writing Classroom
Brooke (1991) claimed writing classrooms have established expectations for the role of writers that are defined through the activities and the ways individuals are expected to behave during those activities. Within each writing classroom, "there are conflicting ideas of how individuals ought to behave, what values are operative, and what counts as success" (p. 21). The children whose behaviour meets these expectations may be assigned a higher value in the writing class by the teacher and other children, than the children who do not succeed in meeting the expectations. As will be illustrated through examples from classroom research later in this chapter, children who succeed in meeting the role expectations in classrooms are privileged into certain discourses which increase the positive relationship between social interaction and identity formation for those children. However, for children who are unable to gain access to privileged roles and discourses, their experience is more likely to form a negative relationship between the particular social activity and identity formation, which will impact on their future learning. The competing social forces that present within the classroom
will lead children into a process of identity negotiation, to position themselves relative to the expected roles and behaviours, and to other social participants.

In summary, Brooke (1991) claimed that what children learn about writing is "a consequence of the role negotiations that take place. Writing is understood - and then engaged in - in relation to the roles and values operative in the communities the student is exploring" (p. 8). Learning becomes important to children when it "supports their attempts to be certain kinds of people in their world " (p. 10). The kinds of people children wish to be are privileged to play certain roles. It is the access to those roles that has the power to influence children’s learning.

Brooke (1991) stated that writing is experienced by children both as a way of gaining group membership, and gaining separation from groups children wish to reject. It is through this process of alignment and distinction from others that children form an identity of themselves that defines them as a particular kind of writer. The ideas of social alignments and distinction are echoed by Dyson (1989) in her interpretations of interactions between children in the writing class, and are illustrated later in this chapter.

In the writing classroom, Lowe (2002) claimed children created stories to understand their learning, connecting new ideas to those already held and understood. These stories encompass a vision of the roles they will have access to in the classroom, and the degree of success children will enjoy as a consequence of their ability to access the roles they desire.

While many children form stories of themselves that lead to success as literacy learners, many other children are trapped in personal meta-narratives of underachievement, or failure (Lowe, 2002). When 'successful' children are able to access and fulfill the roles they perceive as having value and supporting their attempts to be certain members of the classroom, learning continues to reinforce their positive literate identity.
3.3 Identity Formation: Implications for Teaching and Learning

According to Lowe (2002) and Brooke (1991), the real power of stories lay in their ability to position the learner in particular ways. Lowe (2002) was convinced that the story a student held of themselves contained the power to determine their literacy outcomes by positioning them as particular kinds of literacy learners. Lowe presented classrooms as sites where children were taken into a privileged discourse, "but they approach that discourse with attitudes that may vary from participation, to consent, to indifference, to outright opposition" (p. 13). The approach taken by an individual child was affected by the story they held of themselves, and the convergence of their story with the curriculum activities of the classroom. The child's literate identity affected their learning in positive and important ways when the learning opportunities allowed them to assume a role that they perceived as having value. At the point where the story of the learner and the curriculum connected "learning has relevance, and meaning results" (p. 9).

The responsibility of the teacher is to enable children to revise their stories, to support their continued engagement as learners. To accomplish this, Lowe (2002) stressed that teachers need to know and value the stories of learners, and the goals of the learner. "The important thing is not to negate the goal of the learner but to negotiate a way to achieve success" (p. 25). It was Lowe's assertion that success can be achieved when children change their stories as a result of interaction with others.

More than any teaching strategy or teaching practice designed to focus on the skills of writing, Brooke, Mirtz, and Evans (1994) asserted that practices which allowed children to develop an understanding of themselves as writers were far more effective. Brooke et al. proposed writing response groups as providing the kinds of interactions that enable children to revise their stories of who they were as writers and to gain access to the roles they perceived as supporting them to construct the literate identity they desire.
3.4 Access to Desired Roles in the Writing Classroom

Brooke (1994) argued that a child's formation of their literate identity was determined through the roles offered to them in the classroom, and the perceived value of those roles.

Learning is influenced more by the roles offered in school than by any particular content or material being taught, because it is in negotiating a response to these roles that individuals work out their future stances towards knowledge, towards authority, and towards academic learning (Brooke, 1994, p. 11).

Rowe, Fitch, and Bass (2001) explained writing in a similar manner:

"Writing is at one and the same time a cognitive and sociocultural activity. When children write, they not only use cognitive strategies to make marks on paper, but also implicitly define themselves as particular kinds of writers who are entitled to specific roles in the social structure of the classroom (p. 426)."

It is the description of writing given by Rowe et al. above that is of particular interest to the present study. Such a description of writing suggests the inter-relationship between the child's sense of being a writer and the types of writing in which they might engage.

3.5 Writing Response Groups: Providing Time, Ownership, Response, and Exposure

This section describes four essential elements of writing response groups. Chapter three describes writing response groups and the theory that supports them.

Forming an understanding of the self as a writer requires the provisions of four essential elements to the classroom writing programme: Time, Ownership, Response, and Exposure (Brooke et al., 1994). While other researchers often cite time, ownership, and response as
important elements of a writing programme, Brooke et al. considered the element of exposure as an extension of the social-value purpose of response. Exposure to the literate life requires learners being immersed in literate discourse valued by others, and developing an understanding of what it means to be a writer.

3.5.1 Time
Learners need time devoted to writing so they can develop and refine their ideas in written form. Graves (1983a) and Calkins (1994) were direct in stating that children should be writing every day and be engaged in the writing process for at least forty minutes each day. Yet, the element of time was neglected in many writing programmes. Elbow (cited in Brooke, 1991) argued that too much time in writing classes was spent looking at models of others' writing rather than in giving students the opportunity to write. He warned, "... we have to emphasise production - that practice of writing - and devote plenty of time to this oddly neglected practice" (pp. 15-16).

3.5.2 Ownership
The concepts of ownership and control were central to Graves' (1983a) description of the writing process. Brooke (1991) described ownership as an awareness of the choices available to a writer, from the selection of a topic through to the choices the writer makes as they revise their work. In this sense Brooke argued that a writer's sense of control over their writing leads the writer to assert their idea of ownership.

Atwell (1994) preferred the terms engagement and responsibility to ownership. According to Atwell, these terms reflected the writer's need to own the processes through which they wrote, rather than simply the product, which might reflect little responsibility toward making choices that could enhance the writing and the writer's sense of satisfaction.

Initially skeptical that students could make choices about their writing and remain committed to those choices, Atwell (1998) described the changes she observed in her students when she allowed them to experience ownership of their writing. Most surprising to her was that the students appeared to care about their writing - both the content and its correctness, as well as
the correctness of surface features. Furthermore, she described how her students took themselves seriously as writers and expected others' to take them equally as seriously. Atwell claims that when students choose their own topics to write about they begin to see themselves as writers. They learn about their responses to events that occur in their lives and how they make sense of those events. They reflect upon those events and make changes in their lives - and on the pages.

3.5.3 Response
Brooke et al. (1994) claimed writers needed response to their writing for three reasons. Firstly, response from others allowed writers to develop the ability to predict the reactions from an audience. Such an awareness developed the writer's ability to perceive how others made sense of their writing, leading them to make conscious decisions that affected their writing. Secondly, the response of readers allowed writers to review their writing: to view different possibilities and problems, and in turn to consider how others might develop the piece of writing.

However, it is Brooke et al.'s (1994) third reason for including the process of response that it of particular interest to this study, and a reason unexplored by many theorists as a major factor contributing to a child's growth in writing. Brooke et al. claimed response from others made writing a social, rather than solitary act. Response from others "creates a context where the writer's ideas have social value" (p. 23). In the arena of ongoing literate identity negotiations the responses from others, and the value attributed to an individual's writing experience directly contributed to a student's sense of being a writer.

Dyson's (1989) research on peer interaction during the writing process (introduced in a previous chapter) also addressed the value of social response from a writer's peer group. Although Dyson's work described the effects of interaction during the writing processes of young children, it has great relevance to understanding the powerful influence of peers in many age groups. She argued that peer interaction during writing was a form of narrative play in which "elaborate stories would be collaboratively spun" (p. 65). The oral narrative play created opportunities for writers to move between their own 'imagined' world, into the
world of their social peers. Being exposed to the worlds of their peers enabled writers to test ideas for peer acceptance before committing them to paper. Dyson also asserted that the critiques offered by peers allow for the writer's competency to be monitored for consistency and the accuracy of language.

During the narrative play, and the responses and critiques of their peers, writers align and distinguish themselves with their peers, negotiating their own literate identity. Interaction with peers has the power to create what Dyson calls 'social networks'. Such networks bind children together, often creating the trust between peers that allows children to display their competence and uniqueness as writers, as well as to receive the admiration sought for that competence. Sometimes the bonds of friendship will lead to peers defending each other from criticism which threatens the perception of another's competency, and other times peers will playfully acknowledge the competency of others.

Demonstrating the power of the peer response group for learning about literacy and what it means to be a writer, Dyson (1989) stated that within the supportive structure of a writing programme, the social energy created through peer interaction becomes the fuel for writing growth. The tensions created through the writer's interaction between their imagined world and the world of their social peers creates the energy that leads the writer to make changes in their writing that will align and distinguish them from their peers. As the writer negotiates their way through the different versions of the world, imagined and peer, as well as the wider world of which they are also a part, the writer forms an identity of themselves as a particular type of literacy learner.

Dyson (1989) further addressed the importance of the social value of response to writing by making the simple point that the verbal attention given to children's writing by other children, acknowledges their writing as interesting, and worthy of attending to and talking about. She also acknowledged the reciprocal learning and negotiation opportunities inherent in response groups by stating that members of the group call "attention to themselves as legitimate audience for and critics of each other's efforts" (p. 67). Through the interactions with other
writers and their writing, group members are offered opportunities to align and distinguish
themselves with their peers through their responses and subsequently, their own writing.

3.5.4 Exposure
Brooke et al. (1994) believed the element of exposure was vital for children learning to write.
Brooke et al. suggested that the element of exposure was in many ways an extension of the
social-value purpose of response. This element can be included into a programme when
learners are immersed in a literary rich environment. Exposure to the writing of others, and
other people who write "helps us imagine ourselves as writers, helps us to see the social
value of literate activities" (p. 26).

Exposure can be provided in three ways. When learners share their own writing with a small
group, or with their whole class, they are exposing each other to different ways of writing,
thereby sharing approaches to writing as well as recognising and solving problems in writing.
Discussions in small groups provide another form of exposure for learners. By sharing
individual pieces, writers have the opportunity to tell why they like their writing, and to share
problems they have experienced in the writing, and solutions they have tried. Such
discussions expose learners to the "literate activities that the group members value and
participate in" (p. 28), and to learn from the experiences of others. The third form of
exposure occurs when teachers share their own experiences of writing and reading. Through
their teacher's literate activities learners are exposed to a modeling of literate activities that
may be different to those they have previously experienced. Such exposure may well provide
the opportunities for learners to identify with literate activities and see themselves as literate
people.

3.6 Bringing the four elements together: Writing Response Groups
Brooke et al. (1994) believed that the four elements of time, ownership, response, and
exposure could be successfully included in programmes that incorporated the use of small
groups. They stated, "Small groups provide response and exposure, directly, and support time
and ownership, indirectly" (p. 29). The small groups to which Brooke et al. referred generally
consisted of five or six students who met to share their writing and their experiences of writing. The children received commentary and criticism from others, with a view to improving their writing (See chapter three on Writing Response Groups for a more detailed description).

Brooke et al. (1994) claimed that being a member of a writing response group provided children with opportunity to explore different roles for themselves as writers, and to experience how writing might enhance their lives. It was Brooke et al.'s assertion that within the groups, children are offered different social roles as they share their writing, share their experiences, or respond to the writing of others. Brooke et al. believed this led directly to the development of a sense of self. The opportunity to try out different roles within the writing response groups most successfully taught students how to develop their writing, and what it meant to be a writer (Brooke, 1994).

3.7 Illustrations of the Impact of Literate Identity on Children's learning about Writing

The next section of this chapter describes the impact of children's sense of themselves as writers and their learning about writing.

In the first study, Rowe, Fitch, and Bass (2001), described the way children are privileged to certain roles in the classroom because of assumptions of what counts as literacy in their classroom. The children who more closely match the teacher's assumptions of what is valuable in literacy learning move into more privileged roles in the classroom. This occurs because of the stances those children take toward learning as well as how the classroom activities are organised.

In the second study, Broughton and Fairbanks (2002), described the powerful effect of the teacher's assumptions of what counts as literacy and appropriate classroom behaviour for a girl named 'Jessica' in a year eight classroom. The mismatch of the teacher's and Jessica's assumptions of what counts as literacy deny Jessica access to the roles she believes will
support her in being the literate person she seeks to be, and impact dramatically on Jessica's academic performance and behaviour.

Rowe, Fitch, and Bass (2001) described stances to literacy learning in a first-grade writing classroom. Regarding stances as the ways in which children responded to the ways they were positioned as writers in the classroom, Rowe et al. investigated the impact of children's instructional stances upon their literacy learning. The researchers believed the children in the study shared similar backgrounds and assumptions about literacy practices, which meant they needed to make only minor changes to their beliefs and behaviour to fit the literacy culture of the classroom. At the same time, the children were able to shift between the official classroom culture and peer, social culture with smoothness.

Rowe et al. (2001) identified three stances toward the official classroom culture adopted by the children in their study. One group was compliant, and was willing to do as suggested to them. A second group offered resistance to the classroom culture. They challenged some aspects of the classroom culture, while at the same time generating their own alternatives. Rowe et al. acknowledged that, "When they were successful, they not only repositioned themselves in the official classroom culture but also increased the diversity of options for all" (p. 429). The third group avoided the activities by not participating as expected. Rowe et al. stated that these students "... rejected the legitimacy of official classroom culture and refused to engage in more than a minimal way" (p. 429).

Rowe et al. (2001) observed that children whose work and behaviour closely resembled the valued literacy practices in the classroom were able to move into powerful roles. These children were able to control the writing process, and rarely had to stop their work to wait for the teacher or another child to help them continue. They tended to write more quickly than children who did not know how to spell words, and as a consequence, often wrote more than less able children within the time available. These children also finished their work more quickly, and by doing so they were able to share their finished work from the 'Author's Chair'. Being in the author's chair gave these children greater attention from other children and the teacher, and tended to influence the peer-social culture and classroom culture about
what was valued as literacy practice. The children in the classroom referred to these children as "good writers". In pair or group writing situations these children were often the 'scribes' and were able to use that position to record ideas of which they most approved, either their own or others'.

Less able writers, often those children who were weaker at successfully using correct or invented spelling, were accorded titles suggesting they did not know how to write. These children were infrequently asked to give assistance or opinions to other children. Furthermore, other children in the classroom viewed and treated them as needing help to complete literacy activities, even though such help was often not sought. Such behaviours towards these children further positioned them in the role of non-reader and non-writer. This, in turn, impacted significantly on the opportunities for these children to engage in literacy practices valued in the classroom (Rowe et al., 2001).

However, some children exhibited skills and strategies similar to the children who appeared to have strong literacy skills, and who were perceived by their peers as being 'good writers'. This group of children were not positioned in similar ways to the 'good writers', nor did they assume a similar stance toward literacy learning in the classroom. It was this group of children Rowe et al. found most perplexing, and whose stances and perception by other children warranted further investigation.

Examining the events and activities of the children in the classroom from a socio-cultural perspective, Rowe et al. recognised the powerfulness of the children's peer world culture and its intersection with the official culture within the classroom. The expectations upon children within these two worlds were often in conflict and offered different social roles, and consequently different social positions, to the children.

Rowe et al. identified that the stances assumed by students could change, and with the changing stance, the student could engage in literacy activities valued within the official culture of the classroom. "We want to invite children from all communities and skill levels into roles that provide them with positive views of themselves. At the same time, we want to
challenge them to construct the understandings and strategies they need to participate fully in a literate classroom and a literate society" (p. 432).

Rowe et al. recognised the importance of how children are positioned in other communities in which they participate, as well as the official classroom culture, and the affect of this positioning on the stances children assume toward school culture. The use of this sociocultural perspective serves schools in better understanding the impact upon learning that these varied communities have for students. "Increasing the diversity of options for expression provided multiple entry points to print literacy, and allowed more children to come into the official world of the classroom from positions of power" (p. 433).

Rowe et al. concluded their research by pointing out that neither the problems nor the solutions of mismatched community expectations of roles were new. Yet, they believed the issues surrounding social roles and instructional stances presented one of the biggest challenges facing literacy teachers and researchers in the future. They concluded that two characteristics of the classroom learning environment needed particular attention in order to solve the tensions of classrooms as sites of multiple communities. Firstly, they argued it was critical that teachers knew about the children's lives outside the classroom to understand how the children view themselves in communities that are important to them. Secondly, Rowe et al. stated that the practices that are important to the children's views of themselves need to be brought into the classroom, and included as part of the classroom curriculum. They suggested collaborative curriculum planning may provide one method of achieving this.

Broughton and Fairbanks (2002) investigated their concern with how classroom discourses and practices contributed to girls' subjectivities with a study that selected six girls from one sixth-grade Language Arts classroom. The term subjectivities was used in preference to identities, as the researchers believed that the term implied the students and teachers in the classroom were constantly in the process of 'inventing themselves' as they responded by participation to their surroundings and discourses. However, such a definition of the term subjectivities is compatible with Brooke's (1991) use of the term identities.
To discuss some of their findings, Broughton and Fairbanks described how the classroom discourses and practices affected the stances and dances of one student named 'Jessica'. Stances have been identified as students' approaches to literacy events, and dances have been identified as the negotiation of the students' subjectivities in response to literacy events.

The researchers used interviews and observations to highlight the distinctions between Jessica's sense of self as a person with her sense of self as a student. Much of Jessica's view of herself as a student changed during the year of the study. This was largely attributed to two converging conditions: the teacher's perception of literacy as primarily instrumental, and Jessica's stances toward literacy learning. The views of literacy learning held by Jessica's teacher were evident in the instructional patterns and discourses that shaped the classroom culture. The selection of classroom learning activities was driven by the teacher's desire for the students to perform well in external examinations. The teacher expected students to accept the assignments given to them and to meet the teacher's goals of achievement for the assignments. However, Jessica wanted to use writing and reading for activities that held personal meaning for her, particularly her family and events which sometimes turned out 'good' or 'bad', but which Jessica wanted to explore and reflect upon.

The converging mis-match of the teacher's goals and Jessica's motivations left Jessica having to reconcile the competing subjectivities of herself, and resulted in Jessica experiencing limited personal and social links to classroom activities. While Jessica attempted to modify behaviours that the teacher would not tolerate and which lead to Jessica receiving unwanted teacher attention, Jessica was forced to accept and resist various constructions of herself:

We came to see the changes in Jessica's subjective positioning as a kind of performance in which she danced around the boundaries that tended to frame her. In this dance of subjectivities, we saw evidence of both acceptance and resistance as she attempted to reconcile the competing discourses to which she was subjected (p. 294).

For Jessica, the re-negotiation of her subjectivities resulted in negation of three significant learning outcomes, and the negation of her personal narrative and subjectivity. Firstly,
Broughton and Fairbanks (2002) witnessed the censorship of Jessica's engagement in literacy activities. In the course of managing what the teacher deemed Jessica's 'impulsive' behaviour, Jessica withdrew her participation in classroom discussions. Effectively, Jessica's voice was silenced.

The second result of Jessica's re-negotiation of her subjectivities was a 'loss of connections' between her personal narrative and the purposes of literacy teaching within her classroom. Linked with the erosion of Jessica's engagement in literacy activities described above, the loss of connections suffered by Jessica continued to reduce the opportunities for Jessica to define herself as a member of the classroom through participation.

The third loss suffered by Jessica was the reduced expectation she held for her academic success, compared to the expectations she held for herself at the beginning of the study. Jessica no longer held plans to attend university, but appeared to want to leave school as soon as she was old enough, and had settled on the idea that she would have to do a job that was not intellectually demanding of her to achieve this.

Broughton and Fairbanks (2002) cite the work of Bowles and Gintis who argued that for working class children, like Jessica, the rules and procedures of a classroom take precedence over the child's "... personal connections, critical analysis, and independent action" (p. 296). The potency of the teacher's instrumental goals for literacy teaching and the perception of Jessica's behaviour as impulsive, combined with Jessica's passive acceptance and resistance of the various constructions of herself, and resulted in Jessica's surrender of her literate identity. The delimiting roles for Jessica within this classroom did not allow Jessica to negotiate her subjectivities, but served only to negate them.

Jessica presented a similar dilemma to Broughton and Fairbanks (2002) as the children in the Rowe et al. (2001) study described above. Jessica was relegated to the margins of her classroom: she no longer sat near the front of the classroom and the teacher, but withdrew to the back of the classroom, where she tended to dance around the boundaries that delimited her opportunities for literacy engagement.
In both of the above studies, the researchers recognised the need for children to be able to negotiate successful outcomes for their sense of themselves as literate members of the classroom through personal connections to the valued literacy activities.

3.8 Converging the Curriculum with Children's Identity as Writers

The potential of harnessing the power of identity formation to teach children to be better writers is yet to be realised. The inclusion of writing response groups in writing programmes creates opportunities for children to interact with others, to experience and respond to different roles, and to form stances towards these roles. Brooke (1991) argues that learning to write should involve children in building an understanding of themselves as writers:

Learning to write meaningfully in our culture requires developing an understanding of the self as writer, as someone who uses writing to further personal thinking and to help solve public problems (p. 5).

For meaningful learning to occur the child's story and the curriculum must converge. At this point, children are able to negotiate a way to achieve success in the writing classroom. Lowe (2002) stated what teachers need to make this possible when she wrote,

Our professional responsibility lies not in transacting content, but in enabling students to gain access to that curriculum, and in mediating students' engagements with information so that their learning and concept development are supported. It is in these processes that the power of story lies richly at our disposal (p. 4).

The inclusion of writing response groups in the writing classroom provides ideal opportunities for the curriculum and children's identity formation to converge. Children have greater access to the roles they desire as writers within the supportive structure of writing response groups, and are supported in their attempts to be certain kinds of people in the classroom, and in the wider social world.
CHAPTER 4

LANGUAGE AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT AND THE CASE FOR WRITING
RESPONSE GROUPS

4.1 Introduction

For much of their history, the merits of writing response groups have been understood and debated in terms of the impact of talk in the groups upon the revision of a piece of writing, and the perceived improvements that have been made. A great deal of research has been devoted to examining the relationship between talk and subsequent writing products within writing response groups. While issues over the efficacy of groups to achieve 'improvements' remain, much research points to the benefits that writing response groups offer.

Writing response groups provide opportunities for writers to share their writing with one another, with the goal of improving the writing and helping writers learn to solve writing problems independently. In classroom settings the groups generally consist of five or six students. In varying ways, response groups have been used at every level of education, from early childhood to university settings. While the value of writing response groups is acknowledged as developing the writer's awareness of their audience and their audience's needs, Gere (1987) states they are also associated with enhancing positive attitudes towards writing, encouraging critical thinking, and increasing motivation to write and revise.

Yet, there remains a greatly untapped potential in writing response groups to contribute more significantly to writers' growth and development. Dyson (1989) describes this potential as the 'social energy' that is often present when children respond to one another's writing. The power of talk in writing response groups is acknowledged by Gere (1987) when she stated that such groups, "focus on creating meaning through dialogue among participants, and this creation enables writers to re-vision their work, improving it substantially" (p. 93). From the perspective presented here by Dyson and Gere, writing response groups heighten and develop a writer's sense of audience, but also create talk that helps a writer to understand their writing, and how they write.
Brooke (1991) complements the work of Dyson when he argues that talk in writing response groups allows writers opportunities to explore writer's roles. According to Brooke, it is through these explorations that learning about what it means to be a writer, and learning to write, take place. Brooke, Mirtz, and Evans (1994) make the simple claim that "growing writers need to be surrounded with literate talk" (p. 27). By being immersed in the literate talk of writing response groups, Brooke et al. argue that writers and responders "make writing more than a solitary act; they make writing a means of ongoing participation with others who are important to the writer" (p. 13). These are central ideas to literacy theory that perceives writing as a social act.

4.2 Origins of Writing Response Groups

Gere (1987) traced the popularity of writing groups throughout the Western world from the 1800s to present day. Her research showed that writing groups have existed for as long as writers have sought comment on their writing. Membership of a group reflected social expectations and organisation of the time, meeting members' needs for social interaction, as well as political interests. The groups tended to be structured to provide a writer with feedback on the style and content of a piece of writing, with the goal of empowering the writer to making improvements in future writing. Such a goal is cognizant with Graves' (1983a) concept of writing being a recursive process.

Social historians have identified two qualities that were common to most writing groups. The first was they possessed an egalitarian view of knowledge. In this sense, membership was not bound by class or education, but was open to all. The second quality was that of voluntary membership to join with others to initiate change. Consequently, the groups' structure tended to be non-hierarchical, emphasising co-operation rather than competition. Furthermore, group members wanted to share their writing for comment by other group members. In so doing, writers accepted authority from others, yet always retained ownership and control of their writing. These qualities were echoed by Graves when he revitalised writing instruction in
classrooms throughout the western world in the early 1980s (These characteristics of the writing process were described in Chapter Two).

4.3 The Centrality of Writing Response Groups to Vygotsky's Perspectives

Theory supporting writing response groups has radiated from a social definition of writing consistent with Vygotsky's theories of cognitive development (Gere, 1987). Vygotsky believed that social interaction was a stimulus for individual cognitive growth, and that an individual's way of interpreting and thinking about the world was shaped by social experiences. According to Vygotsky, the direction of the development of thinking occurred from the social to the individual.

Central to Vygotsky's theories was the use of 'social semiotic systems' between individuals to construct meanings in culturally formed settings (Hammond, 2001; Werstch, 1985). Semiotics is concerned with signs and the meanings they signify within a society, or particular context. In Vygotskian terms, signs consisted of a level of meaning and a level of expression. The relationship between the meaning and the expression is based upon socially agreed convention. The signs are modeled socially, within meaningful contexts. Within a socially meaningful context these signs are mediators of learning via such things as gestures, symbols, and language.

The social semiotic view of learning assigns significance to language based upon the relationships between the speaker and their social environment. "Semiotic systems are constructed and used by social beings in social contexts to achieve social ends. More broadly, social semiotic systems work together to construct the cultural and social realities in which we live" (Hammond, 2001, p. 18).

In accepting the Vygotskian social semiotic view of language, we must also accept that language constructs meaning. It follows then, that teaching and learning are "concerned with constructing shared understandings and shared knowledge" (Hammond, 2001, p. 21), and thus, learning is a social rather than individual process. Hammond proposes that the
acceptance of such a view of language "ultimately implies a social constructivist model of teaching and learning, where teacher and students are seen as actively engaged in the process of negotiating understandings" (p. 21).

Bruffee (1984) drew upon Vygotsky's theory about language learning to state that writing is "internalised social talk made public and social again" (p. 641). Bruffee has stated that knowledge about one's writing is not static, but socially justified, evolving as communities of writers interact to shape, extend and reinforce one another's ideas. DiPardo and Freedman (1988) stated that writing groups are supported by Vygotsky's theory of development with their emphasis on social interaction for language learning.

Vygotsky's insistence on the dialectic between the individual and society however, puts peer response at the centre of writing because it makes language integral to thinking and knowing. The generative qualities Vygotsky attributes to language underline his social view of knowledge (Gere, 1987)

However, despite the support for writing response groups evident in Vygotsky's work, writing response groups have consistently struggled for mainstream acceptance in schools. Gere (1987) and Hammond (2001) explain this in terms of popular epistemology. Gere believes the pervasiveness of Cartesian epistemology throughout modern history has positioned writers as solo-performers and marginalised writing groups. Such an epistemology has dictated a fixed view of knowledge, and viewed language as a conduit through which knowledge is transmitted, rather than as a way of developing ideas. Accordingly, writing has been seen as a reproduction of knowledge already in existence. The absence of the concept of intellectual property meant writers could not claim ownership of what they wrote. Rather, their writing was viewed as a 'reassembling' of knowledge already in existence, or the 'directives of a muse' (Gere, 1987).
4.4 Piaget and the View of Writing as an Individual Activity

In reviewing the history of writing groups, Gere (1987) identified Piaget's theory of language development as the most widely accepted throughout most of the twentieth century. The implications of Piaget's work and theory are evident not only in how language acquisition and development were believed to proceed, but also in how writing has been taught in schools.

At a time when Cartesian epistemology shaped the progress of society's knowledge, Piaget's work with individual children complemented the accepted views of knowledge. Piaget made significant contributions to the field of psychology with his theory of cognitive development. Piaget's theory was formed to describe how the child thinks and represents the world, and how these capabilities change with development. Of particular interest to Piaget was the general nature of children's thought, rather than the differences between children at the same stage of thought. Piaget's theory assumed the process of language development was aided by socialisation, but he assigned an asocial genesis to egocentric speech. Much of Piaget's research focussed on the role of conflict in promoting cognitive restructuring. "According to Piaget, through arguments and disagreements with age-mates, children are repeatedly jarred into noticing that others hold viewpoints different from their own" (Berk & Winsler, p. 18). However, Piaget believed that the stages of development follow the same sequential order in any environment. Thus, while social interaction played a role in promoting learning, it was regarded as being secondary to development (DiPardo & Freedman, 1988). This separation of the individual and society was common to Piagetian theory and Cartesian epistemology. This is further demonstrated by the viewing of progression in hierarchical terms, the focus on the nature of individual thought, and the characterisation of knowledge as a fixed entity. Gere (1987) concludes that Piaget's theories placed writing as a fundamentally individual activity.

It is within the Cartesian epistemology that the view of writing and authorship is consonant with the solo-performer concept. Such a view of language and writing generates metaphors such as 'brainstorming', 'getting it out', and 'writer's block' (Gere, 1987). Gere believes,
Such metaphors represent writing as a difficult process of extracting material, thereby reinforcing the idea of the mind as a closed box, and of language as nothing more than a conduit connecting internal and external worlds (p. 80).

Another popular metaphor used by Reddy (cited in Hammond, 2001) to describe this view of language is that language is a 'conduit'. Such a view is based upon the assumption that language acts as a transfer mechanism, "... that it simply provides the means to convey messages from one person to another" (p. 17). Hammond concludes that this view implies that language can be separated from meaning and knowledge. Consistent with this view of language as a conduit of thoughts, feelings, and information is an understanding that language is a technical skill that can be separated from the content of the text. From this perspective, the role of the teacher is to facilitate the successful transmission of information to students. Hammond (2001) describes this as a popular 'common sense' view of language that has dominated the way many English speakers perceive and discuss language and communication.

It was apparent that within this view of language, there was little need for interaction between speaker and listener, nor writer and reader in order to construct agreed meanings, or to greatly enhance cognitive development. Writing response groups were not valued as necessary to the development of a writer and their writing within a Cartesian epistemology, or within Piaget's theory of cognitive development.

4.5 The Rise and Fall of Writing Response Groups

While writing groups enjoyed some limited popularity during the first half of the 1900s, they later fell into demise with the emergence of interest groups whose influence upon the curricula of universities and schools was dominated by considerable instruction in grammar and the mechanics of writing (Gere, 1987). Neatness and accurateness were also highly regarded, and teaching focussed on these 'surface level features'.

2 Surface Level Features of writing are those which affect visual presentation, such as neatness, spelling accuracy, punctuation, and to some degree, grammar. Deep Level Features are those features of writing which affect the meaning of the writing, and are more concerned with ideas.
In the late 1950's and early 1960's the 'tripod' of Language, Literature, and Composition studies dominated the teaching of English in American schools (Gere, 1987). However, the 1966 Dartmouth Conference exposed and promoted a changing intellectual climate. Views of the nature of knowledge had begun to shift, and this was particularly evident in how the British were teaching English in schools. Where the American's favoured the precise formulation of ideas and arguments, with a focus on the finished product, their British counterparts had adopted an approach in which ideas and arguments were presented tentatively, and the focus was on the process of writing (Gere, 1987). The American's responded positively to the model for teaching English presented by the British. The tripod of Language, Literature, and Composition was quickly overtaken by the British ideas. Gere concluded that,

The Dartmouth Conference and its aftermath did not cause writing groups to emerge: it merely realigned subterranean forces to bring them closer to the surface. The intellectual climate of 1968 was more hospitable to writing groups than that of previous decades because ... views of the nature of knowledge had begun to shift (p. 29).

While this shift did realign writing response groups with mainstream educational practices, it also brought unwanted attention. Writing response groups were subsequently grouped with 'progressive education' and overshadowed by the connotations of the label. The progressive movement has frequently been labeled as 'vague' (Gere, 1987), and resulted in writing groups being pushed, once again, to the margins of education.

4.6 The Place of Writing Response Groups in Schools Today

While current theories of the teaching and learning of writing support and advocate writing response groups (DiPardo & Freedman, 1988), their popularity remains affected by a legacy of little value being placed on peer interaction. Gere (1987) points to their continuing 'discovery' as indicative of their existence within an intellectual environment that has been
unable to support them. The popularity of writing response groups in present day classrooms tends to reflect teachers' philosophic stance towards two issues. The first issue concerns the autonomous functioning of writing response groups and the possible divergence from teacher set goals. This presents a significant issue for many teachers, particularly those who seek direction and control over children's writing processes. Closely linked to this is the second issue of teachers' stance towards the value of peer talk in creating a dialogue to develop writing.

Newman, Griffin, and Cole (1984) believe that in the traditional classroom in which children took their writing to the teacher for 'conferencing', a hierarchical division of labour became established. The teacher assumed the position at the top as the expert, while the children were positioned on the lower rungs of the ladder. Consequently, the learner's sense of the purpose and meaning of the writing task was obscured, as the higher goals of writing were removed from their control. For many teachers this practice was equated with effective teaching and learning, and it certainly fits into the functional view of literacy described by Cambourne (1988)\(^3\). However, it presents difficulties for teachers in terms of sharing the responsibility, as well as the 'expertise', in writing with students. At the same time, the idea of teacher control over a child's writing processes is in conflict with the ideals put forth by Graves (1983a), particularly the ideals of writer ownership and control.

### 4.7 Teachers' stance towards Autonomous Functioning of Writing Response Groups

The perceived loss of teacher control of the peer response group is a significant issue for teachers who want to replicate the teacher-student conference, and are concerned about how students will discuss each other's writing, particularly if peers will comment on the same issues as the teacher. Dipardo and Freedman (1988) suggested that teachers who expected writing groups to function in this way would become frustrated by children's failure to do this, and would consequently find writing groups difficult to accept.

\(^3\) Cambourne has frequently criticised views of literacy that value functional skills. Cambourne claims that a functional view of literacy teaching leaves learners struggling to independently connect and successfully use language in meaningful situations. This is detailed in the following chapter.
Many teachers attempt to solve the perceived problem of how to deal with a loss of influence over the direction of children's writing in one of two ways. One option for teachers is to be present when writing groups meet, or to participate in the group responses. DiPardo and Freedman's (1988) review of research concludes that while the presence of the teacher in the writing response groups may lessen the teacher's feelings of loss of power, it also lessens the opportunity for peers to give feedback that diverges from that which a teacher may give. Dipardo and Freedman (1988) claim that teacher directed conferences deny children the opportunity to interact as peers. The main consequences of this will be more apparent in the discussions that follow in this chapter.

The second option many teachers use is to organise the group around directives and procedures determined by the teacher. These directives and procedures often take the form of editing sheets that students are expected to use. Such editing sheets tend to focus on highly structured peer interactions, in which students are trained to assume the teacher's role. Clearly this organisation ignores the benefits of peer interaction, and places teacher interaction with children's writing at the top of the hierarchy once again. Much research concludes that the use of editing sheets limits spontaneous response by peers, significantly reduces peer-to-peer talk about writing, and promotes mimicry of teacher-type responses. Freedman (1992) found the use of such editing sheets correlates with a marked reduction in student-to-student talk. Specifically, the use of teacher-designed editing sheets position knowledge, and meaning in writing, as being already given by the teacher, rather than as resulting from peer interaction.

Supporting teacher concerns in this area a study by Newkirk (cited in Freedman & Dipardo, 1988), in a university setting, revealed three factors that were likely to affect the responses peers gave to writers. The first finding was that students were more willing, and more likely, to fill in missing information as they read another writer's writing than their teachers. The second finding revealed peers were affected by what they thought their teacher would praise in a piece of writing and were likely to offer similar praise, even though the writing may not have been given praise by the teacher. Thirdly, peers tended to indulge their own ego as they respond to writing by being uncooperative and rejecting a writer's ideas, rather than allowing
the writer to make the decision about when an idea should be rejected. Newkirk offered some solutions to the problem of peers diverging from teacher goals for writing groups with the careful demonstration of appropriate responses to writing by the teacher before peers work in groups. Newkirk’s concern with peer responses diverging from teacher goals, positions him using peer response groups to reduce teacher workload, rather than as recognising the value of peers as a legitimate audience for writing (DiPardo & Freedman, 1988). Again, the place and value of peer response groups within the instructional context of the class may erode the quality of peer responses rather than enhance it and the subsequent revisions made by writers.

DiPardo and Freedman (1988) suggested that the real question to be answered is how teachers and children can share power in the writing groups.

When the use of peer response is not accompanied by a philosophic shift that suggests the benefits of peers’ working and talking together in a manner that is at once academically serious and supported by the peer structure, writing instructors will always feel frustrated at the failure of peers to perfectly mirror the substance and style of teacher feedback (p. 144).

In contrast to Newkirk’s study (cited in Freedman & Dipardo, 1988), others have illustrated positive relationships between peer talk in writing response groups and subsequent revisions made by writers. Nystrand and Brandt’s analysis of the draft writing and revisions made by a group of students (cited in DiPardo & Freedman, 1988) showed evidence that revisions resulted in writing that was of a higher quality than the revisions made by writers who had received teacher-only response. Furthermore, they concluded that writers in the group were "...more aware of their needs and accomplishments..." (p. 139). More particularly, DiPardo and Freedman believed that the opportunity to discover the task, considering both the problems and the solutions, resulted in the students' superior achievement. Such results support theories of the writing process which value and emphasise writer’s gaining control over their writing process:
The language about processes of writing demonstrates how students in writing groups are reflective about what they do when they write, recognise problems, consider possibilities in a reasoned way, revise their approaches, and assess the worth of what they have produced (p. 375).

In examining the talk in peer response groups Lawerence and Sommers (1996) concluded that ninety per cent of talk in peer response groups is task related. Task related talk in the groups was categorised as being related to elements of the text, topic, and group processes. Similar results have been found in other studies to support the idea that most talk in peer response groups is task related. Of greater significance however, is the relationship between that talk and the revised writing of group members. Lawerence and Sommers (1996) compared initial drafts of students' writing with drafts completed after peer response and stated that more than half of the comments made in the peer response groups were used by writers in the revisions made to their writing. They concluded that the responses given to writers were useful and resulted in changes to a piece of writing in terms of ideas and organisation, as well as the structure of sentences. Furthermore, the researchers speculated that the opportunity to work in peer response groups fostered a writer's sense of ownership of their writing, as well as of the group processes.

Gere and Abbott (1985) examined the language of peer response groups to investigate the relationship between speaking and writing, and the value of collaborative writing groups on a writer's developing skills. The research drew significantly on Vygotsky's theory of the effectiveness of learning to internalise language through talk in peer groups, for externalising in subsequent independent writing. Gere (1987) subsequently explained this by stating that the voices students hear in their writing response group contribute directly to what they write when they revise their writing independently. Although their study compared the responses made in three different class levels (Year 5, Year 8, and Years 11&12), the results showed that most talk in response groups at all levels was focused on the content of the writing. The more junior students tended to focus on the content of a piece of writing, while the more senior students attended to the context and the form of the writing.
Much of the language used in the peer response groups appeared to be increasing students' knowledge about writing, and about the processes used in writing, thus creating a metacognitive language specific to the group (Gere & Abbott, 1985). According to Gere and Abbott, such language "demonstrates how students in writing groups are reflective about what they do when they write, recognize problems, consider possibilities in a reasoned way, revise their approaches, and assess the worth of what they have produced" (p. 375). Gere & Abbott also recognised the value of responses defined as 'phatic', which were common among the more senior students in the study. Gere and Abbott, citing the work of Duncan (1973), stated that phatic comments were those which "contain no content but serve as placeholders or as back-channel cues facilitating dialogue" (p. 368). Phatic responses included 'yeah', 'oh, okay', 'thank you', and 'I don't know, I mean...'. These responses were more common among the senior students. While these responses appeared to not contribute directly to discussions about the content, context, or form of the writing they served the valuable purpose of indicating to a writer that their writing was shared in a "supportive and engaged atmosphere..." (p. 375).

Being supported in their writing allowed many students in the study to orally revise their writing. Describing the revision process of one student, Gere and Abbott (1985) argued this was an example how the response offered by at least one group member had enabled the writer to see her writing from another's perspective, and to then want to revise her writing. It is also an example of how a writer is able to experiment with alternative solutions to writing problems within the supportive atmosphere of the group. In recognising the support present within writing response groups, particularly senior students, Gere and Abbott have acknowledged their potential to contribute to a writer's growth and development.

4.8 Writing Response Groups as an Audience for a Writer

Writing groups present an arena for writers to interact with others at various points in the composing process. Such interaction underscores the writer's sense of audience by providing an immediate audience who can respond thoughtfully to a piece of writing as it is being
written. Fitzgerald (1988), in linking peer response groups and the process of revision, claimed that writers developed audience awareness through responses offered to them within the writing group. Response comments helped writers to anticipate audience expectations about content, organisation, writing style, and even presentation. By being able to anticipate and respond to audience expectations writers began to establish clear intentions for their writing during the writing process.

Argyle (cited in Freedman & Dipardo, 1988) stated that because peers share similar cognitive constructs, they can communicate appropriately, and often more effectively than teachers, with each other. While Argyle recognised that peers may not have the knowledge about writing that teachers possess, they do hold special potential to build one another's confidence, social skills, and motivation for writing and re-writing. Furthermore, Freedman (1987) stated that peer response gives writer's information about their performance that leads them to recognise when they are performing well.

A small amount of research has paid attention to the influence of writing response groups upon poor writers. While able writers are more likely to extend their revisions beyond the suggestions offered by group members, Russel (1985) claims that poor writers are more likely to over-use suggestions made during response groups and teacher conferences. She stated that

Poor writers are likely to use all suggestions from a conference, thus having ownership of their writing compromised. Writing partners must be cautioned against taking over someone's writing and making decisions for another (p. 15).

In recognising poor writers' over-reliance upon their peers and teachers to acknowledge and critique their writing we turn our attention to features of successful writing response groups to enable children to form an identity of themselves as writers, and to assert ownership and control over their writing.
4.9 Features of Successful Writing Response Groups

The 'success' of writing response groups as measured by an evaluation of a piece of writing is difficult (DiPardo & Freedman, 1988).

Progress in writing is difficult to measure and often occurs over extended periods of time. Even when no one-to-one relationship can be found between talk in groups and improvement on an individual piece of writing, learning might still be occurring in groups (p. 121).

DiPardo and Freedman's (1988) comments illustrate the powerful potential of writing response groups to influence a writer's writing outside the group, as an effect of the experience of being part of a response group, who have constructed meanings in writing through dialogue. The comments also reflect the ideas of Graves (1983a), presented in the chapter two, concerning development in writing as a process, and writing as a craft. Furthermore, the comments recognise the need for writing response groups to exist within a classroom environment in which peers are encouraged and supported to work together, with that work being regarded as academically serious.

Lawerence and Sommers (1996) conducted research in writing classes of university aged students. They described two essential ingredients for successful peer response groups. Firstly, students needed training in making response to their peers' writing, and secondly, students needed many opportunities to work in collaboration with peers. Lawerence and Sommers sought to establish willingness by their students to work in collaborative groups with experiences that highlighted how the diversity of group members offered opportunities to learn from one another.

Instruction in the benefits of peer response groups for writing was given to students, as well as discussion of the types of comments writers found most useful to assist them in making revisions to writing. Specifically, group members were told that sharing and talking about writing extends a writer's repertoire of thinking about how to develop and organise ideas.
Also, through the experience of receiving response to writing, writers would be exposed to ways in which other writers solve similar writing problems. Responses that attended to a writer's focus, development, and organisation of ideas were described as most useful to a writer in early response sessions. Students participated in structured peer response groups over a three-week period to promote successful skills and attitudes. In the peer response groups students were expected to respond according to a set of procedures designed by the researchers, focusing on the intentions of the writer, as well as the responder's perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of the piece of writing.

The results of Lawerence and Sommer's (1996) study revealed peer talk that was useful to writers in making revisions to their writing, and approaching future writing tasks. Rather than aiming to focus responses to reflect what a teacher might say, the researchers aimed to focus responses towards autonomous group processes and functions. The emphasis on teaching students the benefits of peer response groups as well as how to respond appropriately and effectively to a piece of writing, highlighted the importance of teachers making a commitment to group work. The instructional scaffolding provided to the students, in the form of set procedures to guide responses empowered group members to recognise features of writing they liked or disliked, and to express these in ways that were helpful to writers at different stages of the writing process.

The success of writing groups is dependent upon students being able to employ the necessary social and intellectual skills. Gere (1987) stated that the tasks of the writing group must be clearly set. At the same time, Gere acknowledged the importance of groups having autonomy and authority to respond to writing in spontaneous ways. The social skills necessary for successful group functioning range from simple turn taking, to behaving in ways that facilitate group processes. Gere stated that the most significant learning occurs after a writing group session, during evaluation, claiming,

"... it is evaluation that transforms the work of writing groups into the kind of learning that enables participants to negotiate their way... into the normal discourse of 'knowledgeable peers'. By discussing the issues that have arisen in their writing..."
groups, explaining what they have learned, and exploring unresolved issues, participants learn to monitor their own thinking and evaluate their own progress" (p. 111).

The type of research described above moves closer to a socio-cultural view of writing response groups, in the sense that the benefits of social collaboration during the writing process are acknowledged. However, the powerful potential of the groups to create a social energy, which in turn creates an impetus for growth in writing, is not acknowledged.

4.10 Beyond the Audience Role: Writing Response Groups and the Potential to Extend, Enhance, and Energise Writing via Collaborative, Narrative Play

DiPardo and Freedman (1988), citing Freedman's (1987) study of two writing response groups in a ninth grade classroom, identified four distinct functions of writing response groups: responding to writing, thinking collaboratively, writing collaboratively, and editing student writing (p. 120). The most common function of writing response groups, however, was to respond to the writing of one individual member.

Several researchers have acknowledged the role of the peer response group beyond simply being an audience for writing. The work of Nystrand (cited in DiPardo & Freedman, 1988) argues that response groups serve the important function of helping writer's to monitor their composing process because group experience means they become aware of potential problems in their writing. Nystrand characterises successful writing response groups as those that demonstrate 'extensive collaborative problem solving', allowing the writer to "...test hypotheses about the possibilities of a written text" (p. 139).

In recognising the potential of peer response groups to enhance and extend students' language functions and particularly to foster a metacognitive understanding about writing, Gere and Abbott (1985) believe the success of such groups has been constrained by the instructional context in which they are set. When writing response groups are used for the purpose of responding to the writing of individual group members, their potential is limited.
Dyson (1989) also acknowledges the value of writing groups as an audience, but has extended the group's value to recognise the power of this social group. Writing groups allow a monitoring of competence, questioning writers on such issues as consistency, and accuracy of language. Focussing on the positive social energy created within writing groups that support young writers, Dyson makes the simple point that the verbal attention given to children's writing by other children, acknowledges their writing as interesting, and worthy of attending to and talking about. She goes on to say, "Moreover, as members of the peer social group, they called attention to themselves as legitimate audience for and critics of each other's efforts" (p. 67). Dyson paints a picture of the members of writing response groups being active in affecting change in writing, rather than acting as a passive audience. The idea of an audience for a writer's writing is generally associated with the finished writing product. Dyson positions the audience during the writing process as 'legitimate critics', who may impact on the writing process, and consequently on the finished product of writing.

Dyson (1989) has stated that within the supportive structure of a writing programme, the children's social energy became the major fuel for writing growth. Through their interactions with each other, the children established a social network that both bound them all together as a group and also allowed each to seek recognition as competent but unique individuals. The children's social networking included displays and admiration of competence, critiques of self and others, and interactional efforts aimed at both rising above the crowd and enjoying each other's company. Written language was a part of the knowledge and skill valued by the children, as well as a social tool that helped them to connect with and distinguish themselves among their peers (pp. 66-67).

This is where the true power of writing response groups lies. When writing response groups are supported in classrooms, peers are recognised as legitimate audiences for writing by the teacher, and by the children themselves. In this way writing groups present an opportunity for teachers to shift the focus from writing product to writing process, and an opportunity for
writers to develop their 'writing voice' as they talk with peers about significant issues in their writing.

The research of Dyson (1989) was complemented by Brooke's (1991) theory of Identity Negotiations, particularly as such theory related to literacy learning, described in the previous chapter. Dyson's work made significant contributions to the area of writing response groups and identity negotiations. Her inclusion in these two chapters is integral to highlighting the value of talk in writing response groups.

4.11 The Future of Writing Response Groups

Despite their lingering popularity over the past two hundred years, writing response groups have been marginalised in educational circles by an intellectual environment unable to support them (Gere, 1987). Freedman (1992) has stated that while peer response groups are well favoured among many theorists, there is disagreement concerning optimal ways to organise such groups. Response groups typically reflect the teacher's view of how such groups match the curriculum and goals for students. Such views of writing response groups continue to circle around their real potential to teach the writer about what it means to be writer. As teaching shifts further from the 'conduit' metaphor for learning language and recognises the value of peer talk for constructing shared understandings between individuals, writing response groups will become popular again. The enormous potential for growth in writing that exists within the social interactions occurring in writing response groups positions them as a vital component of writing classrooms.

The directive to attend to issues or features decided upon by the teacher limits spontaneous talk about the writing, composing processes, and the writer's experience of writing, thereby eroding writer control and ownership of their work. Rather than developing their own writing voice, the audience' and writer's role is reduced to mimicry of expected responses within teacher-student conferences.
When literacy is viewed as a social activity, Gere (1987) claimed the best way to become more literate is to become part of a community.

The product of writing groups, the polished prose, has importance, but even more significant is the process of the group, the means by which individuals experience and eventually become part of a literate community (p. 123).

Being part of a literate community, such as a writing group, offered children opportunities to observe and practice language in meaningful contexts, and to internalise and develop language. Participation in autonomous writing groups allowed for group members to negotiate meaning, and generate new understandings. In learning the language to talk about their writing, group members were able to talk about the problems they experienced in their writing, and developed the tools necessary to solve the problems. Gere (1987) believed that "The voices students hear in writing groups contribute directly to what they internalise and later use in writing" (p. 84).
CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

5.1 The Pilot Study

A pilot study was planned to sample the possible range of categories that could be used to analyse talk in the writing response groups. The categories used by Gere and Abbott (1985) (see previous chapter) were modified to be: Praising the writing; Asking clarifying questions; and Making suggestions for revision of the writing. These categories proved to be successful in enabling the talk to be categorised. At the beginning of the year writing response group sessions were trialled with two groups of five children. Basic group skills such as turn taking, and active listening were practised during these sessions. The teacher was an active participant in these groups, modelling responses, ensuring established procedures for one writer to share their work each day were practised, and that children's initial responses to a piece of writing were positive.

5.2 The Current Study

All of the 27 children in the class were involved in the study. The children were randomly placed in five writing response groups of five or six members, and the groups remained the same throughout the whole study. (One group had some initial group functioning problems and these children were placed into other groups within two weeks of the study beginning.)

Each writing response group met on the 'floor area' of the classroom twice each week. Only one group met at a time to ensure that the children could be recorded without excessive background noise. Typically, when a group met any child who wanted to share a piece of writing could do so, meaning that up to six children could share their writing on any day. This did not usually happen, however, as time was a constraint and groups usually met for about 20 minutes at a time. Two different groups held sessions each day, and if their sessions were less than 20 minutes in duration, another group could hold a session before the end of
the Writing time. While a group was holding a writing response group session the other children in the class were typically involved in writing, sharing their writing with a partner, holding an ‘informal’ writing response group session to share with their group changes that had been made to a piece of writing as a result of a previous group session, or publishing a piece of writing.

In the group which was holding their writing response group session the writer read their writing and shared something of their experience of writing. One child at a time gave a 'positive' response to the writer. A positive response was deemed to be one that described what the responder liked about the writing, reflected the writer's experience of the writing, or congratulated the writer on the piece. The writer then stated the part, or ideas, in their writing to which they wanted response. Responders could then ask a clarifying question, or immediately respond to the writer's request. At the end of the session, the writer was expected to describe what they thought they might do next, identifying any responses they felt were particularly helpful.

During the writing response group session, the teacher operated an audio cassette tape to record the session. Children knew they were being taped and that the teacher was conducting research to understand the types of responses writers found helpful in guiding their writing revisions. As the teacher/researcher was present on only two days each week, the same groups tended to be tape recorded for the study. However, all groups were tape recorded during the study, and the interactions of children in all groups helped to analyse the responses from the taped and transcribed sessions. During the early part of the study the teacher was present, and sometimes participated in the group sessions. On other occasions it was explained to the children that the teacher would not be commenting on the writing during the session. Transcripts of the group sessions were written as the study continued. Descriptions of the group sessions were recorded daily. The format for a single group session is described in greater detail below.
5.3 Questions of the Study

The study sought to investigate how talk in the writing response groups contributed to the formation of a child's identity as a writer. The specific questions used to guide the study are listed below:

1. During writing response group sessions, what information is offered through the responses given about a piece of writing, or to the writer, that positions writers in particular ways in the classroom?
2. How do the responses given in the writing response groups enable students to re-negotiate and re-position themselves in the writing classroom?

5.4 Design of the Study

The study was designed to inform the teacher/researcher's teaching practice. The research was a descriptive study of the impact of an introduced change to the writing programme - the writing response groups - upon the children's sense of themselves as writers. The researcher was a participant in the study. While such 'insider' knowledge can be an advantage, it can also pose problems and disadvantages (Davies, 1999). To combat these potential problems, a reflexive technique was adopted. The teacher/researcher and co-teacher discussed sections of the transcripts and analysis to ensure consistency in the analysis and interpretation of responses and events which took place.

5.5 Setting

The study took place in a Full Primary School (Year 0 - year 8). The school was designated as a Decile Ten school. There were approximately 150 students enrolled in the school when the study began. The teacher/researcher's association with the school began in 1996 when employed as a full-time classroom teacher. The teacher/researcher had returned twice as a part-time teacher after taking maternity leave.
The study was conducted in a class in which the researcher was a part-time teacher. The teacher/researcher and her teaching partner taught a new text type, or an element of a text type, each three-weeks. During the three-week period, children were expected to write at least three pieces on the 'compulsory' text type, and choose one to publish. For the remainder of the three-week period, children could choose their own topics for writing. Children were still expected to publish one out of every three pieces they wrote.

During the first half of the year most children were successfully able to meet the writing and publishing criteria described above. However, teacher/researcher and teacher felt that some children needed firmer guidelines regarding how much they were expected to write each day. Elbow (cited in Brooke, 1991) argues that "we have to emphasise production - that practice of writing - and devote plenty of time to this oddly neglected practice" (pp. 15-16). Consequently, unless children were engaged in a single peer or a teacher conference, they were expected to write two pages (double line spacing making this equal to one full page of lined 1B5 paper) each day. Despite some initial mumbling from a few children, all children were able to write the required amount. Many children wrote significantly more than two pages.

At the beginning of a new three-week period, children were immersed in a particular text type, or element of text type. Several examples were shared with the children. Following a 'read and retell' process described by Cambourne (1987) children were able to talk about features of a text type, collect examples of the text type, analyse the features as part of the teacher's lesson, and to practice a piece of writing.

5.6 Participants

The teacher/researcher was a teacher with twelve years' teaching experience. The teacher/researcher was completing a thesis towards a Master of Education Degree at the Wellington College of Education.
The teacher/researcher taught in the classroom two days each week, in a job-share position. The other classroom teacher was an experienced teacher, who taught the other three days of the week. While both teachers taught writing and held writing response group sessions, only the sessions that occurred on the teacher/researcher's teaching days were included in this study. This practice made the transcribing of writing response group sessions more accurate, as the teacher/researcher had made accompanying notes to the sessions, and was able to record impressions of the sessions in a journal.

The 27 children in the study were aged between eleven years, two months and twelve years, six months at the beginning of the school year.

Atwell (1986), in describing successful teaching approaches she had used with children of the intermediate school age, claims they are intensely social, and seek social contact with their peers. Experiences where they can meet with their peers, such as writing response groups, provide a necessary social need, and possess potential for better quality teaching and learning. "They need to participate in classrooms that move them toward an adult reality. They need more independent activity, increased responsibility for their own learning, and increased voice in what happens in the classroom" (p. 25). The children in the study enjoyed being with friends, and liked to sit in groups to do their work if permitted.

5.7 Data Collection from Writing Response Group Sessions

Fifty peer writing response group sessions during the third and fourth terms of the 2001 school year were audio taped, and later transcribed by the researcher. A socio-cultural perspective was used in analysing the transcripts of the writing response groups.

5.8 Writing Response Group Session

The writing response groups were typically composed of six children who had been randomly grouped by the teacher/researcher. The teacher/researcher was present during sessions. The children met in one corner of the classroom. Once all the children were seated
they decided which group member, or members, would share their writing for response. This decision was dependent upon children's willingness to share their writing, and preference was given to a child who not recently shared their writing.

The writing that was shared by a group member was selected from any of the writing they had worked on during the year. Typically, children selected their most recent pieces, but sometimes pieces written in the previous two weeks were chosen. The piece of writing did not have to be completed. The writer read the piece of writing without interruption from the group.

An example of a child's piece of writing is provided below, and has been copied from the child's draft writing book without surface feature corrections. The writing was started four days before the writing response group met, and the writer, Adela, had added to it before she shared it with the group. Adela held her draft writing book while she read aloud to the writing response group. This meant her writing was not visible to any other group member.

Table 1: Extract from Adela's draft writing book which she selected to read to the writing response group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>August 2001 (First day of writing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a time to die there is even a time to live there is time for everything but how much time do you have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Help me please over here I'm stuck under some wood and metal. Help&quot;). No one can hear me. I'm so hungry. So cold. So tired. I just want to go to sleep but I have to get out from under this stuff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>August 2001 (Second day of writing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Help! Help me!&quot; All this screaming is making me hot and I can't move. This hurricane came over Springfield. I can see ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample of student writing by Adela, August 2001
5.9 Responses from children

The following table is the transcription of what the writer above stated to the group when she had completed reading the selected piece of writing, and gives an example of the structure of responses given by group members, as well as the interactions between group members. In this example the teacher/researcher participated in the group. The group consisted of four Year Seven children: Naomi, Amanda, Nigel, and Nicola; and two Year Eight children: Adela and Max. This group tended to work well together. Group members generally agreed who would read their writing to the group, and took turns to give responses.

Table 2: Transcription from audio tape cassette recording of a writing response group session consisting of four Year Seven children, and two Year Eight children

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adela</td>
<td>Oh, it's not finished yet. I just want some ideas for what to write next 'cos I'm not sure about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>That's great if the writing is not finished yet. It doesn't need to be completed for you to share it. That tells the group members that you look forward to their comments and are likely to use the ideas that they give you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>I liked the way you started and how you tell me about time. I liked that style. I think it sounds really interesting and exciting so far and I think you should continue with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>That thing about time at the start. It kind of made me think about someone looking at what has already happened and really telling the story about it. And then you were under all that stuff and it gets real interesting. Well, it's good at the start when you're talking about time. 'cos it makes you think about how much time you have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigel</td>
<td>I liked the part about she mentioned she was trapped and like trying to get out of the - was it the wind?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>The hurricane.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adela</td>
<td>Yeah, the hurricane.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transcript of response group session continued from previous page

Max

She barely said one sentence and she was straight into it. Yeah. And also the time bit, that made me think "Oh yeah, she's going to die". And then I'm thinking is she or isn't she?

Teacher

I think the beginning is exciting. I thought, "Wow!" It just rolled off your tongue. Have you read something like that before?

Adela

Well, it's like in the bible. It says there's a time for everything and there's a time to die.

Max

And there's there's that song, "There's a time, turn, turn, turn". Who's it by?

Teacher

Adela, what type of help would you like from the group today?

Adela

Well, I'm not sure what else to put in because at the end there's this hurricane that comes over and I've put, "She can see...", but I don't know what she can see. So, I'd like some good ideas about what she can see.

Naomi

Well you could write about the hurricane as it comes closer and how she gets caught up in it.

Adela

Um, it's already come over and it's like she's in it already. And there's like dead people and stuff like that.

Nicola

Well, I think one thing you that you could maybe say is like, "I can't see anything", 'cos like there's everything moving around her.

Adela

Well, like maybe like broken down cars and trees and leaves and like that sort of stuff.

Nigel

I think you should carry on like the hurricane has stopped and now you're looking at the town, but it's like it's been blown up, and maybe you have to go and start helping people.

Max

Maybe everyone's dead except for her.

Adela

Look for people who are still alive and stuff? Well maybe I could see someone come over and I could call out.

Continued over page...
With the writer's closing remarks the sessions ended, and the tape recording, and subsequently transcription of the session ended. The writer usually continued to draft their writing at the next available writing time, and might share the draft with a member of the writing response group to talk about how the writing was progressing.

5.10 Children's Journals

Children in the study were asked to record their thoughts about the writing response groups in a journal. Time was given at the end of each fortnight for children to write their thoughts. Sometimes children were asked to respond to specific statements or questions made by the teacher/researcher. Children had been asked to comment on their experience of the writing response group, the usefulness of responses made by other group members, whether the
The teacher's presence was significant in the types of responses given or influential on group processes.

On the day of the session described above the children from the group were asked to write a journal comment. Adela's journal entry made reference to her writing, as well as the group processes.

Table 3: Extract from Adela's Journal after a writing response group session in which she read her writing to the group and received responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>August 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Today it came over me I had so much to say when I was in my conferencing group. I love how I am doing my &quot;Time&quot; story and the help I am getting from people. I am thinking of doing something to do with a second part. My writing has developed because of my writing group and the ideas and help. They are very encouraging to me, and in my group there are people who don't really like me but they do help me with my writing, and it helps me enormously. And I love what people say to me. My writing is developing good with the help I get from my group. I sometimes know the ideas that my group gives me, and I listen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Journal Extract from Adela, August 2001

5.11 Teacher's Journal

The teacher/researcher kept a journal to record impressions of the writing programme during the year, the successes and failures of the writing response groups, reflections on literature that had been reviewed, and reflections on conversations with the thesis supervisor, colleagues, and friends.

The following journal entry provides an example of the types of impressions that were recorded, and relates to the session described above.
Table 4: Extract from teacher/researcher’s Journal relating to the writing response group session in which Adela read her writing to the group and received responses

August 2001
Adela started to read her writing today with great confidence. Her reading is really improving. Adela’s writing began boldly, and everyone seemed to be listening. At the end of the reading she apologised for not completing the writing. I commented that it was great she had brought a piece of writing that was unfinished because it showed she was open to suggestions from group members. It was interesting that children seem to think they can’t share their writing unless it is complete. I sense some satisfaction from Adela as she read and then received responses from the group - there seemed to be a level of comfort, if not trust, between the group members.

Journal Extract from Teacher/Researcher, August 2001

The use of information contained in the transcripts of sessions, children’s journal entries, and the teacher/researcher’s journal entries together provided a good description of the talk in the writing response groups. This information indicated how children responded to the interactions that occurred in the groups, and the formation of children’s identity as writers.

5.12 Ethical Considerations

The study has followed and met the requirements of the NZARE Code of Ethics. Permission from the school’s Board of Trustees and parents of the children in the study were gained prior to the commencement of the study. Accordingly the school and the students are not identified by their real names and issues of confidentiality have been observed throughout the study.
6.1 Introduction

Talk in the writing response groups serves to create and organise meanings in writing, as well as to support the writer as they form an identity of themselves as a particular kind of writer and literate person. Dyson (1989) explains the importance of talk with young children as they learn to write: "Speech is again important, serving not only to organise and invest early written graphics with meaning, but also to form the raw material for the graphic symbols themselves" (p. 7). A similar explanation can be used to describe the value of talk in writing response groups. As children share responses to a writer's work within the supportive structure of the writing response groups, strengths in the writing are acknowledged, and suggestions are made as part of a collaborative narrative. This allows the writer to rehearse possible changes to their writing, and continue to define themselves as a particular kind of literate member of the class.

Brooke's (1991) theory of Identity Negotiation argues that writing is a symptom of group membership as writers find or create a role for themselves, in a relationship to the social groups they consider important. The formation of a writer's identity involves children working out stances toward learning and the social groups to which they seek alignment, or from which they seek to distinguish themselves (Brooke). The stances assumed by the child allows them to play particular roles in the writing classroom, being defined as particular kinds of literate people. The formation of a writer's identity affects future literacy learning.

The social energy of the writing response group generates growth in writing as the group supports the writer to consider other possibilities for their writing (Dyson, 1989). Yet, continued growth is established by the writer's increased sense of themselves as a writer. The writer gains independence from the prompts offered by the response group by independently recognising and solving problems in their writing, and developing the confidence to try other ideas in their writing. Then, the writer forges their own energy, discovering and generating
their own ideas for writing. The analysis presented in this chapter is a description of how a child writer's sense of identity is formed through writing response groups in the classroom.

6.2 Grouping of Responses
The responses given in the writing response groups have been grouped according to the contribution they make towards the formation of a writer's identity. Similar responses have been grouped in different ways to show the layers of support offered to the formation of a writer's, and in some cases, a responder's, identity. The responses made have contributed to a social networking among group members that allows members to align themselves with other individuals as well as the group, and to distinguish themselves from their peers. The roles assumed by group members to achieve this, allowed them to position themselves as particular kinds of writers.

6.3 Acknowledgement of the Writing and the Writer
Dyson (1989) makes the simple point that the verbal attention given to children's writing by other children, acknowledges their writing as interesting, and worthy of attending to and talking about. Therefore, not only the writing is regarded as interesting, but the writer is also regarded as interesting. As an extension of this idea, Dyson acknowledges how response group members call "... attention to themselves as legitimate audiences for and critics of each other's efforts" (p. 67). Such a declaration allows group members to assume different stances toward different pieces of writing, presenting themselves in different roles, as they respond to the writing being shared.

6.3.1 Admiration of Competence
Children express their admiration for another child's writing simply by making a positive comment about the writing. A positive comment attaches value to the writing, and identifies what the responder likes about the writing. The information given to the writer about their writing identifies what is successful in the writing, and may highlight how to successfully attend to problem areas. This information reinforces the writer's sense of their identity as a writer in positive ways.
Responses such as Naomi’s supported Nicola in seeing herself as a particular kind of member of the classroom. Naomi is able to identify what she likes about Nicola’s writing, and asks Nicola for more information about a particular part in the writing. Nicola is thus acknowledged as an interesting writer.

Naomi: I liked the way you told that story, and you know that (inaudible, referring to something in the writing), is that true?
Nicola: I made it up (Nicola sounds very flattered).
Naomi: I think that’s so cool.

"Admiration" August 2001

Nicola learns that Naomi likes her writing. Naomi is apparently impressed by part of the story and asks Nicola if it is true. Naomi concludes with the comment “I think that’s cool.” Nicola appears to enjoy the attention she receives from Naomi for her writing, and within the supportive structure of the writing response group, Nicola is able to trust that Naomi’s response is genuine. When Naomi asks if a part of the story is true she is apparently uncertain, but obviously believes it could be true. This tells Nicola that she is capable of creating writing that seems life-like, affects the audience, and promotes audience reflection and reaction. In other words, Nicola is a good writer who can convince her audience that what she writes about is life-like.

Nigel makes the next response to Nicola’s writing, and he too, is admiring, if a little tongue tied, as he praises what she has done. Again, Nicola is told that she has written well - she is a good writer. The effect of these responses on Nicola is immediate and obvious: The force of the responses and the value her writing receives, leaves Nicola appearing overwhelmed and literally gushing for breath.

Nigel: I wouldn’t make any changes. I think it’s a great story. I think it’s, well, you never want to miss a part. It’s, it’s, that is such a great story!

"Admiration" August 2001
Nicola receives these responses from Nigel as genuine and accepts them as defining herself as a good writer. Nicola responds without words: she is obviously excited and breathless, beaming a huge smile.

While Nicola was obviously pleased with the responses she received from her writing response group, Keith's experience in his writing response group lead him to change his personal opinion of his writing. On this occasion group members were reluctant to share their writing. Keith was asked to read by the teacher, and did so willingly.

The responses from the group told Keith that he had written well, and had found a topic that other children enjoyed and were interested in reading about. Keith beamed an enormous smile, and seemed surprised at the responses he received. Before Keith read to the response group it was likely that he would have chosen to not publish his writing (sharing writing was the usual precursor to deciding to publish). After receiving the responses from his group, however, Keith seemed to have new energy, and a commitment to continue working on this piece of writing.

Alexa: I think he really explains things that are going on really clear, and I think it's a good piece of writing.

Alana: I think it's got really good descriptions in it.

Melanie: I like the way he described people in it.

Teacher: I thought it sounded fantastic. It sounded like a really fierce team that you were going to play against, and the rumour "they say he has steel caps in his boots" makes it sound like something everyone has talked about in the team. It sounds brilliant.

Keith, what sort of help would you like from the group today?

Keith: Well, when I was reading it myself, I didn't think it sounded as good as people said it did.

Continued over page...
Keith seemed excited about the response for his writing. The admiration for his writing, and his excitement give Keith the motivation to return to his writing with a renewed vision (revision). He said, "When I was reading to myself, I didn't think it sounded as good as people said it did". Keith apparently trusts the opinions of the group members - he offers no resistance to their praise, indeed he accepts the praise with enthusiasm and renewed energy. This is a good example of how the energy in writing response group provides the fuel for growth in writing.

The admiration of a writer's competence provides information to the writer that helps them to form an identity of themselves as a writer. This link is strong when the writer can trust the information given to them, such as within the writing response group setting.

6.3.2 Acknowledging and Articulating what the Writer has done

Through the writing response groups, children were presented with opportunities to show what they knew about writing. This was accomplished through what they had written, and through the responses they offered to other writers. Sometimes, these responses provided an opportunity to process the information the teacher had presented during writing lessons. The children may not have fully understood an idea that had been taught during a writing lesson, but the opportunity to talk about the idea within the writing response group sometimes served as an opportunity to process the information, and check their understanding with others.

The day after the teacher had taught a lesson identifying the structure of a newspaper article, Max wrote a newspaper article and brought it to his writing response group for comment.
The article was based on a movie Max had recently seen. Max had selected an incident in the movie and described it in the style it could be written if it appeared in a newspaper.

Nicola: Well, I think it's a really good idea how you've written it as a newspaper article, 'cos like, the teacher has just shown you a newspaper article and then you go and take that idea and write about that movie.

"Acknowledgement" September 2001

Nicola reinforces what Max has done. She acknowledges that he has chosen to retell an incident through a newspaper article rather than through narrative, and that he has been successful in doing this. Nicola's response may also serve to remind and define for other group members how a newspaper article can be written when she mentions that newspaper article writing was the teacher's lesson on the previous day.

Nigel used the writing response groups to test his understanding of how a narrative is composed. Several weeks previous to this group session, the teacher had taught lessons on how a narrative is constructed, identifying the orientation, problem, solution to the problem in a graph form to illustrate the level of excitement an audience may feel as they read the narrative. Nigel seemed to be processing the content of these lessons as he described Adela's writing. His response positioned him as someone in the class who understands the 'mystery' of how a narrative can be graphically plotted. While Nigel may have positioned himself as someone who understands a narrative, his response also served to alert other group members to the structure of Adela's writing, both an admiration of Adela's competence and an explanation of how other group members could achieve a similar effect in their own writing.

Nigel: Like last week how Mrs Davis said that you go up and you go straight down (reference to a narrative story line plotted on a graph). You kind of changed that around a bit more. You've just made it so it's up, down, down, up. That's kind of like you have describing parts where it goes, "She's under the wood and she's trying to get out, and then she sees an ambulance and then 'broop' (to signify an upward movement on the narrative graph), another hurricane comes and like after shocks". Like I think since the part where she sees the girl in the bandana and then she finds out she's in a place where she thought she would never be. Something like that.

"Articulation" September 2001
Nigel's responses also allow him to try another role to that which he usually has at school - he gets to be the teacher and hold the attention of the co-operative members of his writing response group. Stating his knowledge of a narrative he demonstrates an understanding of a matter other students may not already possess.

The teacher questioned Nigel about his use of the narrative structure when he writes. Nigel stated that he had not consciously thought about the structure of any narrative he had ever written. The teacher learned from this response session that Nigel had not previously processed the information presented in the 'narrative' lessons, and had not followed a narrative structure in his own writing. This assessment helped the teacher to remind Nigel of the narrative structure in his future writing, and to provide opportunities for him to talk about what he was trying to achieve in his own writing.

The acknowledgement of writing contained in these responses provided positive information to writers about their writing, as well as how well they had written by demonstrating particular elements of structure or style. This information contributed directly to the formation of the writer's identity, and subsequent responses would continue to support or challenge this identity. However, these responses also created social energy as they paved the way for talk that can be described as narrative play, and consequently gives life to the writing as future possibilities are discussed. The metaphor of writing having life has previously been used by Graves when he described writer's recognising the options they have for developing their writing.

The responses included in this category have allowed members of the response groups to show what they know and understand about writing. While these responses have allowed the responder to distinguish themselves as particular kinds of literate members of the writing response group - knowledgeable and perceptive - they have also served to align the responder with the writer. The acknowledgement of what the writer had accomplished created a social network (Dyson, 1989) between children, which continued to strengthen the social networking developing within groups.
6.3.3 Acknowledgement that the Writing is Worthy of Defending against Undue Criticism

Sometimes it is not the author who asserts their control over a piece of writing that has received undue criticism. In such a case, it may be the other members of the response group who assert the author's ownership and control, by supporting the author's choices, and perhaps questioning the value of the criticisms. This is what happened to a piece of writing by Nigel. Max questioned the accurate use of the term 'crash' to describe the plane's landing when the pilot had lost control. Max thought the scenario of a crash would be more serious than that described by Nigel and explained why he might have chosen different words. However, Max's criticisms were met with unprecedented opposition from four of the girls in the writing response group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Max:</th>
<th>Well, did the plane ditch or did it properly crash?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigel:</td>
<td>Well, what do you mean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max:</td>
<td>Well, ditch is when it's a controlled ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigel:</td>
<td>Oh, no, the motor breaks and it went ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max:</td>
<td>Well, then they wouldn't be able to ditch it because it went straight into a spin...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adela:</td>
<td>Well other people won't know that 'cos like they're not all experts...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max:</td>
<td>Yeah, but some people will!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicola:</td>
<td>But not as much people know about planes as you do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adela:</td>
<td>Yeah, I don't think much people will know about that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda:</td>
<td>Yeah, well like everybody says, it's just really good and I think that I would like to hear the rest of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adela:</td>
<td>I enjoyed it and I think you can do lots with it and take it a long way, and I can't wait to hear more of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi:</td>
<td>I think I really want to hear the rest of the story and I can't wait.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Defending" September 2001
During the exchange that took place, Nigel invited Max to clarify the issue under debate when he asked Max, "What do you mean?" Max was then presented with the opportunity to showcase his expertise. This might have placed Max in a helpful, expert position, however, Max's comments were perceived as a confrontation to Nigel's authority over his own writing. Max and Nigel interrupted each other to get their own points stated. Interruptions like this had not been part of the successful experience of this group in previous sessions. Adela then let Max know that his requirement for accuracy was unnecessary: "Well, other people won't know that 'cos they're not all experts". However, Max is not easily appeased, and perhaps his sense of value to the group was being eroded when he replied, "Yeah, but some people will." Presumably, 'some people' included Max!

6.4 Narrative Play

The discussions that took place in some groups, became a collaborative form of narrative play (Dyson, 1989). Narrative play allows possibilities for future writing direction to be presented to the writer by participants in the response group, as well as for the writer to orally rehearse changes and further developments (revision). The writer retains ownership over the original text, yet is able to test out new ideas within the supportive environment of the response group. The idea for the narrative play came from the piece of writing being shared.

6.4.1 Activating a Shared Group 'Memory'

Some children played the game of 'narrative play' very well. They entered the world a writer had created through writing, respecting the writer's creation of characters, scenes, and events. When these children spoke about the writing, they spoke as if they had been there to see an event, to talk to a character, or had seen the scene described. The comments made by these children helped to focus the writing response group by retelling a part of the writing. Sometimes the retelling was verbatim, and at other times it was given from the responder's perspective.
Nigel's response to Nicola's writing about a cat named Fluffy, who had leapt from the top of Auckland's Sky Tower was a good example of how narrative play serves to activate a group memory.

Nigel: I liked the part when it came flying down the Sky Tower, ooooo, and like it's just a comedy sort of movie, story, sort of writing. I think it was pretty good.

Nicola: 'Cos I was trying to make it a bit like a cartoon. 'Cos I was trying to write it up like a special cat.

This exchanges between Nigel and Nicola served to support the formation of Nicola's sense of identity as a writer, as she reflected upon Nigel's comment, then stated her intention for this piece of writing to be cartoon-like. Nicola possibly felt great support from Nigel, whose comments helped her to clarify her intention for this writing as cartoon-like. Nicola's response to Nigel also created an alignment between these two children, strengthening the social networking (Dyson, 1989) taking place within the group. This support became part of the social energy the writing response group offered to Nicola when her writing was talked about as something all group members can experience. In fact, Nicola concluded this session by stating:
Creating New Group 'Memories'

Creating new group 'memories' was achieved when the members of the writing response group talked about future possibilities for the writing. Rather than retelling the story, the group members narrated new parts for the writing. Again, the group members accepted the narration, and entered into the new creation of the writing. This kind of talk directly gave life to the writing: new ideas were presented and molded, based on the original ideas of the writer. The knowledge that others thought a piece of writing had future possibilities supported what the writer had already written, and strengthened the social networking within the group as members worked on collaboratively narrating the writing with the writer's permission. At the same time the social networking allowed the writer to try different roles, and move between their own, imagined world, and the wider, social world (Dyson, 1989) of their peers, as they formed their writer's identity.

Nicola's writing about "Fluffy" provided many examples of creating new group 'memories'. An interesting feature of this particular group session was that Nicola accepted all suggestions made by group members as future possibilities. Perhaps Nicola's enthusiasm allowed the group to be forthcoming with suggestions, contributing to the energy that seemed present in the group's discussions.

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Adela: Well, like maybe one night it (Fluffy) was on your bed and it went missing, and maybe you follow it and then you find out it has super powers like it can fly or ...

Max: Maybe it's a member of the CIA or FBI.

A few exchanges later:

Nicola: Yeah, I was thinking about making a sequel to this one and making the cat somewhere else. Yeah, and I love the idea of following it and finding its super powers.

Adela: Or maybe you shift it to another part of the world in a different series and then it climbs up the Eiffel Tower.

"New memories" August 2001
Once again, Nicola seemed to have been swept up in the energy of the group, and claimed she was already considering writing a sequel - which would certainly solve any potential problem of how to include all the ideas suggested by group members. The energy of the group enthused the participants, who in turn inject new ideas into the discussion. Adela, for example, suggested that 'Fluffy' had super powers, and a few exchanges later, suggested Nicola write a series about Fluffy and great towers around the world.

The exchanges by the members of this group do give life to Nicola's writing, give her authority over a piece of writing she is obviously excited about, and with all the possibilities for sequels, really do give Fluffy nine lives!

'Thrillers' and 'Mysteries' seemed to invite and generate many suggestions for writing among the children in this study. Amanda's writing about a young woman who received mysterious notes, and veiled threats to her safety, aroused the imagination and excitement of the students in her writing response group. Amanda stated the particular help she would like from the group: "Well, maybe what's written in the next letter. And how she would react." The members of the response group each contributed ideas, adding a little more mystery, excitement, or suspense. The group members freely give their ideas, and Amanda appeared to consider them all. The suggestions given to Amanda for her writing created an atmosphere of tension and excitement in the group. Each group member had ideas to offer, and was part of the collaborative, narrative play that gave life to Amanda's writing. Each group member implicitly accepted the narrative created by Amanda - none offered criticism, or suggested that a part be altered - and offered possibilities for future writing direction collaboratively, building on each other's ideas.

Nicola:  
Well, like maybe she could be quivering or crying or maybe stumbling a bit. Or not knowing what to say. Yeah, and maybe like it was maybe a ransom note where maybe she has to give some money to spare her life or something.

Naomi:  
Well, like same as Nicola, he, or the person who's sending the letter could ask her to meet him somewhere like at the park or something, and like late at night, and maybe do it there.
Nicola immediately responded to Amanda's request to know how the main character might react to the note she had received. When the teacher asked if the reaction might be fear, Nicola agreed, and then moved on to suggesting what the note might contain. When Naomi responded she showed some value for Nicola's ideas: "Well, like same as Nicola", and then extended the contents of the note to include a late night meeting arrangement. Nigel included the previous suggestions from Nicola and Naomi, and built on them. His idea was to name a time and place for the meeting. Then Nigel included how the character might react, "She knows she's got to stick up to herself (stick up for herself) and end whatever is going on." Nigel added that the character would want to end this situation and ask the note writer what he wants. The many possibilities suggested to Amanda for future direction in this piece of writing were given enthusiastically, and without devaluing the contributions of any other group member.

Max's suggestion moved slightly away from the previous suggestions - he seemed to have moved past that stage in the story, and onto another incident - and Max suggested a further complication in the story-line when the main character's boyfriend is also threatened. Max's response also gave him the opportunity to assume the role within the group of someone who can move beyond present discussions and identify other areas needing attention that other
group members have not yet noticed. Max often assumed this role, perhaps fulfilling his need to distinguish himself as a particular kind of literate member of the group. Adela had the final opportunity to make suggestions for Amanda's writing, and she returned attention to the note received by the main character, offering more specific ideas for what the note could state. Then, like Max, Adela moved to other incidents that could occur in the writing.

The ideas offered by each group member left the control for the writing firmly in Amanda's hands. Amanda could pick and choose between all the suggestions and determine for herself the future direction for her writing. This placed Amanda in the role of one who was a collaborative member of the writing response, but one who could create a unique piece of writing (Dyson, 1989), that would distinguish Amanda as a particular kind of literate person.

6.4.3 Authority for the Writing Residing with the Writer

Beyond the collaborative nature of the writing response groups and the temporary giving of authority, there was an assumption by all group members that ownership and control of a piece of writing resided with the author. In one writing response group session in which the teacher/researcher was a participant, the writer made their authority over their writing plaintively clear. The writer's name was David. David presented himself as a motivated, diligent, and co-operative member of the class. David shared his writing of a brother and sister who were camping in the bush. The siblings did not get along very well, and during their camping trip tensions became overwhelming for the sister, who reacted by pushing her brother into a lake. David asked the group for further ideas to strengthen his writing. The teacher/researcher, and all group members, had offered an idea for the future writing direction of David's writing. David listened to all the ideas presented by group members, and, as was usual told the group which ideas he was considering using. Rather than selecting the idea presented by the teacher/researcher, David chose another child's idea. The teacher/researcher was both surprised and excited by David's choice.
Ethan: There could be a strong current in there so she's pushed him in and he can't get out 'cos it's just pulling him in deeper.

Teacher: Hmm. I'm thinking that maybe when the brother gets pushed into the lake, maybe he can't even swim. So that would be serious - that would be frightening. Maybe he loses consciousness and needs to be resuscitated and maybe that's going to give Rebecca a big scare. So maybe in those few moments when he's not breathing, maybe for her she stops breathing and she's standing still with her life flashing before her eyes and she realises the consequences of her actions, and what her life could be like.

David: I think I'm going to go with Ethan's idea, 'cos maybe there's like a strong current and he gets pulled away.

"Writer's authority" September 2001

David stated his intentions for the future direction of his writing with confidence. He was not concerned with giving offence to any of the group members, including the teacher/researcher, for not choosing their idea, having given the suggested ideas consideration (as assumed by the 'Hmm, Hmm' sounds David had been making as group members made their suggestions). When David stated he would work with Ethan's idea, the teacher/researcher was surprised, believing that David would choose the idea she had suggested. This belief was based the teacher/researcher's enjoyment of narrating an idea for David's writing, and a past history of conferencing with children who will unquestioningly do what their teacher suggests for writing.

This particular writing response group session highlights some important considerations of a writer's authority over their writing. As a member of the writing response group, David received the teacher's ideas as having similar status to the ideas presented by other group members. In writer-teacher conferences children may feel they are offered only one choice regarding the future direction of their writing, or that what the teacher suggests is not a choice but a directive. Within the writing response group the writer is offered many ideas and may feel free to choose any, or none, without giving offence or suffering any negative
consequences by choosing one idea over others. The immediate audience is expanded in the writing response groups to include four or five people, rather than the single audience present in a teacher-writer conference. This may help the writer to evaluate ideas suggested and make a choice based on their own vision for the writing, as well as presenting themselves as a particular kind of literate person within the group.

6.5 Social Energy

Social energy is not contained within one particular type of response. Rather, it is the interaction between group members that accompanies a response made to a piece of writing. The interactions seem to have a snowball effect: one response generates another, and enthusiasm grows with each response. Group members seem to be committed to making suggestions for future writing direction when social energy is created, and this supports the writer to try new ideas in their writing. The social energy provides a collaborative narrative for the writing, but also creates a social network of writing response group members that allows members to align and to distinguish themselves from other members.

6.5.1 Social Energy Generating New Ideas for writing, and Motivation for the Writer

The responses made within some writing response groups allowed writers to orally rehearse their future writing directions using ideas provided, or initiated, by group members, as well as ideas which the writer had not previously revealed to the group. In these situations, the writer is able to negotiate their way between their own, imagined world, and the wider world of the writing response group members'. The group members were able to monitor the ideas presented by the writer for consistency and accuracy within the writing, as well as to support the writer in retaining ownership and control of the writing.
Nicola: In some ways I disagree with Nigel and like not stopping publishing, because I think you could keep on publishing and like publish this but, and then you publish your next chapter when you've done the next chapter, like one chapter after another, because I know that's what some authors actually do.

Adela: You're giving me an idea, because what I think - I like your idea, Nigel - but what I'm thinking of is that I could publish this and then I can think another bit and then make a copy for myself so I can read it over and over again, and then I can get more ideas for my second, and maybe a third, and maybe even a fourth. I could put all my pieces that I've published together in a book, so I could make a big book.

Nigel: Yeah, you'd have to do a bit more copies than just four.

(Whole group giggling and agreeing - but being very encouraging.)

Nicola: Yeah, and maybe like what you could do is maybe do some pictures to help describe, like maybe do a picture of the hippy with everything - it could look quite neat. When you were reading that bit about the bandanas I could just imagine you and all that stuff.

Nigel: Like in the next couple of weeks or maybe months you're going to make up a really cool book, and I'm sure that the whole group would like to help. It's going to be quite exciting to see the end of a book.

"Social energy" October 2001

The interactions between Adela, as the writer, and Nicola and Nigel, as responders, involved the interplay of suggestions from three people. The responses were not based on the content of Adela's writing, but were based on what she could do with this piece of writing in future. Nicola's suggestion to Adela that the writing could be published apparently appealed to Adela. Adela then told Nigel, "I like your idea, Nigel" (about carrying on with more chapters) but asserted her control over the future of the text. Adela decided to publish each chapter as she wrote it, collating the chapters into a "big book". The increased life expectancy of this piece of writing excited Adela and motivated her to continue her writing, energised by the responses from her group.
6.5.2 Writer Acknowledging the Positive Support of the Group

Although responses in this category could be grouped above with 'Acknowledgement' (point 1), they are included here to demonstrate the social energy created within some writing response groups, and the writer's assertion of ownership and control over their writing.

On many occasions writers came to the writing response groups not knowing what to write next, or which idea to choose over any other. The writer often accepted an idea given by a group member, and made it their own by including it in their writing. The collaborative nature of the writing response groups meant the suggestions belonged to anyone in the group who could include them in their writing. This demonstrated the writer's willingness to give temporary authority to another member of the writing response group while their writing was being discussed. At the conclusion of discussions, however, the authority was always returned to where it had originated - the author.

As children offered suggestions to a writer for the future direction of a piece of writing, they entered into a collaborative, narrative play (Dyson, 1989). The participants of this narrative play (the members of the writing response group) shared the world the writer had created through their writing. The writer was told how the group participants saw and experienced that world, and offered recreations of that world in their responses. Using information from the response group, the writer was able to make changes, or choose to not make changes.

Adela

I love it how you put in the end bit that your wife and children move to Italy and your little boy wants to be just like you were when you were younger. And I like it how you've put in the bits where it was going on and off like you were in the lead and then other people were in the lead and stuff. When you go, "we're coming to the flags," 'cos you must have been on the last lap, and you and this other guy are pushing and shoving and you made it, and that must have been so cool. That was so cool.

"Acknowledging group" August 2001

Before Adela's final comment, she states, "That must have been so cool". Adela is telling Nigel that it must have been thrilling for him to have won that race when it was such a close
match, yet the real Nigel has never driven a racing car. Adela let herself be swept up in the story that Nigel was telling - as surely Nigel would like his audience to be - and shares in the success of an important car racing win.

6.5.3 Social Energy as the Fuel for Writing

Attention, support, energy, and enthusiasm were usually present in the writing response group sessions. Dyson (1989) believes that young children's fuel for writing exists in the social energy of their peers as they talk about a piece of writing.

| Max: | Maybe the whole group could make a book together. We could just put all these stories together and every group could put all their stories together. |
| Nicola: | And, well, for an end of term thing, we could do our last activity together and make an entire book - one story and each person could do a different part and like three or four pages each. |
| Adela: | Do you mean like you know how you have to draw pictures and like there's three bits of paper folded over, and then one person draws on it and you're not allowed to look and one person writes it and then they don't know what someone else has written and then another person thinks? |
| Nigel: | Maybe we could make a 'Carmen Sandiego' thing. Whole group giggles in support of the idea. Like you've got one thing like a racing car driver and then he goes to another world and things? |

The notion that something about the writing could be changed further supported the acknowledgement that the writing was interesting and worthy of attending to and talking about. The responders and the writer began to collaboratively create changes in the writing. The entering into playing around with characters, images, and events gave life to the writing.
The writer and responder shared their understanding of the world created on paper, and considered possibilities for future writing direction. The writer could choose to align themselves with the suggestions made by a responder, or to distinguish themselves from the suggestions and the responder. In so doing, the writer is forming their identity, defining themselves by the choices they made for their writing.

6.5.4 Asserting Author Authority over a piece of writing

Not all comments made in the writing response groups were positive and admiring. Sometimes the comments offered criticism. Criticisms created a situation for another kind of negotiation for the writer. Sometimes the writer behaved defensively, explaining the effect they were trying to achieve in their writing. In so doing, the writer was brought closer to identifying their intention in writing, and to declaring their ownership and control of the writing. On other occasions the writer asserted that their intentions and the resulting writing were desired. The assertion of ownership and control again announced the writer as a particular kind of literate member of the class.

Adela shared a piece of writing with her response group that described a school principal as a chewing gum eater who offered Adela’s character some gum she had been chewing. When Adela read that part the children in the writing response group groaned that it was 'gross', and were confronted with a conflict of how they would describe a school principal with how Adela had described the principal in her writing. This created a dilemma for some responders as they balanced their literary criticisms with their acceptance of the character Adela had created.

*Max*

Well, the chewing gum part, well I don't actually think that the principal would actually do something like that... it could be another kid at school or maybe someone who went to the school in ages past, or someone who's like real old.

Continued over page …
Transcript of response group session continued from previous page

Nigel
I don't think that that's a really good story. Well, I think that it's a stupid story. I'm not like being mean or something, but can you really imagine anyone who would go along chewing chewing gum and then go and stick it in someone else's mouth? It's revolting. To have a principal that would go around telling people dirty jokes, well I think that principals are supposed to be people who are caring and nice.

Amanda
Well, you know that part where in the train and the principal's being really awful and saying horrible things and that, 'cos I don't really think that things like that would really happen. So you might want to change that.

Adela
Well, it doesn't really have to be a principal, because it's not based on anyone or something like that. It's just something I made up to give people a bit of a laugh or something like that. It's not really...

Nigel
It's not funny. It's revolting.

Adela
Yeah, but people laugh at things that are revolting and things.

Max
Well, sometimes, but it depends.

Adela
Yeah, but if you hear William or Jamie say something disgusting, well I see people laugh.

"Asserting authority" October 2001

The writing response group has acted as monitors on the reality of Adela's writing. The principal created by Adela was too implausible to sit comfortably with Nigel, and he gingerly voiced his opinion. Other group members supported Nigel, and his conviction regarding the inappropriate behaviour of a principal was repeated assertively: "It's not funny. It's revolting." Adela, at least momentarily, seemed to believe she might be a victim of the 'old boy's network' when she told Nigel that people laugh at similar things when they have been written by William or Jamie. After this group session Adela recorded her thoughts in her Journal: "I liked my writing group. I liked my comments that I got. I did get upset with Nigel ... (he) said it could go a long way, and then he said it couldn't go a long way and that made me angry. But it was a fair comment I think."
Similar negotiations took place when responders challenged the authenticity of character's actions, or scene descriptions within the writing. While the writing response group sometimes offered invaluable advice to the writer, on other occasions the writer would remain steadfast in their stance to what they had written. The writer's decision to exercise their right to choose which of the available options for their writing would be included placed them firmly in the author's chair as authority over their writing.

6.6 Children's Perceptions of the Writing Response Groups - Journal Comments

Children wrote in their Journal comments to record impressions of the writing response groups, as well as the experience of writing. A common theme in the journals was the children referring to themselves as writers, and talking about 'my writing'. The children's assertions of themselves as writers bore strong correlation to their participation in the writing response groups, and in particular the responses they and their writing received. Within the writing response groups, as the transcripts of group sessions have highlighted, there was room for children to negotiate a position for themselves as particular kinds of literate people. The stances toward writing and the group, and the role assumed by the children were not challenged in the group context. The acceptance present in the groups, allowed the children to renegotiate their roles as particular kinds of literate people. Consequently, the notions of ownership and control of their writing seemed firmly established in these children.

Alana Reading my writing in the group makes me feel good that the people in my group are taking on what I said and listening to what I say. Instead of having my stories just stay in my book I can get ideas and it will make me want to write because of the comments I would have got.

"Forming writer identity" October 2001

Alana's writing response group not only supported her identity as a writer, giving her confidence in her abilities, but it pushed her to explore new ideas that she would not have considered if she had been writing on her own. Indeed, the writing response group seemed to inspire her. This group not only attended to Alana's writing, acknowledging her accomplishments, it created an atmosphere of narrative play where the members of the group
shared Alana's imagined world. With the group's support in exploring her imagined world, Alana learned more about the world she was creating in her writing, and something about herself as a writer. The greater the strength of the connections Alana was making between how she felt perceived as a writer by her group, and the roles available to her as a writer, the more personal and meaningful her writing became. It became easier for Alana to experiment with her writing because she felt acknowledged and supported by her group.

Angela

I think that the writing groups are like something to look forward to. There are so many ideas to use. Sometimes there are stories that have so many possibilities. As a writer I feel that when I write the story it seems to be just right, but when I take it to someone they tell me what it needs to have that little bit more. Then, if I put in that bit, my story is even better. That is what is the cool bit about having a person listen to my writing.

"Forming writer identity" September 2001

Angela acknowledges that the narrative play within the writing response groups provided her with ideas for writing that she would not have considered if she worked alone. Angela considers the writing response group to be her audience and expects that the group members will be listening to her writing. She knows that the group listens to enjoy her writing, but also to make her aware of parts that may need development or clarification. Angela values these responses from the group and knows that when she heeds their advice and does add 'that little bit more', as suggested by her group, then her writing will be 'even better'.

Angela identified herself as 'a writer' through her journal comments. She seems aware of group dynamics and appropriate ways to manage conflict within her group, indicating a commitment to the success of the group.

David

The difference between an audience and the writing groups is that when they finish reading they comment on my writing and give me ideas. Also, when I'm reading my story by myself I find nothing wrong with it. When I read it to the writing group I stop and try to figure out what I was trying to write about.

"Forming writer identity" October 2001
These are interesting comments from David. David seemed to be distinguishing between an audience to whom a published piece of writing is presented, and a writing response group who offer response to writing which, while it may be completed, is open to suggestions. This distinction highlights a perception of published writing being final and draft writing being alive with possibilities for change. If this is David's perception, it seems possible that he learned little about the reception of his published writing by an audience, but he learned a great deal about his writing, and about himself as a writer, when his writing was open for discussion, and given life by that discussion.

Alexa

I think the writing groups are like something to look forward to. There are so any ideas to use. Sometimes there are stories that have so many possibilities. As a writer I feel that when I write a story it seems to be just right, but when I take it to someone they tell me it needs to have a little bit more. That is what is cool about having a person to listen to my writing.

"Forming writer identity" September 2001

Alexa confidently identifies herself as a writer. This identity is not challenged in the writing response groups - rather, it is supported. Alexa often wrote at home (as was revealed by her mother during a teacher-parent meeting), yet this was not made public at school until the writing response groups were operating. At that time Alexa felt that writing was something that was celebrated in the class. A connection was being made between what was important to Alexa in her private world and the social, academic world of the writing classroom.

Alexa is not talking about the passive listening of an audience who may not accept and enter the world she has created in her writing when she writes, "That is what is cool about having a person to listen to my writing". Alexa is talking about an audience who is active in recreating Alexa's world, and gives life to her writing by talking about future possibilities. The responses of the group energise Alexa's writing, indeed, she looks forward to the writing groups.
6.7 Teacher/Researcher Perceptions of Individual Children

It was the change in behaviour of several of the children who are described in this section that first alerted the teacher/researcher to the social networking and social energy that was present in the writing response groups. For these children the writing response groups provided the arena to renegotiate their literate identity within a supportive structure where genuineness was taken for granted, and distinguishing oneself from the group usually brought acceptance rather than mistrust and criticism.

Yvonne was often quiet in class, and did not volunteer to answer questions. She seemed more comfortable in taking her lead from what other children in the class did. During early writing response group sessions, Yvonne often made responses such as: "I thought it was a good story", or "I thought it was good writing and I liked the story". Such comments seemed to place Yvonne in a 'safe' position: the responses were general and did not draw attention to any particular feature of the writing, nor to herself as a critic of writing. When it came time for Yvonne to make a suggestion for future writing, her comments were often inaudible, and Yvonne gave the impression she did not want to be heard.

However, as the writing response groups continued, Yvonne changed the way she responded to the writing that was read to the group.

Yvonne: You could add like how Rebecca is a pain to her brother. Like she is a pain and what she does, 'cos you haven't quite put that in yet - how she's a pain

"Legitimate audience and critic" September 2001

These comments suggest that Yvonne felt safe in offering these suggestions to David. Yvonne was making her voice heard in the writing response groups, and asserting herself as a legitimate audience for and critic of other's writing (Dyson, 1989). Toward the end of the year, Yvonne did something quite unusual. Rather than chorusing the general consensus of the group with a particular criticism, Yvonne made a stand and stated something different.
This was an enormous change in the type of comment Yvonne had been making:

Teacher Journal comment (5/11/01) "Yvonne is presenting her ideas and comments more positively and assertively. She seems to believe she really does have something to contribute to the group." Yvonne's comment suggested that she was willing to distinguish herself from her peers, and felt safe in doing this. Yvonne's comment also suggested a confidence in her own ideas, reflecting a growing awareness of her own skills as a writer.

The writing response groups offered an opportunity for Yvonne to learn about her writing and the writing of other children in the class, but more importantly, to learn about herself as a writer. When Yvonne had succeeded in writing well, members of her writing response group acknowledged this. The response group also acknowledged what Yvonne was trying to achieve in her own writing, even though she may have been unclear in her own intention, or unclear in what she had written. Yvonne was valued as a member of the writing response group, and her contributions gained her attention she might not have experienced otherwise.

No longer an inaudible participant in the writing response groups, Yvonne had found her voice as a writing critic, and renegotiated her role as a valuable contributor to the group.

Adela's reputation seemed to spoil the likelihood that she would be taken seriously as a writer in the classroom. She had received 'remedial' teaching since she started school. Boys were particularly resistant of her inclusion in groups, and she had frequent falling-outs with other girls in the class. However, in the writing groups Adela assumed a different role, and presented herself in a serious manner. She offered positive comments and was enthusiastic in her responses. Her confidence in expressing her ideas increased, as did the amount of writing she did during a writing session. In her writing Journal, Adela wrote that her opinions seemed to matter to writers, regardless of the friendships, and regardless of how much better Adela perceived the others as writers, than she perceived herself.
Today it came over me I had so much to say when I was in my conferencing group. I was happy when people came up to me and said they are going to use my ideas and liked them. It's made me feel like people like me. My writing has developed because of my writing group and their ideas and help. They are very encouraging to me and in my group there are people who don't like me but they do help me with my writing, and it helps me enormously, and I love what people say to me. My writing is developing good with the help I get from my group. I sometimes know the ideas that my group gives me, and I listen, too. There are good and bad points they give me.

"Forming writer identity" October 2001

The writing groups may have offered Adela the opportunity to redefine herself as a particular member of the classroom: someone who can write well, acknowledges the accomplishments of others, and is a legitimate audience to offer critique of peer writing. The safe boundaries, and expectations, of the writing response groups may have offered Adela the audience she craved to show herself in a different light, by presenting Adela with the opportunity to try a different role she had usually been offered in the classroom. These comments from Adela may reveal her developing sense of herself as a writer. They also acknowledge the support given by group members to allow Adela to renegotiate her place in the writing classroom as a person who is a legitimate audience for and critic of other's writing.

Zach's writing did not look good on the surface. He made many spelling errors and his sentences were not well constructed. During the first part of the year Zach appeared to be a reluctant writer, and often his writing was not completed. Zach would rather engage in off-task activities such as talking to friends, or drawing pictures. Yet, something exciting seemed to be happening for Zach within the writing response groups. Zach easily reached the minimum of writing two pages in a writing session, and was enthusiastic about sharing his writing. In fact, he often asked that his writing response group be allowed to be the first group on most days, and wanted to share his writing. Furthermore, his writing was surprisingly good.
The social networking opportunities within the writing response groups seemed to satisfy Zach's need to communicate with others. The interactions in the groups were structured around writing, and as Zach's writing was well received among his peers, it allowed for Zach to experience positive social interactions. The tentative nature of writing shared within the writing response groups, as well as that fact that the writer read their own writing to the group, meant that what Zach had written was not seen by group members. Therefore, untidy handwriting, and incorrect spelling were not visible to the group. Immediately, Zach's writing was not judged on the quality of surface features, but on the story being told. The interesting nature of Zach's writing (on topics such as rugby games, and Egyptian mummies) combined with Zach's obvious enthusiasm for what he had written seemed to ensure that Zach would receive favourable responses from his group. For Zach, participation in the writing response groups certainly fueled the energy for growth in writing.

6.8 Conclusions: Children learn to write by being Writers

At the beginning of the study, the teacher/researcher expected that talk in the writing response groups would reveal the types of comments most useful to writers for the purposes of revision. However, the writing response groups offered much greater opportunities for children to learn about writing and about themselves as writers, and in the process, to form an identity as a writer.

The acknowledgement of a piece of writing, and the articulation of what a writer had achieved in the writing, was the first step in supporting a writer's identity. For many children, particularly children like Adela, David, Yvonne, and Zach, the experiences they enjoyed in the writing response groups was rare in other aspects of their school life. In the writing response group others listened to their writing and the ideas they offered to other writers. These children were regarded as having a message worthy of attention, and they were allowed to respond in a manner that presented them accordingly. The constant layering of expectation and performance allowed many of the children in the study to present themselves to their peers as 'writers'.
The social energy created in the writing response groups supported children in making changes to their writing. Different from teacher-child writing conferences, the writing response groups allowed children to make decisions about what to change in their writing from a selection of ideas that had similar value. In the teacher-child writing conference children often surrender their authority of a piece of writing to the teacher without much negotiation (Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1984). In such situations the child is quickly positioned as having less authority over their writing than the teacher. The stance the writer often assumes is that of someone who surrenders their authority over their writing. The loss of their authority, or authorship, in turn shapes the roles that are available to them in the classroom. In the writing response groups described in this study, authority over a piece of writing was given to the respondents only temporarily, and was always returned to the writer.

The enthusiasm for the writing response groups, and requests from the children to include the groups as a daily event in the classroom were an indication of their success. The groups provided a much needed opportunity for children to establish social networks that were structured around a specific task (responding to writing), but also allowed children to present themselves as a member of a particular group, or distinguish themselves from a particular group. Children who appeared to be excluded from many social groups that existed in the classroom and the playground were given similar status to some of the more popular members of the class. Within the supportive structure of the writing response groups, members were recognised by what they had written and what they were trying to achieve in their writing, rather than their past social history. This presented a powerful opportunity for some children to renegotiate a place for themselves - at least within the writing response group - as a legitimate audience for and critic of other children's writing, and as a particular kind of literate member of the class. The willingness of the children in the class to allow other children to present themselves differently than how they were presented in social groups, made available roles different to those usually available to some children. These children then took the opportunity to present themselves differently, and by so doing gained access to the roles they perceived as having academic and social value. Access to these roles enabled these children to be supported in their attempts to be particular kinds of literate members of the class, and to successfully achieve their literacy goals.
CHAPTER 7
REFLECTING ON CHILDREN AS WRITERS

In bringing together theory of teaching writing, identity formation, and writing response groups it was noted that writing is both a cognitive and sociocultural activity. In accepting this view we, as teachers, need to examine our beliefs and practice in the teaching of writing. Central to this examination needs to be our view of the writer as they interact with their peers in the classroom during the writing process.

This study sought to examine the relationship between the formation of a writer's identity and writing response groups in the classroom. How the interactions between children in a writing response group support the formation of a writer identity was investigated through an analysis of the talk between children.

This chapter highlights how the essential elements of teaching writing, identity formation, and writing response groups together provide an effective classroom environment for children learning to write.

7.1 Strengthening the Role of the Writer

In strengthening the role of the child as a writer in the classroom, we need to shift our focus in the teaching of writing from both product and process to the child. As Calkins (1986) reminds us, we need to keep in mind that we are teaching the writer and not the writing. Successful learning about writing occurs when the child is able to experience what it means to be a writer, in particular asserting their ownership and control over the writing process. Activities that allow children to experience ownership and control over their writing are most effective in teaching children what it means to be a writer.
7.2 Identity Formation

A growing sense of what it means to be a writer enables children to make important personal connections to learning. In forming connections to learning children recognise the roles that will help them achieve their learning goals. When children are able to access these roles they are supported in their desire and attempts to be particular kinds of writers, and their sense of literate identity is reinforced. As examined in chapter three, access to the roles most desired by children has the power to determine engagement in literacy activities, and ultimately literacy success.

7.3 Writing Response Groups

This study highlighted that the most important part of the writing process took place as children interacted with their peers in writing response groups. The inclusion of writing response groups in the classroom was evidence of the value and importance placed on the interactions between children as they talked about writing. While the attentions and acknowledgements given to a writer create a social energy to develop a piece of writing, they also reinforce the child's identity as a writer. Most importantly, however, it was through the interactions that children to gain access to the roles in the classroom they believed would help them achieve their personal learning goals.

7.4 Discussion

The children in this study learned about themselves as writers through the interactions in the writing response groups. The establishment of the response groups allowed the children to present themselves as writers who were worthy of attention and acknowledgment. These responses created further opportunity for students to make personal connections to their learning, and to achieve what Lowe (2002) describes as negotiating a way to achieve self determined goals.
The writing response groups described in the classroom supported the formation of children's literate identity. The positive impact on some groups of children was particularly obvious. Several of the children who did not feel they were successful writers or popular members of the class, wrote in their journals feelings of being accepted and valued by their peers - feelings that were unique in their school experience.

Adela, like many children who did not see themselves as 'good' writers, received many favourable responses from her group, and this led her to write on topics that she had never before ventured to write on for fear of ridicule. Referring to one of these personal topics, Adela wrote in her journal, "I think writing what I did made me feel better inside. I have never said anything like that before because I would have thought people would laugh at me" (Journal Comment, 17/7). Yet, within the supportive structure of the writing response groups children like Adela felt safe to share their thoughts and feelings. This provided opportunities for this group of children to present themselves to their peers as children who could write about their personal experiences and were willing to share them, resulting in them enjoying new roles.

Writing response groups enabled the social energy of children to be expressed and acknowledged. This was exemplified by Yasmin when she wrote,

> **Yasmin**
> The most fun thing about writing groups is sharing the different ideas and helping people 'create' their writing.

"Acknowledging Social Energy" September 2001

Many of the children recognised the supportive, social energy given to them from the groups, and acknowledged support during group sessions, or in their journal comments. Other children benefited from the social energy created in their groups through narrative play. This was evidenced as they continued to develop their story lines, such as Nicola did with her 'Fluffy' cat writing.
The social energy created through response to writing by peers whose attentions are important is more valuable to writers than response by the teacher alone. Several children in the study were able to express this is simple, yet powerful terms, when they referred to themselves as 'a writer'.

Because untidy handwriting and poor spelling were not visible to group members (writer's read their writing aloud to the group) it was the content of writing and participation in the groups which were valued. Rather than being judged on the lack of surface feature accuracy, children whose handwriting and, or, spelling was poor were able to present themselves as legitimate group members. These children were able to accept responses from other children and offer appropriate responses to others.

One of the keys to the success of the writing response groups was that response was seen by the children as being useful. The responses were given during the writing process, and at the request of the writer. This enabled the writer to present their writing as a draft, rather than as a measure of their complete ability to write. This lessened the threat of the groups for many children, and made the groups more useful. Children who shared their writing in the groups consistently made changes to their writing as a result of the responses they received.

Our knowledge and understanding of peer writing response groups is steeped in historical traditions, as well as current theory (Gere, 1987, DiPardo & Freedman, 1988). Our valuing of writing response groups, however, has been limited by the assessment of their value in terms of the effect of talk on the subsequent revisions made by writers. Our concerns should not lie with whether talk in writing response groups will be task related, or if children will respond to similar issues as the teacher. This study showed that children did make sensitive and appropriate responses to others' writing. By shifting the focus to the writer, rather than the writing, as Calkins (1994) urges us to do, the power of these groups becomes visible.

The struggle for many teachers lies in balancing teacher control of the writing programme with the child's ownership and control of their writing, and their growing sense of writer identity. This requires a significant shift in viewing writing instruction as an individual
activity to the view of writing as a sociocultural activity. As teachers we need to enable children to access the roles they believe will support them in being the kinds of writers they desire to be. More than any approach to the teaching of writing, it is access to these roles through writing response groups that will determine children's literacy success.

Despite the challenges that the inclusion of writing response groups may present to teachers, the benefits of writing response groups in promoting writer growth presents a compelling argument for their inclusion in the classroom.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

There were two kinds of limitations to this study. Firstly, there were limitations in respect to teaching practice. This study does not attend to how to include and manage writing response groups in classrooms in practical ways. The establishment and continued functioning of the groups demanded a significant amount of the time usually devoted to all literacy activities in the classroom.

The second set of limitations concerns the restrictions of action research studies. The generalisations that have been made in this study are not made through the number of children involved in the study, but through the ideas that justify the classroom arrangement.

7.6 Implications for Future Studies

This study has raised important questions about the ways we arrange children's writing experiences. How to manage time within the classroom timetable to enable children to participate in writing response groups is an important consideration. The opportunity for all children to share their knowledge about writing requires teachers to make practical decisions regarding the frequency and duration of the group sessions. While this study touched on the influence of writing response groups on all participants, it was the affect upon the writer that took precedence. How writing response groups contribute to the formation of writer identity upon all group members deserves greater attention. We need to examine each of these ideas in greater detail to benefit children's learning about writing.
REFERENCES


