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ABSTRACT

A study investigated how writing skills were taught and learned in one low-SES, urban, whole language primary classroom. Participants were three teachers who team-taught a group of primary-age children and 11 children who were considered conventional writers, 3 of whom had learning disabilities. Teachers and children were observed twice a month for a school year during literacy instruction, and six visits were tape-recorded. Children's writing folders and journal entries were collected in September and compared to their writing samples from spring. Five writing skills (fluency, a sense of audience and purpose, organization, use of written language, and use of lively or engaging language) were examined holistically, and the skills of using compound or lengthy sentences, end mark punctuation, capitalization, and spelling were examined through word and sentence counts and error rates. Results indicated that the teachers were effective in helping the children with some skills but not others. While they changed their instruction mid-year to meet the needs of learners, their instruction was not always a part of the children's writing. More opportunities for editing and publishing and more direct, explicit instruction on particular skills may be needed for some of the children. (Two tables of data are included; 79 references, scoring rubrics for students' journal entries and for letters, sample scoring for a journal entry and a letter, a narrative account of one portfolio examination, and pre- and post-journal writing exercises for one child are attached.) (Author/RS)

Teaching and Learning Writing Skills in a Low-SES, Urban, Primary Classroom

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Running Head: Skills in Context

Abstract

Teaching and Learning Writing Skills

in a Low-SES, Urban, Whole-Language Primary Classroom

This study investigated how writing skills were taught and learned in one low-SES, urban, whole language primary classroom. These skills included fluency, a sense of audience and purpose, organization, use of "written" language (rather than oral), use of lively or engaging language, use of compound or lengthy sentences, end mark punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Participants were three teachers who team-taught a group of primary-age children and eleven children who were considered conventional writers at the beginning of the study, three of whom had learning disabilities. The teachers and children were observed twice a month for a school year during literacy instruction, and six visits were tape-recorded. Teachers were interviewed and lesson plans were photocopied. Children's writing folders and journal entries were collected in late September and compared to their writing samples in late March/early April. The first five skills (above) were examined holistically using a rubric, and the final four skills were examined through word and sentence counts and error rates. The teachers were effective in helping the children with some skills but not others. While they changed their instruction mid-year to meet the needs of learners, their instruction was not always a part of the children's writing. More opportunities for editing and publishing and more direct, explicit instruction on

particular skills may be needed for some of the children.

Teaching and Learning Writing Skills
in a Low-SES, Urban, Whole-Language Primary Classroom

Traditionally, classroom literacy instruction focused on the teaching of reading and writing skills through isolated drills and practice from textbooks and worksheets. Today, in many classrooms, knowledge of how children learn has changed these practices. Many view recent literacy research on development as mismatched with traditional approaches to instruction. Educators also argue that the traditional fragmented curriculum and lack of authentic literacy experiences work against the best interests of children. Research findings have shown that when writing skills are taught separately from the writing process, it has no significant impact on written language (Dowis & Schloss, 1993; Hillocks, 1984; Issacson, 1989; Purcell-Gates & Dahl, 1991). Results such as these have helped many teachers move from teaching isolated skills toward focusing on meaningful, relevant communication through whole language teaching. The purpose of this study was to examine how writing skills are taught and learned in one whole language classroom. These skills include fluency, a sense of audience and purpose, organization, use of "written" language (as opposed to oral), use of lively or engaging language, use of compound or lengthy sentences, end mark punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

Effects of Whole Language on Children's Writing

Recent research has shown that instruction from a whole

language perspective can positively affect children's writing processes and products. Children in whole language classrooms write more (Fisher & Hiebert, 1990; Dahl & Freppon, in press; Morrow, 1992), have more sophisticated and positive attitudes toward writing (Harris & Graham, 1993; Dahl & Freppon, in press; Scala, 1993) and use strategies like those of sophisticated writers (Dahl & Freppon, in press) more often than do children in traditional, skills-based instruction. While some studies have shown no significant differences in written products of children in whole language classrooms (Haggerty, Hiebert, & Owens, 1989; Stahl, Suttles, & Pagnucco, 1992; Stahl, 1993), other studies have shown that children in whole language settings write better nonnarrative compositions (Freppon, McIntyre, & Dahl, 1994; Knapp, Adelman, Marder, McCollum, Needles, Shields, Turnball, Zucker, 1992) and more complex stories (Freppon, 1993; Knapp, et.al, 1992; Morrow, 1992). Further, grade three through six children in meaning-centered classrooms acquired a grasp of "basic" mechanics at least as well as those of students in classrooms oriented primarily toward teaching these skills out of the context of students' writing (Knapp, et.al, 1992). Specific data is still needed on the relationship of what and how writing skills are taught and what is learned in whole language contexts.

While extensive research does not exist to explain exactly why children in whole language classrooms write better, many whole language practitioners suggest that children learn the

skills for effective written communication implicitly and indirectly through reading and writing functional and relevant texts (Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987, Calkins, 1986; Goodman, 1993; Goodman & Goodman, 1981; Graves, 1983; Smith, 1988). They believe that children will learn skills when the need arises, because people learn best the things they feel they need to learn (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1985).

Yet, there is increasing concern that whole language teaching, as it is being practiced, may not be meeting the instructional needs of all children (Delpit, 1986; 1988; 1992; Gersten & Dimino, 1993; Hood, 1993; Reyes, 1991; Stahl, 1993). Critics of whole language see it as a too-casual approach to teaching. Some are afraid students, left on their own, will learn incorrect skills, making remediation necessary and time consuming (Rosenshine, 1986). Others have cited instances of low-achieving students floundering in whole language classrooms (Reyes, 1991).

Some educators suggest that children not "of the culture of power" (Delpit, 1998), such as those of low-SES, minorities, or children with learning disabilities, may not learn necessary writing skills in whole language contexts without some direct, explicit instruction (Beck, 1990; Delpit, 1986; 1988; 1992; Duffy & Roehler, 1987; Gaston & Peretti, 1993; McIntyre, in press, McIntyre & Freppon, 1994; Roehler & Duffy, 1991; Templeton, 1991). Direct instruction, as viewed by these educators, does

not involve hierarchically-ordered subskills or teaching skills in isolation as in traditional instruction. Rather, it involves explanation (telling children the whats, whys and hows of good writing), modeling (showing children how to write something well), and guided and independent practice (helping children accomplish a task and then allowing them to try it on their own).

Teachers' Instructional Actions

Research on teachers' effective instructional actions (Duffy & Roehler, 1991) contributes to understanding the criticism of whole language instruction and the call for more direct, explicit instruction on certain aspects of literacy. Extensive research shows that when teachers carefully explain to students what is being learned, why it is being learned, when it will be used, and how it will be used, students learn more (Roehler, Duffy, & Meloth, 1986; Palinscar, 1986; Roehler & Duffy, 1986; Smith & Goodman, 1984). Further, when teachers regularly practice the use of "think-alouds" (Duffy, Roehler, & Herrmann, 1988), or modeling of cognitive processes, students learn more as well. Explanation and modeling can be ways of "scaffolding" (Bruner, 1960) or supporting students in accomplishing what they may not be able do independently. When scaffolds are used, they are used directly and explicitly (Rosenshine, 1993).

Clearly, some children need explicit instruction on skills others learn more easily. The issue may be more of what to teach directly, rather than whether to teach directly (Roehler, Duffy,

Meloth, 1986). Some suggest that the teaching of strategies enables learners to construct necessary information (Pearson & Dole, 1987). Integrating cognitive strategy instruction within a whole language classroom may help some children construct the necessary information about good writing that others construct on their own (Harris & Graham, 1993). Learners must be put into situations that allow them to construct the cognitive and metacognitive strategies "that will help them use their abilities in new situations, manage their own learning and thinking, know which strategies to use, why they are important, when to use them, and what to do when one does not know what to do" (Kulieke & Jones, 1993, p. 27). Delpit (1991) also helps us understand why this is important:

> The direct instruction of certain kinds of strategies would also help children acquire the culture of power because it would give them access to the major medium of power, written language...It is often necessary to be explicit both with what you're trying to communicate and why that information is important" (p. 542).

Thus, many educators are now advocating the direct, explicit teaching of cognitive strategies within whole language settings. Yet, it is still unclear how typical, practicing whole language teachers view the direct, explicit teaching of skills, what they understand about this kind of instruction, and the practical effects of their instruction.

Current Classroom Reality

There are many whole language teachers struggling with the issues of explicitness vs. discovery (Bruneau, Rasinski, Ambrose, & Holly, 1992; Dudley-Marling & Dippo, 1991; McIntyre, in press). In one study, teachers who team-taught discussed the issue of skills at length, agreeing by the end of the year that children "don't need skill lessons in isolation, but you do have to teach them" (McIntyre, in press.) Other whole language teachers may be misinformed or sent contradictory messages about the role of skill teaching. Dudley-Marling and Dippo (1991) explain:

> "We've found lots of teachers who felt that the explicit teaching of reading and writing skills ran counter to basic tenets of whole language teaching. A teacher in Toronto, for example, told us that she didn't teach spelling or punctuation because 'I'm holistic' and 'whole language teachers don't teach skills.'" (p. 584).

There is clear evidence that some teachers' beliefs and implementation of whole language are at odds with direct, explicit instruction. There is a need for a better examination of what occurs under the label "whole language" and an examination of direct, explicit instruction on the "skills" of literacy in meaningful contexts.

Current Study

Little research has examined the teaching of specific skills in meaning-centered classrooms, particularly in classrooms

with children "at-risk" for school failure. Much needs to be learned about how teachers view and implement writing skill instruction in whole language classrooms, which skills need direct, explicit teaching, and which are learned in naturally-occurring contexts. Educators need to understand the balance between explicitness and discovery. We also need to understand what it is teachers actually do in classrooms labeled whole language in order to understand the relationship between teaching and learning.

The purpose of this study was to describe what three whole language teachers believe about writing instruction, a variety of ways they teach specific writing skills to young, low-SES urban children, and the effects of this instruction. The following questions guided the study:

1) What writing skills do these teachers see as important for young children to learn? Why?
2) How do they teach these skills?
3) What writing skills are learned across one year of whole language teaching in this classroom?

Method

This was a descriptive case study of the literacy instructional practices in one team-taught classroom across one year and some of the writing skills eleven of the students in that class learned. The specific procedures for site selection, data collection, and analysis are described below.

Subjects. Three developing whole language teachers (Donna, Joy, and Tina) who team teach one nongraded primary group of children, 98% of whom qualify as low-SES, were selected for this study. There were 42 children in this classroom, 15 of whom had literacy-related learning disabilities. The children ranged in age from 6-9 in September. To assess the teachers' instructional orientations, I interviewed each using Richardson, et al.'s (1991) interview and Deford's (1986) Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile. All three held perspectives on the whole language side of this instrument. Donna was in her sixth year of teaching, Tina her fourth, and Joy third. Donna and Tina had had whole language undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs. Joy referred to her teacher education program as a "mix" of perspectives, and she graduated with a degree in special education.

The students selected for this study were eleven children who had begun and ended the year as "conventional" writers (Sulzby, 1991). Of the 11 children, three were children receiving instruction for reading and writing disabilities. Importantly, these 11 children were all in this classroom for the second year. Because it is "nongraded," the children have the same teachers for up to four years during their primary years.

Data collection procedures for instruction. I observed these teachers during literacy instruction approximately twice a month from September of 1992 through May of 1993 for a total of

18 visits. Instruction was documented through field notes, interviews, and an examination of lesson plans. I also tape-recorded six lessons, twice per teacher. Recordings of instruction and informal interviews were transcribed and incorporated into elaborated field notes after each visit. I formally interviewed each teacher three times across the year about her instructional practices. During these interviews, the teachers' lesson plans were photocopied and used for discussion about instruction during non-visit times.

Formal interviews began with "grand tour" (Spradley, 1979) style questions about instruction. Teachers described what and how they taught and why, what they viewed as most important about teaching primary children to read and write, and what their instructional successes and problems were. Then the teachers explained in global terms how they taught the "skills" of literacy. This was followed by specific questions on the writing skills measured in this study. These interviews occurred at the beginning and end of the school year.

The skills measured in this study were included because they are often those associated with good writers (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rowen, 1975) and effective communication (Durst, Laine, Schultz, & Vilter, 1990). Further, fluency and a sense of audience and purpose are those skills stressed in the teachers' state-wide reform assessment. Spelling, capitalization and punctuation are skills traditionally taught in primary

grades.

Analysis of instruction. Analysis began after the first six visits. I reviewed data in order to determine the data still needed. During this "scanning" period (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) I wrote intuitive, yet informed notes, questions, and comments about the writing instruction. These notes served as a guide for later data collection.

I pattern-coded (Miles & Huberman, 1984) data from all sources (field notes, tape-recordings, interviews, lesson plans) for teaching behaviors and talk related to the teaching of writing. First, I wrote a global description of the literacy instruction, and checked the accuracy of the description with the teachers. I adapted the description to capture an "emic" view of their classroom literacy instruction. Then, all "skills" teaching episodes were coded, and I delineated several categories of writing skills taught.

I then wrote vignettes of specific examples of how teachers taught these skills and, again, checked these descriptions with the teachers. I also estimated, from the lesson plans and field notes, the amount of instructional time spent on the measured skills. In all cases, the teachers changed the estimates to better reflect how much they focused on the skills listed. They reported that they often taught skills that were not listed in their plans.

Data collection and analysis procedures for learning. To assess writing skills, every piece of writing each of the eleven children produced during an entire week in late September and the first week in April were photocopied and analyzed as an authentic measure of their writing skills. These products included daily journal entries, the contents of writing folders (e.g., stories and other texts they worked on), content area writing, and any notes or incidental writing products the teachers could collect. These pre- and post- writing samples were analyzed in three ways.

First, two kinds of texts (journal entries and letters) that all children happened to have written, were selected so that uniformity for comparison scoring could be achieved. An holistic analysis was conducted to capture skills in fluency, awareness of audience and purpose, organization, use of a "written register" (Purcell-Gates, 1988), and use of lively or engaging language on each sample. Further analyses were conducted by counting words and errors to capture skills in complexity of sentences (lengthy or compound), end mark punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Third, an examination of each child's entire collection of samples was completed to augment, confirm, or refute the numerical scores given each writer.

To examine both holistic and local aspects of the 11 children's texts, the range of textual analyses listed above was completed on the 139 pieces of writing (39 letters and 100 journal entries) by four raters. The 67 pre- and 72 post-texts

were grouped by type (journal and letter) and were scored for all analyses in two day-long sessions. Three of the raters were experienced middle school English teachers pursuing a masters or doctoral degree in education. The fourth was an experienced primary grade teacher, who was skilled in text analyses. One of the raters had participated in state-wide writing assessments prior to this analysis.

Each text was coded by two raters for each analysis, with all demographic information about the texts and writers hidden from the scorers. The percentage of exact agreement initially made among the raters was computed for all the analyses. These percentages fell between .62 and .96. A third rater resolved all disagreements on all measures. Raters scored the texts holistically first, then proceeded to score each text (in stacks of 15) for the other measures.

Holistic Quality

A four-point rubric was developed for the journals and letters, using the data and previous research on young writers (Britton, et. al, 1975; Newkirk, 1989). The skills involved in the holistic analysis included fluency, a sense of audience and purpose (particularly with letters), organization, use of written language (as opposed to oral), and use of lively or engaging language. The local measures were not completely independent as sentence level complexity and mechanics were part of the overall holistic scoring. The rubrics used to score the samples and

accompanying examples can be found in Appendices A and B.

Linguistic Quality

Syntactic complexity. In order to capture the sentence complexity of young children's writing, the number of words per sentence and the number of simple and compound sentences were calculated for pre- and post- samples. First, raters simply counted the total number of sentences. "Sentences" written without punctuation were judged primarily by T-units, such that each sentence was an independent clause. However, cues such as the word "and" indicated to the scorer that there may be two clauses, and thus the rater scored it as a compound sentence. Scorers used their best judgments as to the writers' perceptions of sentences, thus use of fragments and run-on sentences were not captured in this analysis. Rather, apparent sentence-level errors were captured as end mark errors, which will be discussed below. For ease in scoring, the raters first "marked off" perceived sentences with slash marks. After raters reached agreement on what counted as sentences, the other local measures were completed. The greetings and closings of the letters were not counted in the analysis because the teachers wrote these prompts on the board before the children began to write.

The following definitions, adapted from Mullis and Mellon of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1980) guided the counting of the varied types of sentences. The examples come from these data (with corrected spelling for ease in reading).

simple sentences: a sentence that contains a subject and a verb. It may also have an object or subject complement. Simple sentences may have embedded clauses, but only contain one independent clause.

Example: You are my friend. (post-letter #34)

compound sentence: a sentence that contains two or more simple sentences.

Example: I like spring because I can ride my bike and I don't have to use a jacket. (post-journal #33)

After the counting of each type of sentence, raters were asked to make sure the number of simple and compound sentences totalled the number of sentences for each text.

Length and mechanics. Since length is correlated with quality in writing (Mullis & Mellon, 1980), a simple word count was completed in order to capture growth. Then, spelling errors were counted and scored as a proportion. Using an adaptation of the steps outlined by Mullis and Mellon, end mark and capitalization errors were calculated. The rules for scoring end mark errors included: 1) every "sentence" must have some type of end punctuation if the next sentence starts with a capital letter. If the writer omits end punctuation, but begins the next sentence with a capital letter, a punctuation error is scored; 2) if there is an apparent fragment at the end of the text with no end mark, it is scored as an error, and 3) the wrong use of punctuation is coded as an error (e.g. a period instead of a

question mark as needed). The rules for scoring capitalization included: Code the capitalization errors in the following situations: 1) the first word in a sentence is not capitalized, 2) proper nouns or adjectives are not capitalized, and 3) the pronoun I is not capitalized. (The many instances in which primary-grade children capitalize letters in the middle of words were not counted.) Examples of a journal entry and a letter and how they were scored can be found in Appendix C and D.

Case Study Analysis

After the scoring was complete and the quantitative data computed, I chose to examine the children's numerical growth scores individually. I wrote descriptive accounts of each of the eleven children, based on their scores. Then, I examined their entire portfolio contents for the September and April weeks in order to see whether the whole of their writing was clearly represented by the numerical scores. I extended the narratives I had written on each child by including information from their portfolios. I then asked the teachers to "tell me about" each child and how they viewed his or her literacy growth. I asked for specific information about the three children labeled "learning disabled." The information from the teachers enabled me to understand and categorize the children's learning, which augmented the information from the quantitative scores. After the descriptions were written, the teachers read and checked my summaries. One example of a narrative can be found in Appendix E.

Results

These three developing whole language teachers held definite ideas about instruction on some writing skills, and they had few or no ideas about instruction for other writing skills. Their whole language instruction can be described as dynamic because they constantly made changes over the course of the year, particularly with issues involving how much skill instruction children should receive. They struggled to understand how much they should "let go" of power and control in writing instruction and how much to "tighten the reins" (McIntyre, in press) and make decisions about what children should do.

The children did learn many of the skills that were taught and some that were never taught. However, they also did not learn well some of the skills that were purposefully addressed in instruction. I first describe the overall classroom setting and writing instruction, followed by the beliefs the teachers held and subsequent instruction concerning skills. Then, I describe the learning which resulted.

Description of Instruction

This team of teachers taught in two rooms which opened up to make one large room, and they used a small extra room down the hall for small group lessons. Children sat at tables scattered about the room. Several bookshelves held approximately 1000 books, including many nonfiction and poetry selections. The children had access to extensive science equipment, animals, and

manipulatives for mathematics.

Typical days across the year began with an extended reading period of approximately thirty minutes in which children self-selected texts and teachers observed or read with children. A daily read aloud time followed in which teachers and children read books to the class. A seventy-five minute language arts period in the morning usually included 45 minute small group lessons centered around a book and a follow-up writing activity. These lessons were highly varied across the year, yet nearly always included an opportunity for the children to write in response to the selected book or books. Often these lessons revolved around a social studies or science theme, and they sometimes included skill lessons (which will be described).

Within the 75 minute period, children worked at least 30 minutes (sometimes more, depending on how long small group instruction lasted) on texts from their writing folders, or from a variety of other choices. One weekly assignment included what the class called the "special person" letter. Each week a child was chosen as the "special person of the week," and the other children were to write a letter to him or her. On Monday of the week, one of the three teachers demonstrated the writing of a special person letter to the class. The "skills" taught through this procedure included a sense of audience, purpose, organization, and the conventions of a letter. The teacher also demonstrated correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, often

mentioning the latter two skills as she wrote. The following is one letter-writing protocol that occurred in October.

Donna gets the attention of the children, and asks them to look at the board. She tells them, "Our special person this week is Josh. Here's his name (She points to his name on the board.). Now what does this say?" (She points to the words, 'Dear Josh.')

Several children read, "Dear Josh."

"And this?" she asks pointing to the words, 'Your friend.'

Several children read, "Your friend."

"OK, now, when you write to Josh, keep in mind the kinds of things he might like to hear and the kinds of things he likes to do. You might even tell him why you like him, or something like that." Donna continues by eliciting from members of the class what they know about Josh while Josh listens and grins. Donna nods toward Josh and finishes, "He'll need these letters by Friday."

Journal writing occurred in the afternoons. The children had individual spiral notebooks in which they wrote for 10-30 minutes (longer toward the end of the school year). Topics were never provided for the children and most wrote each day for the entire period. Quiet talk was allowed during this time, and children could sometimes be heard spelling for each other, sharing their texts, and commenting on each others' work. The

teachers wrote in their journals at this time, or they occasionally took anecdotal notes on what the children said or did. Sometimes the teachers spelled words for the children, but usually when the children asked for a word to be spelled, the teachers responded with, "Spell it the best way you can." According to one of the teachers, the goal was to get the children to spell "functionally" in order for them to achieve the fluency they needed for self-expression. After the writing period, two or three children were usually invited to share what they had written with the group. Each week one of the teachers read the students' entries, and the teachers responded to the content of the text, sometimes in dialogue fashion in which they asked questions about what the children had written. For example, when one child wrote, "My mom is going to wash my stuffed animals," Joy wrote back, "Oh, neat. How many do you have?" When another child shared aloud, "I'm taking swimming lessons," Joy asked him where, and if he could swim in the deep part of the pool yet.

Teacher beliefs and subsequent skill instruction. There were some skills the teachers believed were important for children to learn, but they did not address them in instruction either because they did not "get to" them in the curriculum or because it did not occur to them to address particular skills. For example, the three teachers said that they "rarely got around" to helping children re-organize their texts; they said

they wished they had devoted more time to revision. Finally, when asked about helping children write longer and more complex sentences, the teachers said they had not thought of teaching these skills.

These three whole language teachers believed that children would learn many of the skills of a writer, (such as fluency and use of book-like and lively language) if they were exposed to good literature and wrote in daily journals. For example, when asked how they taught children to become more fluent writers, Tina said,

> "Well, through journal writing I guess...and gosh, we provide a lot of models through the books we read (to the children). I think they learn a lot from the books, like how to use repetition and certain words..."

The teachers also believed that the children's spelling would improve as they continued to write. Donna said, "Well, we read that spelling is developmental, so we try not to correct them, and (we) encourage them to spell functionally." The teachers believed children learn skills by viewing their demonstrations and through writing.

Unintended instruction. Although the teachers believed some skills did not have to be "taught," children did have opportunities to learn these skills. Even though the teachers did not directly or explicitly teach the children to become more fluent writers, journal writing and the occasional use of

teacher/student dialogue in the journals may have had an influence on what and how the children wrote. For example, one morning a child opened her journal to find that Tina had written her a note. It said, "I noticed you looked pretty today." The child struggled to read the note, asking friends what each of the words said. When she discovered the message, she beamed, and began to furiously write Tina a note back, copying each word she wrote. It said, "Mrs. Cron, you looked pretty today." Thus, even though skills were not explicitly taught, some may have been learned because of the communicative nature of many of the tasks in this classroom.

Furthermore, although the teachers claimed they did not directly or explicitly teach children to use lively language, when children wrote something particularly engaging or interesting, they celebrated the child and his or her text. They also commented on various authors' styles and use of lively language when they read books aloud to the children, which may have inadvertently affected the students' writing skills.

The three teachers did believe that some writing skills need to be directly addressed in instruction, and they spent time teaching them. Of the skills measured in this study, the teachers believed young children needed to learn capitalization skills and to use appropriate end marks. These skills were taught either incidentally to individuals or in planned ways for groups of children. Both ways were direct, and to some extent,

explicit.

Incidental instruction. At the beginning of the school year, the three teachers believed that children would learn many of the conventions of writing, (such as punctuation, capitalization, and spelling) as they wrote. Thus, just having them write in daily journals was one way they "taught" skills. Then, about mid-year, they began to think that some children needed more "reminding" on how and when to use capitalization and end marks. (As stated earlier, they believed spelling to be developmental). The teachers did take opportunities to teach the skills "incidentally, when the need came up" as Donna stated. For example, one afternoon in February, a child brought her journal to Donna. Donna smiled and invited her to read it aloud. It was a story about going to the doctor and being scared. The child read it and the two talked about it. Donna remarked that she did not much like to go to the doctor either, and the two laughed. Then, Donna pointed to a word that began a sentence and said, "What do you think?"

The child bent to quickly capitalize the word. Donna pointed to another word and asked, "What about this?" The child wrinkled her forehead and shrugged.

"It needs something."

"Capital," the child said and fixed it as well.

After helping the child fix a few more mistakes, Donna suggested to the child that she go to a table and circle all the

words she thinks she needs to fix and then bring her text back for more help. This instruction tended to be direct and based on learners' needs, but it only occurred with those children who the teachers noticed needed the help.

Whole class, direct instruction. After much talk, professional reading, and discussion and examination of children's written products, the teachers became concerned that most of the children weren't learning the mechanics of writing (in particular, punctuation and capitalization). About mid-year (soon after the "reminding" began) the teachers began to incorporate some whole class, direct teaching of skills during what they called "Daily Oral Language" each morning. The teachers elicited sentences from the children about their days at home the evenings before, or about what they were thinking. The teachers often wrote these sentences on the chalkboard or chart paper incorrectly. Then they invited the children to help them edit the sentences. As they did, they emphasized sound/symbol relations and the rules for capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

Also about mid-year, the teachers began to plan and implement other small "mini-lessons" on writing skills, based on what they saw the children lacked in their writing products. These small group skill lessons occurred if the skill fit with the lesson the teacher had prepared. These lessons often had to do with the two week unit on which they focused.

For example, in January, the class studied space. During one of the morning language arts lessons, Tina was working with a group of seven, eight and nine year olds, all of whom were conventional writers. She began the lesson by pointing to a chart she had made. She asked one child to read the first sentence.

The child read, "Who was Guion Bluford?"

Tina said, "Right. Tell me what the question word is--one word, Josh, what's your question word here?"

"Um, who?"

"Good! That's it. Is it in our box?" Tina pointed to a list of words on the chart (who, which, when, where, why) that was boxed in with red marker.

"Yep."

"Is it capitalized?" she asked.

"Yep."

"Why is it capitalized?"

The child answered, "Because it begins the sentence."

Tina nodded and explained, "Yes, it's the first word of the sentence and the first word of a sentence is always capitalized. What else do we need to know about this sentence?"

The child asked, "Does it need a period?"

"Not a period, this is a question."

"Question mark," the child said.

"Right," Tina finished, pointing to the word who, "and this is the question word. When there's a question word, you know it's gonna need a question mark."

She continued with the lesson, helping the children to analyze the next two sentences, which referred to their lesson on space. She summarized the lesson by saying, "the words who, which, when, where, and why tell you you need question marks at the end."

The following table summarizes the beliefs the teachers held about writing skills instruction, the ways each of the measured skills were addressed, and with the teachers' estimations of time spent on each. It also includes other instructional practices I observed that may have influenced the learning of the particular skills.

Put Table 1 about here

Growth in Writing Skills

All eleven children showed growth in writing skills after one year of whole language teaching. However, the children learned some skills better than others. In this class, the context in which the skills were taught and practiced mattered.

The following table lists each of the measured skills for the pre- and post journal and letter samples. These averages (and percentages) remain as descriptive data because they are

most informative that way. They were not compared to another standard, nor were there enough children to make statistical tests feasible.

Put Table 2 About Here

The children received higher holistic scores on their post-texts for both journal entries and letters. The post-texts show that children wrote much longer texts in both journal and letter samples, shown by both word and sentence counts. Further, the children's post samples also show more complex sentences as measured by the number of words per sentence in both journal and letter samples. Growth in sentence complexity was also shown in the students' letters by an increase in compound sentences over simple sentences.

Students made some, but not regular use of the surface-level writing skills such as punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. However, these skills were apparently only regularly practiced in the letter-writing context. Although children had fewer end mark and capitalization errors in all post-texts, and they spelled many more words correctly, the percentage of errors decreased only in letters. Their error rates went up when they wrote in their journals.

Case Study Information

The individual examination of each child's portfolio

revealed interesting and surprising findings. In many respects, the children were similar in their growth patterns. Nearly every child's score represented the quantitative pattern shown above, with the exception of one girl, one of the most eager and fluent writers in the class (who also happened to feel comfortable asking questions). She was able to learn the "skills" of punctuation and capitalization better than the rest of the children as shown by a decreased error rate in both letters and journals. In general, all children did become better writers, writing longer and more interesting texts in April than in September. The younger children's holistic scores were much better in April, while the older children's holistic scores remained about the same. Although the error rate in their journals went up in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization for all children, their texts were also more readable in April than in September. This is likely because children's categories of spellings moved from primarily pre-phonemic and phonemic in September to phonemic and transitional levels (Gentry, 1987; Henderson & Beers, Read, 1971) in April. An example of one child's journal entries in September and April which illustrates the above qualitative statement is shown in Appendix F.

There are exceptions to this finding. The three children with learning disabilities and one other child's written products showed interesting findings. Each child became a more fluent and lively writer, with "voice" much like that of other excellent

beginning writers (Dahl & Freppon, in press; Dyson, 1993; 1992; 1991; Newkirk, 1989). For example, Paul wrote about an Indiana University vs. University of Kentucky basketball game from beginning to end, showing excitement and clarity in how the game proceeded. These four children's punctuation and capitalization growth was also no different from the other children in the class. Yet, they did not show growth in spelling development. Their spelling errors remained at the same level (pre-phonemic) for all texts in both September and April. For example, Eugene wrote hra, peoal, and seotl (for hear, people, and sister) in September and bibmk, fisett, and cetanr (for backpack, flashlight, and canteen) in April. If it weren't for their use of some memorized spellings, my extensive experience reading invented spelling, and some information on the content of what was written, their texts in both September and April might not have been readable.

Discussion

The Promise of Whole Language Teaching

The eleven children involved in this study had all been part of this classroom for two years, the second of which included the time of the study. Thus, they were used to being able to write on topics of their choice and encouraged not to worry about conventions during journal writing, an instructional practice heralded by many experts in writing (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1985; Routman, 1990). This experience and freedom may be

why the children's (particularly the younger ones) fluency improved, as measured by an overall increase in use of complex sentences, and an increase in the number of words and sentences per text. It is also quite natural for children to write longer texts as they grow as readers and writers (Newkirk, 1989). The freedom to self-select topics, along with extensive book sharing and the sharing of good writing, may also explain why the texts maintained (with a slight increase) their levels of organization, use of lively or engaging language, and use of written register (as opposed to oral) as measured by their slightly higher holistic scores from pre- to post-samples. None of these skills were taught directly, and based on the growth of these eleven children, and according to one of the teachers, may not need to be (Cron, 1994).

Some children obviously learn many important skills of writing just through being in a risk-free environment in which children can write on topics of their choice. Encouraging children to write about their experiences helps children achieve "voice" in the writing (Cron, 1994). Teachers can celebrate good examples of the students' writing, demonstrating effective language use. Teachers can use excellent literature to show examples of how authors use interesting words or phrases.

The Challenge of Skill Teaching

While the children applied the skills of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling in their letters, they did not use

them regularly during journal writing. The skills did not "transfer" across instructional contexts, as they often do not in traditional classrooms. The reason the children may have applied these skills in the letters is because they had a real audience for whom to write. The children knew their "special person" letters would be read, and they likely desired to communicate. In this classroom, the special person letter-writing context was the only regular time in which the children "published" their writing. Other contexts involved children in writing for themselves (journals) or for the teachers (content areas). They also did not regularly finish other texts. The teachers explained that they did not "get around" to helping children revise texts, though they planned to do more. It seems that just "free" writing is not enough for some children to learn the surface-level skills of good writers. These results may indicate that these teachers are only mid-way through their development as effective teachers of writing. Teachers often first focus on fluency, then move toward a focus on more competent writing (Langer & Applebee, 1987; Bratcher & Stroble, 1994). These teachers could be like those described in the Bratcher & Stroble study who first focused on fluency, then found better pre-writing activities, then learned to provide more opportunities for publishing students' work, and finally toward revision and editing of texts. These three teachers' comments such as "we didn't get around to revision" indicate they are still developing

as whole language teachers.

In school, children may need to spend more time moving their texts toward making them public, so that they are motivated to learn the skills for good communication. The practice of making texts "public" may create opportunities for the teachers to teach the particular skills the children need with the children's own texts and for purposeful communication. It is suggested that a writing workshop approach to writing instruction in which children revise, edit, and publish their texts on a regular basis might enable more children to use the skills they practiced during letter writing enough for skills to be "overlearned" and transfer to all writing contexts.

The actual development of the children's spelling revealed that most of the children's spelling did improve. These children were still very young (ages 7-9), and they were clearly just developing as spellers. Many of the children's spellings moved from levels of pre-phonemic spellings to transitional levels (Gentry, 1987; Henderson & Beers, 1980; Read, 1971). The question still remains on whether their spellings will move to conventional spelling later in their development.

The lack of spelling growth of four children (three of them labeled "learning disabled") indicates that, in addition to having more opportunity to edit and publish their writing, some children may need much more direct teaching of spelling patterns and phonemic representations of words in order to internalize the

spelling-to-sound correspondences of English orthography (Adams, 1990). It also confirms much of the claim by special educators that there are children who need more meaningful, direct, explicit explanation (Gersten & Dimino, 1993; Harris & Graham, 1993; Kulieke & Jones, 1993; Reid, 1993; Palinscar & Klenk, 1993). While journal writing and a focus on fluency with occasional or incidental attention to spelling did enable most of the children to grow in their understandings, it may not be enough for some children. Their lack of phonemic knowledge for spelling may also be an indication of lack of word attack skills needed for effective reading (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1989; Stahl & Miller, 1989).

Direct, Explicit Teaching

The three teachers regularly talked about their teaching and they read some professional literature. They also regularly analyzed the children's texts. These were reflective teachers who conducted careful observations of children and sought to change their practice. Their move toward a focus on the children's needed skills should be applauded.

The teachers' attempts at meeting children's writing skill needs about mid-year involved some direct modeling and explanation. However, the Daily Oral Language procedure used by many teachers may not be the best approach. These lessons were still removed from the children's own writing and purposes. Although the demonstration sentences used were often about what

the children were studying, they were still not the children's, and the learning did not "transfer" to their journal writing context indicating that the skills were not learned. Skill lessons apart from students' work are useless, as shown by the extensive research on the effects of traditional instruction (Hillocks, 1984). Direct modeling may need to involve the teacher writing for a real purpose and "thinking aloud" (Duffy, Roehler, & Herrmann, 1988) so that she is also modeling thinking and not simply completing sentence exercises. Further, while the teachers did provide some explanation in some of the group skill lessons, the explanations tended to focus on what or how, but not always why or when. Explanations may also need to be very explicit and elaborate, particularly with children who have difficulty in school. Finally, the teachers' attempts at skill teaching also involved scaffolding, or supporting children in doing something they may not be able to do alone. Yet, the scaffolding cases occurred incidentally with children whose needs were made most apparent (the uninhibited). It is unclear whether and how often the children in this study received individual help with their writing. The challenge of teaching writing effectively is making skill instruction, or cognitive strategy instruction, an integral, important, and regular part of writing instruction for all children.

Conclusion

Some children come from environments in which children are

taught what they may not learn in school -- through parents, siblings or other interactions with highly literate people, or through the use of technology (e.g. grammar, punctuation, and spell checkers on computers). And for these children, "skill" instruction may not be necessary. But, for the many children who rely on school to learn all the skills of literacy -- fluency, voice, and surface-level skills -- teachers and curricula need to assess needs and directly and explicitly teach children exactly what they need for effective communication. This kind of individual attention can occur even with young writers in the primary grades.

Limitations

This study is limited in several ways. First, while I believe these three teachers are typical of many whole language teachers, their beliefs and instructional actions reported here were their beliefs and actions only and cannot be generalizable to all teachers practicing whole language teaching. Further, the descriptive data presented here are only on eleven children and the learning outcomes can not be generalizable to all populations of low-SES, primary-age children. Because this study involved much rich descriptive data on what was taught and learned in this classroom, it is hoped that others will identify with the issues and practices in this study, thus contributing to understanding effective teaching.

Future Research

We still need large-scale studies on what teachers nationwide believe about whole language teaching and detailed descriptions of their subsequent instruction. We also need more research on how teachers integrate strategy instruction within meaning-centered instruction and how they enable learners to regularly revise and edit their work. We also need to hear from the children themselves--why they choose to revise and edit some texts and not others. We need to hear from children how to help other children become more effective writers. Further, this kind of study needs to be conducted with older children, for whom skills of writing may be even more complex and extensive. Finally, we need more longitudinal studies of what children learn in whole language settings.

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Table 1

Summary of Instruction

Skill	Intended Instruction	How Often	Other Ways
Fluency	through journals and literature	daily	
Awareness of audience & purpose	through letter writing	weekly	dialogue journals
Organization	little to none intended		literature
Language use ("written" and lively)	none intended		literature; celebration of texts
Complex sentences	none intended		literature; some dialogue journals
End mark punctuation	journals & other writing	daily	some dialogue journals

	incidental reminding after mid-year;	occasionally	
	DOL & mini-lessons after mid-year	daily	
Capitalization	journals & other writing	daily	some dialogue journals
	incidental reminding after mid-year;	occasionally	
	DOL & mini-lessons after mid-year	daily	
Spelling	journals & other writing	daily	some dialogue journals
	DOL & mini-lessons after mid-year	daily	some dialogue journals

Table 2

Average Holistic and Linguistic Scores on Writing Samples

Journals

	Pre-journals	Post-journals
Holistic	1.9	2.3
Word count	22.5	35.4
Number of sentences	3.9	4.7
Simple sentences	3.6 (92%)	3.9 (91%)
Compound sentences	.3 (8%)	.8 (9%)
Words per sentence	6.3	8.2
End mark errors	2.7 (60%)	3.0 (70%)
Capitalization errors	1.8 (46%)	2.8 (65%)
Spelling errors	7.1 (32%)	12.8 (36%)

First-draft Letters

	Pre-letters	Post-letters
Holistic	2.1	2.7
Word count	28.5	49.7
Number of sentences	4.9	7.2
Simple sentences	4.6 (94%)	5.6 (78%)
Compound sentences	.3 (6%)	1.6 (22%)
Words per sentence	6.8	7.7
End mark errors	2.1 (43%)	1.8 (25%)
Capitalization errors	2.5 (51%)	1.9 (26%)
Spelling errors	6.6 (23%)	10.1 (20%)

Appendix A

Rubric for Journals

4

The message is clear and the text is very fluent (i.e an interconnectedness to the piece). The piece is is engaging in some way (i.e. written with lively, flavorful language.) The text stays on one topic, unless there is a paragraph change. There is sentence variety and word usage is mostly accurate. Mechanical errors do not get in the way of reading.

> the resen why I did not come yetsterday is my alorm went off late so mom said go back to sleep. we was not going to argue with a lady who wus hafe asleep no telling what she wood do are what she wood say. (post-journal #211)

3

Clear message, but piece may ramble from topic to topic. Sentences are fluent and make sense, though sentences may lack cohesive ties with one another. Some usage may be incorrect. It may be a bit difficult to read, but overall, the mechanics are not a problem.

> yestrday I wusnt here beeas I wus seck! My brthers are comn ovr I havnt seen them in 2 weks I am happy! Did you no 28 kids are in are clas. Did you no tere are 26 pakans (pumpkins) I like pakans (pre-journal #142)

2

There is a discernible message, but it lacks fluency. It may be disorganized or jump from topic to topic. It will probably have incorrect usage or incomplete thoughts. Mechanics get in the way

of the reading, but it can still be read fairly easily.

Yuetrda my mom & aunt birthday. ther 29 yore old my ho (hair) is frehc brend (french braided) today. I went bak in to see my dad for a wek and I mad at him I knt see my step mom (post-journal #224)

1

Message is mostly unclear. Writer may be doing some experimenting, though there is readable text. It will have incorrect usage and incomplete thoughts. Mechanics make the piece very difficult to read. (This writer is just beyond emergent.)

me and my brtotr pla wet hez ras kr

hrk

n he pla wet hez

(Me and my bother play with his race car track and he plays with his) This text was shown with a picture of a race track. (post-journal #241)

Appendix B

Rubric for Letters

A "4" Letter

Writer has a clear sense of audience. (He/she addresses someone and seems to write for that person.) The writer seems to have a purpose (i.e. tells or asks something/s.) The piece is organized (i.e. stays with one topic until there is a paragraph change). There is little "assumed" knowledge on the part of the reader (i.e. no exophoric references). There is a clear fluent message, and it is engaging (i.e. use of lively or interesting language). It follows all or most of the conventions of a letter (e.g. greeting, closing). The text is fairly easy to read (i.e. mechanics are not a problem).

> April 4, 1993. Dear Sarah, I sure thoght are field trip was fun. Did you? Mrs. Cron got in the space ship too! The maze was hard but I made it out. Did you? It was fun don't you think? I liked the bubbles too. Did you? I liked the hot air balloon because you could make it go up by pushing the button. Your friend, (post-letter #73)

A "3" Letter

Writer has a clear sense of audience. (He/she addresses someone and seems to write for that person.) The writer seems to have a purpose (i.e. tells or asks something/s.) The letter may not be organized into paragraphs, but there is still an obvious message. There may be assumed knowledge on the part of the reader. It follows most of the conventions of a letter. The text may be difficult to read in certain places, but overall, the mechanics are

not a problem.

> Dear Willie, Did you have fun in pe today? I did. Did you like the movie yesterday? I did. I liked the part wene the ogedeg (ostrich) was chacing that boy becouse he took the ogedide egg. Did you see the scorpyon that bit the guy the scoryon looked mean. Did you now your my best freind? Do you now how to write or read cursove yet? I do. Do you now the biggest numder in the world? it is infedy (infinity) plus infedy. I like to write long letters for special people like you. I realy hope you can keep up the good work on compimting (complimenting). I'm glad it is spring break tomorrow are you? I like the rain. Hope you have fun on spring break. Bye, (post-journal # 47)

A "2" Letter

Writer may not address an audience and the text may appear to ramble. There is still a discernible message, but it may be very simple or include many exophoric references (and sound more like a journal entry). It has at least one convention of letter, such that readers can tell it is a letter. The mechanics probbaly get in the way of the reading.

> Dear Thomas, I am your friend. You are my friend. I am 9 how ood are you Thomas. I like pizza Do you? I love J.B. Atkinson. I like T.V. Your friend, (pre-letter #1)

A "1" Letter

Writer may not address and audience and the text may appear to have no purpose or organization. The text lacks fluency, but it is still somewhat readable. It may have no conventions of a letter

and the mechanics make it very difficult to read. "1" letters are just beyond emergent writing.

Dear Thomas, i hv too pumkins 10+10= (pre-letter #26)

Appendix C

Scoring of a Journal Entry

Journal Example

the resen why I did not come yetsterday is my alorm went off late so mom said go back to sleep. we was not going to argue with a lady who wus hafe asleep no telling what she wood do or what she wood say (post-journal #211)

Scoring:

Holistic = 4

Word count = 45

Spelling errors = 7

Number of sentences = 4

Number of end mark errors = 3

Number of capitalization errors = 4

Number of simple sentences = 4

Number of compound sentences = 0

Number of words per sentence = 10.1

Appendix D

Scoring of a Letter Entry

Letter Example

Dear Thomas Do you hav a sestr? I dat I wood like to have 1 sestr Das your mom have log blod hair? Mine das. Do you like gown to the prk? I like gowen to the prk? and I like to go to kentucky keedm. and I like hlwen yor frend (Dear Thomas, Do you have a sister? I don't. I would like to have one sister. Does your mom have long blonde hair? Mine does. Do you like going to the park? I like going to the park. And I like to go to Kentucky Kingdom. And I like Halloween. Your friend, (pre-letter #2)

Scores:

Holistic = 3

Word count = 48

Spelling errors = 16

Number of sentences = 9

Number of end mark errors = 4

Number of capitalization errors = 4

Number of simple sentences = 9

Number of compound sentences = 0

Number of words per sentence = 5.3

Appendix E

Narrative Account of One Portfolio Examination

Brandon's holistic score went up slightly on both his journal and letter entries. He actually wrote fewer word and sentences in his April journal than his September, but his letters were much longer in April. He also had more words per sentence in both journal and letter entries. He had many more errors in all categories, especially in his journal. In September, when the class was studying the five senses, they had to write about how they use their five senses. Brandon wrote four clearly written sentences, one that was a compound sentence. It was quite fluent. His spelling on all his assignments shows him at the phonemic and transitional levels. He has many capitalization errors, including the word "I." In April, he wrote a poem called "What is Red?" (an assignment for all children). He used many descriptive and sophisticated words (dripping, burning, scalding, volcano, spinning, embarrassed) and rhyme ("The funniest thing I can think of thats red is a lady bug and her little head"). His spelling on all writing samples still shows him using some phonemic and many transitional -level spellings. The words he uses seem more sophisticated. Brandon has learned to capitalize the word "I" and often uses capital letters to begin sentences, though not always. The teachers say Brandon is one of the

best students in the class, an eager writer and avid reader.

Appendix F

Pre- and Post- Journal Writing Entries for One Child

and Subsequent Analysis of Spelling Growth (Samples Follow)

September Example

All weekn I ben sik. I got a ear in facshn I have to tac pal I do not like tham thay are gros

(All week I been sick. I got an ear infection. I have to take pills. I do not like them. They are gross.)

words--24

errors--9

percentage nonconventional--38%

weekn--weekend

ben--been

sik-sick

in facshn--infection

tac--take

pal--pills

tham--them

thay--they

gros-gross

March Example:

today is the last day entel spring brack. I cant waet. Wull lase me thak whut I'll do. Wull tomarow I will have to go to my babby sittiers that's OK. My brother dont like it over thur. but

aver thing he side ow and that wus my brother on tv doing the plage and the word of the day he's name is Adam

words: 63

errors: 21

percentage nonconventional--33%

entel--until

brack--break

cant-can't

waet--wait

wull-well

lase-let, let's, or let's see (?)

thak--think

whut--what

wull-well

tomarow-tomorrow

baby-babby

sitters--sittiers

dont-don't

thur--there

aver--every

side--said

ow--?

wus--was

plage--pledge

he's--his

Analysis

In this child's September sample, her errors showed she spelled with beginning and ending sounds, but she still confused some vowel sound and symbol correspondances (as with "pal" for "pill", "tham" for "them", and "thay" for "they"), demonstrating a common stage of spelling by sound (Read, 1971). She also did not use silent letters ("sik", "tac") or double consonants ("pal", "gros"). In late March, this child still spelled phonetically, still confused some vowel sound and symbol relations, but she also used silent letters ("brack", "waet", "whut", "side", "plage") and double consonants ("wull", "babby", "sittiers"), indicating a move to transitional (Gentry, 1987) spelling. She is beginning to show indication she hears nasal sounds (she represents it with "entil" and "cant" but not with "thak"), which is common for transitional-level spellers as nasals are often the last sound children begin representing as they spell. Her spelling error show use of an apostrophe ("he's").

S 192

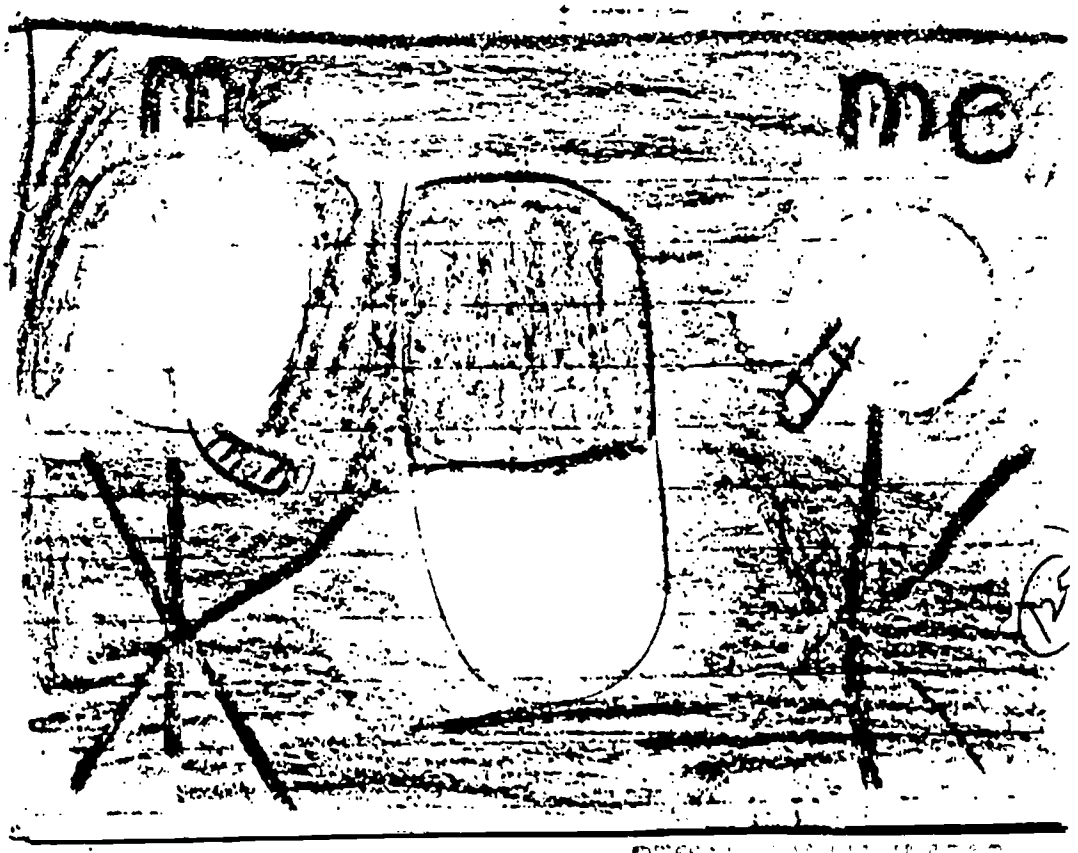
today 9-25

All weekN I been sik I got

a ear infection I have to tac

pals pills I Do not Like them tho

thay They are are gros



ADD

today is mar. 26, 19

today is the last
Day until spring
break. I cant wait.
will lase me that
what I'll Do
will tomorrow I will
have to go to
my baby sitters
that's ok. my
brother dont like
it over there. but

every time
Over thing he side
on and that was
my brother on tv
Doing the flyg and
the word off the
Dat he's name is
adam