Enhancing year 7 and year 8 boys' motivation in narrative writing through peer collaboration and a drama strategy: a case study

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Abstract

International and New Zealand research continues to show that there is concern about boys being less successful than girls in writing at all levels of the school. This study examines to what extent year 7 and year 8 boys are motivated to advance their writing when they collaborate with a peer and choose to use a drama strategy. A qualitative approach was taken to explore the insiders' view of writing from eight year 7 and year 8 boys in an intermediate school in New Zealand. Data gathered were from semi-structured interviews, in class observations and samples of writing. Sociocultural theory was used to inform the investigation of the social and cultural influences on the boys' learning about writing. The findings illustrate that the drama intervention was successful as the boys were motivated to write through their social interaction of role-playing characters from a choice of topics represented in their everyday lives. The boys revealed their metacognitive knowledge by showing their awareness of their thought processes about writing and how to use this knowledge to develop their writing abilities. The study makes recommendations for teachers, including the need for teachers to recognise the boys' position of authority over their knowledge, which is essential for their motivation and learning to write successfully.

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CHAPTER 1

Introducing the issue

Introduction

The teaching of literacy is one of the most important tasks required of New Zealand teachers. Over the last decade the New Zealand Government's highest priority in education was to raise the literacy standards of all children. In 2003 the Ministry of Education established a Literacy Task Force (Ministry of Education, 1999) which established an initiative to ensure that all students continue to develop strategies in literacy, which are critical during their education and throughout their lives. This included the main goal that by the year 2005 every nine-year-old child would be able to read and write for success.

The New Zealand Government has continued to place this high priority on literacy with a major focus on effective instructional teaching of reading and writing. A key reason for this emphasis is that recent findings from major studies have revealed a continuation of disparities in gender literacy achievement across all of the school levels (Flockton, Crooks & White, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2007a). It is clear from this that some boys are consistently underachieving in writing throughout their schooling, compared to girls.

Lower achievement for boys in writing

In reviewing international and New Zealand literature about student achievement in writing, it becomes apparent that the underachievement of boys is of major concern at all levels of compulsory schooling. Research on gender differences in writing from the United States of America has found that girls consistently out-perform boys in standardised narrative writing tests (Bromley, 2007). In Australia, Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert and Muspratt (2002) investigated boys' lower scores on literacy assessments and found that gender differences in achievement were mainly in writing and speaking. In England, Younger and Warrington (2004) found that there was a legitimate concern over the achievement levels of some boys throughout their schooling, and a continued gender gap in writing achievement with fewer than 80% of boys performing at the same level as girls. In New Zealand, there has been a

continuing lack of progress over the last six years with boys' engagement and achievement in writing in year 4 and year 8 (Flockton, Crooks & White, 2006). It is vitally important, therefore, to investigate the factors that can promote boys' success in learning to write.

One major factor contributing to successful learning is students being able to talk meaningfully about texts while collaborating with others as they write. Thought and knowledge emerge from oral language which is bedded in social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Students who write together are an example of this as the process enables them to have a social interaction around a shared experience in writing. Yarrow and Topping (2001) state that when peers write together this incorporates both metacognitive prompting and scaffolding as described by Vygotsky (1978). Peer writing is where same-age or older children are trained to support their peers in learning about writing (Medcalf, Glyn & Moore, 2004). When teachers plan for the use of peers as tutors in their writing programmes this can contribute constructively to students' literacy development (Ministry of Education 2006).

The enjoyment and the motivation to write are critical factors for success, as students need to enjoy and learn from writing (Flockton, Crooks & White, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2006; Fletcher, 2006). Another important factor for writers to succeed is having an awareness of their control over the use of metacognitive strategies as described by McInerney and McInerney (1994) and Bruning, Shraw, Norby and Ronning (2004). Whilst the body of knowledge about factors which contribute to successful learning about writing continues to grow, there is a need for more research that includes the voices of underachieving boys talking about their understandings and interpretations of what helps them to be successful writers.

Enhancing learning through drama

To enable boys who are not achieving in writing to succeed, an original approach that has been successful is one that incorporates a drama strategy. This provides the support for these boys to be more engaged and motivated to write. The close relationship between drama and the development of learning has been recognised by findings of Wagner (1976), Heathcote (1978), O'Neill and Lambert (1982), Neelands (1990) and Gardner (1999). The use of drama strategies can assist students to

socialise meaningfully by providing opportunities for learning. A number of studies focus on the use of these strategies as they can draw from the social nature of learning by being socio-constructive and democratic, helping students to construct new meanings together (for example, Wilhelm, 2002). The use of drama strategies and their techniques can foster metacognition in learning by creating situations in which students can "imagine to learn" and this can help students to greater cognitive gains (Smith & Wilhelm, 2006; Andersen, 2004; Martello, 2002; McNaughton, 1997).

The theoretical framework in this study was sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978) as it was considered important to explore how learners construct knowledge in their social settings when they learn with others (Hatano, 1993; Mathews & Cobb, 2005). Using drama within a natural classroom setting can play a central role in supporting children to learn and this is the approach taken in this study. Furthermore, an examination of the links between drama and students' writing in the classroom reveals how students may be successfully motivated and engaged to write.

The aims of the research

The intention of this study was to investigate to what extent year 7 and year 8 boys can advance their writing when they collaborate with a peer and use a drama strategy. This age level was chosen as these boys would be transitioning to secondary school over the next two years. The writing demands in year 9 onwards are more demanding as students are required to write more complex texts and they will be required to be independent writers to succeed in their secondary school studies. This study seeks to investigate the students' own views about their writing experiences before and after a drama intervention to consider what motivates and engages them to write successfully. Knowledge of this may inform teachers about possible ways to improve literacy learning for primary students in writing.

The tool that is used to assess students is *asTTLe (Assessment tools for teaching and learning)*, developed for the New Zealand Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2003). The *asTTLe* writing indicators identify student achievement at curriculum levels 1–6, and are designed for students in years 5–10. This is one of many assessment tools which enable teachers to track the progress and achievement of both individual students and groups of students against the *New Zealand National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Positioning myself as researcher

My current position is a literacy adviser who provides professional development for primary and intermediate teachers in the learning area of English. The focus of my work is to provide pedagogical support and practical guidance for teachers' practice so they can support students who underachieve in literacy. My teaching background includes working with year 7 and year 8 students in a co-educational secondary school. As a classroom teacher I have designed literacy programmes that incorporate drama strategies to motivate and engage students and support their progress and achievement. I have used drama strategies successfully as a motivating support, especially for students who struggle to write. This awareness arose from my concern that every year an increasing number of boys were underachieving in writing. A common characteristic of these boys was that they appeared to lack engagement and the motivation to write, with the majority expressing their opinions as being "*useless at writing*". Another concern was their negative behaviour patterns I observed especially during their writing sessions. For example, some students would not bring a pen to the class, some would sharpen a pencil for a long time instead of writing, while some would scribble heavily on a page of their draft books. Others would cause disruptive behaviour with other students to attract negative attention, or just put their head in their arms on the desk. However, I discovered that when I used drama strategies as a motivating support, these negative behaviours became non-existent. These boys seemed to express an emotional engagement and an enjoyment to write. My interest in year 7 and year 8 boys who underachieve in writing has led me to me to investigate in this study how they can advance their writing when they collaborate with a peer and choose to use a drama strategy.

Ministry of Education requirements for teachers

In New Zealand the official guidelines for teaching and learning in English-medium schools are contained in the *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007b). This describes what is required in relation to writing and to drama. The teacher resource, *Effective Literacy Practice in years 5–8* (Ministry of Education, 2006a) draws from a synthesis of research and documentation about effective teacher practice. Teachers are required to implement *The New Zealand Curriculum reading and writing standards for years 1–8* (Ministry of Education, 2009). The standards provide reference points for teachers as to where children should be in their learning and they provide guidelines on what children need to do next so they can achieve their curriculum level. Another key document that supports the standards is *The literacy learning progressions* (Ministry of Education, 2010) which informs teachers by providing details about the required skills and knowledge to meet each standard at particular levels of schooling.

Chapter one has introduced the issue of boys' underachievement in writing and the argument that this may be addressed through involving them in drama. The chapter outlined the aims of the research including my own explanation for undertaking this study. The following chapter reviews the literature on sociocultural theory, boys who are not succeeding in writing, and drama as a strategy to enhance writing.

CHAPTER 2

Literature review

Introduction

Chapter one introduced the issue of boys' underachievement in writing and factors that can contribute to successful writing in New Zealand and in other countries. *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) emphasises all students achieving success in English as fundamental to successful learning in all of the other learning areas of the curriculum. The concern about a group of students who cannot access this curriculum because of their poor writing skills and lack of knowledge about how to be successful in writing influences my research questions. The focus of these questions is on how year 7 and year 8 boys who underachieve in writing can learn to solve their writing problems by using a drama intervention.

Chapter two provides background and support for the main research questions by reviewing relevant literature. In section one I discuss the significance of sociocultural theory in relation to understanding learning in the classroom. In section two I discuss why boys are less successful in writing and focuses on some of the main factors that influence boys' success in writing such as motivation to write, choice of topics, students' use of metacognitive skills and collaborating to write. These factors of influence have received increased attention from researchers in recent years. In section three I review relevant research in drama, focusing on the use of drama strategies as a support for student learning in writing.

Section one: Sociocultural theory

This study is about boys as writers, who draw from their knowledge, skills and attitudes to create meaningful texts. This ability to write effectively is part of literacy. Smith and Elley (1997) advocate that the understandings of acquisition of literacy are more than just learning skills to write, which are culture-free, as literacy learning is mediated within children's social and cultural settings in schools and especially in classrooms. There are many definitions of literacy. One interpretation is from *Effective literacy practice in years 5 to 8* (Ministry of Education, 2006) as "the

ability to understand, respond to, and use those forms of language that are required by society and valued by individuals and communities" (p. 10). This interpretation of literacy will be used in this study.

A sociocultural theoretical interpretation of children's literacy enables the researcher to explore how children gain literacy skills and understandings within their various cultural and social settings (Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert & Muspratt, 2002; Mathews & Cobb, 2005). This interpretation is important in the present study as it provides an insight into the children's own perspective of this learning, by listening to their points of view.

Sociocultural theory provides a number of principles that help explain how students learn (Hatano, 1993). These principles draw heavily on the work of Vygotsky's (1978) socio-historical learning theory, which interprets learning through the social interactions between people, contexts and communities. Children's participation in cultural activities with the guidance of others allows them to internalise their community's tools of thinking. Learning is described as knowledgeable others scaffolding the learner within the learner's zone of proximal development. According to Vygotsky, this is "the distance between the actual developmental levels as determined by the independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). For example, learners learn best when they are in their zone of proximal development and are engaged in a task that requires the assistance of an expert other (Slavin, 2006).

The conceptualisations and perspectives of sociocultural theory, which are consistent with a view of learners constructing their knowledge in supportive learning environments, influenced the research of Hatano (1993) and Matthews and Cobb (2005). Hatano (1993) offers a constructivist Vygotskian conception of learning in educational settings describing four assumptions about the nature of the learner and their supportive environments. Firstly, knowledge is constructed when the learner interacts with the teacher, peers, or artifacts embodying voices of others, creating jointly with them the context for interaction. Secondly, through interaction something collective is produced. This could be a cooperative system for solving problems and negotiated meanings or understandings. Thirdly, the learner

incorporates knowledge for generating, elaborating, and revising. Fourthly, this interaction is embedded in a larger community, which may set a limit on the kinds of interactions that occur in the smaller community (Hatano, 1993).

Similarly, Matthews and Cobb's (2005) research draws from Hatano (1993) and demonstrates a design of a model of collaborative literacy events in the classroom, which enables an examination of how children's literacy development is nested within larger social and cultural contexts. They argue that "to obtain adequate representation of the child in classroom interactions around literacy, there needs to be a focus on what the child brings to the interactions as exchanges among individuals" (Matthews & Cobb, 2005, p. 326). In this study it will be the students' personal knowledge that they bring with them to their choice of topic to write about. In addition, Miles and Huberman (1994) claim that a major feature about well-collected qualitative data is "they focus on naturally occurring events in natural settings" (p. 10), so researchers can explore what the "real life" is. Sociocultural theories and research provide a useful framework to interpret students' writing events as they cooperate with their peers and participate in drama activities.

Ministry of Education requirements for teachers
The principle document that provides guidance about teaching and learning in the New Zealand education system is *The New Zealand curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007b). This curriculum is consistent with a sociocultural interpretation of learning and emphasises key factors which are influential for effective teaching approaches. The curriculum describes these factors as creating a supportive learning environment, making connections to prior learning and experience, facilitating shared learning and reflecting thought and action. The curriculum also includes five key competencies, which are described as thinking; using language, symbols and texts; managing self; relating to others; and participating and contributing. The combination of the key factors and the key competencies, are shaped by the social interaction of the learning community who work and learn together.

A key handbook, which draws from a synthesis of research and is specifically designed for teachers to guide their literacy teaching in the middle and senior primary school years, is *Effective literacy practice in years 5 to 8* (Ministry of Education, 2006). In contrast to previous literacy handbooks for primary teachers,

this one has a greater emphasis on literacy research, referring to the work of Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the zone of proximal development where "students learn most and best when they operate within their zone – when they are engaged in challenging work that they can do with appropriate support" (p. 81). The handbook draws from the socialisation model of literacy learning, which builds on the idea that learners construct meaning within social settings. This gives prominence to the social and cultural practices that give shape to all learning and therefore informs the theoretical framework of my inquiry into how the learners' writing development is shaped by their interactions with those around them.

Sociocultural theory provides a useful lens to examine and interpret how students work together with their peers and actively participate in collaborative learning. This learning community plays a critical role as students help each other in the co-construction of knowledge about written texts.

Section Two: Boys who are not succeeding in writing

The underachievement of some boys in writing is a major concern internationally and in New Zealand. A significant feature is that girls are consistently scoring higher in assessments than boys, particularly in their participation, engagement and motivation, and in how they see themselves as writers.

The previous curriculum, *English in the New Zealand curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1994), states that all students need to be able to understand, respond to and use oral, written and visual language in a range of contexts. Skilful writing is a major part of language as this enables students to convey information; to express feelings; to record, clarify and reflect on ideas, experiences and experiences or opinions; and to give imaginative and aesthetic pleasure (Crooks, Flockton & White, 2006).

To discuss boys' achievement in writing and the factors that support successful writing I will explore current thinking about their lower achievement and key factors which contribute to their successful writing achievement. This includes the motivation to write, choice of topics, use of metacognitive strategies and collaborating to write.

Lower achievement for boys in writing

International and national research findings consistently report that some boys are not succeeding in skilful writing at all levels of education systems. Reports from Australia (Alloway, et al. 2002), and England (Ofsted, 2003) investigated boys' learning and achievement in literacy and the effective teaching practice of writing at the primary level of the school. In addition, the focus was on the use of educational theory as it related to the relevant issues and current understandings into boys' literacy practices. Ofsted (2003) emphasised the need for teachers to provide more opportunities for boys to learn by allowing them to take more control of their own learning. Alloway et al., (2002) inquired into previous findings about boys who have lower literacy skills than girls. Their research trialed and evaluated a range of classroom interventions in 24 schools, and surveyed the views and perceptions of primary teachers and the students' parents about the issue of boys and literacy. Recommendations pointed to the importance of teachers helping boys to maintain a productive sense of themselves as literacy learners by taking into account each student's background and experiences. They advocate that this can be achieved by encouraging boys to write about what is real from their everyday popular culture, and to learn to work collaboratively. The research focus was mainly on teacher and parent responses and not on boys talking about their own writing experiences.

This view is consistent with the sociocultural interpretation of literacy and with the approach of *Effective literacy practice in years 5–8* (Ministry of Education, 2006) which was outlined earlier in this chapter. The recommendations from Ofsted (2003) and Alloway et al. (2002) influenced my investigation into the research around boys' achievement in writing.

Research within the New Zealand context supports the view that there is an over-representation of boys who are not achieving in writing at all levels of the education system. A report every four years, the National Educational Monitoring Project (NEMP) (Crooks, Flockton & White, 2006), informs educational policy makers about the achievement of year 4 and year 8 primary school students in all learning areas of the curriculum. Since 1993, this report has examined and compared results from random nationwide samples of students' understandings, purposes, skills and motivation in writing. The focus is on expressive writing in which students have the

freedom to write inventively, functional writing where students present information, and writing conventions where the focus is on students' performance in spelling, punctuation and grammar. In addition, a writing survey, which questions the students' interests and liking for writing, has a strong bearing on their attitude to writing. The year 8 students are at the end of primary education and are therefore at an important stage to assess. In the following year these students will begin secondary schooling and will be required to work more independently in all areas of literacy, especially in writing. The overall findings from this report are concerning, as the comparison of mean effect size between 2002 and 2007 shows that girls continue to average moderately higher than boys in all aspects of writing achievement and that girls are more positive about their writing activities than the boys.

Similar evidence is seen in the Ministry of Education's (2007a) research about boys' participation, engagement and achievement at the different levels of the education system. Key evidence shows that there is an over-representation of boys who have lower achievement in writing and disengagement in their schooling. Little has changed in this result since 2005. An alarming finding comes from the analysis of writing mean scores from *asTTLe* (Ministry of Education 2007a) which indicated that girls score consistently higher than boys in writing achievement. In year 9 onwards this trend continues as girls still outperform boys in writing achievement with an increasing gender gap at all levels of the school. Furthermore, schools and their teachers are recommended to take a step to ensure that boys are engaged in and excited by their learning in order to reach their full potential.

Motivation to write

A crucial factor that appears to affect boys' writing achievement is their lack of motivation to write. Teachers need to create learning conditions for motivating their students, as the Ministry of Education (2006) asserts:

> only when students are motivated and enjoy learning are they likely to make the progress they are capable of in their literacy learning and to perceive themselves as successful literacy learners. (p. 22)

Smith and Elley (1997) examined a number of international and New Zealand studies which investigated student attitude to writing when traditional approaches to writing were on the product or skill, rather than on a process. The common trend of boys having negative attitudes to writing compared to girls was apparent. These results were consistent with the findings from Hansen's (2001) research in a secondary school setting which show that students' self-efficacy, beliefs, attitudes and writing preferences affects boys' achievement. The boys displayed negative attitudes and less writing satisfaction than girls. Furthermore, a report examining the quality of classroom writing programmes in years 5 to 8 (New Zealand Education Review Office, 2002) stresses that the issue of student motivation to write is significant for all teachers. It argues that the awareness and acknowledgement of students' writing preferences in the teachers' design and implementation of writing progammes may well be important in reversing a trend of boys' lack of motivation and achievement in writing.

The research of Flockton, Crooks and White (2006) and Ministry of Education (2007a) compared gender achievement including student attitudes to their writing. This revealed that girls scored higher and displayed more positive attitudes to writing than boys. Both reports highlighted recommendations for further research into the effective practice of teaching of writing, and in particular the motivation of boys as learners.

Choice of topic

The level of students' motivation to write at school and their level of satisfaction in writing may be influenced by the range or restriction of topics to write about. Graves (1983) advocates that students write best when they write from their personal experiences. Schunk and Zimmerman (2008) argue that highly motivated students are more attentive to their learning processes than poorly motivated students, and those students who choose a task or a topic to write about display greater progress in writing than unmotivated students.

Boys' preferences for choosing topics from their own experiences and popular culture impact positively on their writing achievement (Fletcher, 2006; Newkirk 2002). Furthermore, there is disparity between teachers' expectations of what topics

boys should write about and what boys prefer to write about (Dyson, 2003; Maynard, 2002; Anderson, Labbo, Martinez-Roldan, 2003). An example of this is when boys choose to write about violence, and the tension between what teachers expect the boys to write about and what boys really want to write about can impact on their attitudes, motivation and attainment in writing (Sax, 2007).

Research from Anderson (2001), Education Review Office (2002) and Hood (1997) informed *Effective literacy practice in years 5 to 8* (Ministry of Education, 2006) which provides clear guidelines to teachers to allow students to write about topics of their own choice, stating:

> as well as completing teacher-directed writing tasks, students need time to write for their own purposes. They need opportunities to write simply and honestly about their own experiences and things that matter to them and to share their writing. (p. 118)

Students having self-motivation to write and teachers allowing students some freedom of choice in choosing topics to write about can contribute to successful writing. Another key factor for success is students possessing knowledge about their own thought processes as they perform the writing task, and this is discussed in the following section.

Use of metacognitive strategies in writing

One of the aims of the sociocultural view of learning is to encourage students to be active thinkers and be self-directed in their learning. In order to learn more effectively students need knowledge about "how to monitor their cognitive resources, called metacognition, and how they learn, called meta-learning" (McInerney & McInerney, 1998, p. 222).

This is reflected in *The New Zealand curriculum* (2007b) which places importance on five key competencies for children to succeed in learning. One of these is "thinking", which is defined as "creative, critical, and metacognitive processes to make sense of information, experiences and ideas" (p. 12). The importance of students being able to articulate what they know and can do is that it helps them to set themselves new goals and meet new challenges in learning (Pressley, Billman, Perry, Reffitt & Reynolds, 2007).

Bruning, Shraw, Norby, and Ronning (2004) describe metacognition as including two related dimensions of thinking. These two dimensions are the essential component of skilled learning. The first is the knowledge students have about their thinking and the second is their ability to regulate their own cognitive processes. This development of self-awareness and self-regulation is critical to their cognitive growth. They believe that knowledge and cognition include three components. The first is declarative knowledge: having knowledge about ourselves and knowing what helps performance in learning. The second is procedural knowledge, which is knowledge about cognitive strategies. The third is conditional knowledge: when and why to use various strategies.

Several studies have explored how writers metacognitively process information and therefore are more able to advance their writing. Carey and Flower (1989) found that the writers' acquisition of metacognitive strategies impacts on their writing achievement. Englert, Raphael, Anderson, Anthony and Stevens (1991) assert that writers who have a deeper knowledge about their topic advance their writing. Another study, McNaughton, Parr and Tuhiwai Smith (1996), considered student beliefs about themselves as writers and whether this affected their writing achievement. Their findings revealed that poor writers believe that to be engaged in writing was for the purposes of getting their work done, getting it right and making a finished product for the teacher to assess. Furthermore, good writers felt confident as writers and showed self-knowledge about their writing. A study by Graham and Harris (1997) found that writers who are successful at writing concentrate on expressing meanings as their primary goal, and less skilled writers continue to focus on the mechanical features of writing. In a study that investigates how students acquire and use literacy skills it is important to find out whether they are able to reflect on and discuss their thinking, their problem- solving strategies and their knowledge about what helps them to write.

Collaborating to write

The beginning of this chapter introduced a sociocultural interpretation of literacy where children's learning is mediated in various social settings. The chapter also introduced the concept of children's learning being scaffolded by others within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

The school setting offers many opportunities for students to work in collaboration as they engage in literacy learning activities. *Effective literacy practice in years 5 to 8* (Ministry of Education, 2006) provides close links to sociocultural theory and the socialisation model of literacy learning, and explains that when students write with their peers they are learners constructing meaning within social settings. In year 7 and year 8 the students' peers are among the most significant people in their lives and influence their values, attitudes, and behaviours.

There is a need for teachers to consider the literacy practices that these students see used and valued by those closest to them. The students' peers will contribute to the students' own cultural identity and expertise. In advising teachers about their planning, *Effective literacy practice in years 5 to 8* (Ministry of Education, 2006) places importance on a well-planned literacy programme which includes peer groups, buddies, and peer tutors who will contribute constructively to the student's literacy development. It also stresses that teachers should model collaborative ways of talking about writing so that their students are supported in sharing their work and can help one another to clarify their meaning and extend their thinking about their writing. Such a view is reflected by Yarrow and Topping's (2001) study, which focused on pairs of primary school students who collaborated to write and compared their writing with students who wrote individually. Significant gains were made in the quality of writing and student attitude toward writing, when the students wrote interactively with their peer.

The following section suggests how drama can play a major role in providing students with supporting strategies to help students to engage more deeply with learning.

Section three: Drama as a strategy to enhance writing

The previous sections in this chapter introduced sociocultural theory in relation to classroom literacy learning, then described some of the key factors that influence boys' success in writing. These factors include teachers fostering greater motivation to write, allowing students freedom to choose their topics, encouraging collaboration to write, and promoting students' awareness of their metacognitive strategies. This section will draw from these key factors, including the sociocultural approach to

literacy teaching and learning, and discuss research that promotes the use of drama as a process for facilitating students' learning. I will focus on research which promotes the use of drama to advance learning in educational settings. I will discuss the use of drama strategies to enhance boys' ways of working with writing.

Drama promotes learning in educational settings. Poston-Anderson (2008) reviewed drama in education, theory and practice from the works of Wagner (1976), Heathcote (1978), O'Neill and Lambert (1982), Bolton (1985), O' Toole (1992), Neelands (1990) and Gardner (1999). She advocates that drama within a sociocultural context plays a central role in supporting children's learning. Teachers can promote learning through the characteristics of drama which are "engaging and motivating, holistic and integrating, inclusive and community building". Thus, for students using this approach to learning, their "cognitive, affective, social and aesthetic development, become the centre of concern" (Poston-Anderson, 2008, p. 11). A result of this is that the students' learning benefits most, as they are in what Vygotsky (1978) calls the zone of proximal development as discussed in part one. This zone can be described as "when mentors provide guidance through scaffolding, and they assist to extend their learning beyond where they started and to reach their own level of understanding". (p. 12)

Andersen (2002) states that students can make greater cognitive gains when they are working within their dramatic created worlds. Drama supports students to become more capable of making linguistic choices as well as expressing opinions or suggesting solutions. In addition, teachers who use drama activities as a holistic and meaningful communication process enable their students to become involved in writing, which is essential to the students' literacy development. McNaughton (1997) provides another reason why drama is an important medium for learning. The techniques of drama serve as methods to foster metacognition in classroom learning, which benefits all learners.

Drama and writing

The relationship between educational drama and writing in classroom programmes is apparent as Neelands, (1993) writes:

writing generated in response to concrete particulars of context can lead to awareness of the genre, register and audience, since the authentic situations of drama provide opportunities for students to experience the cause and effect of their personal writing. (p. 27)

Teachers using drama strategies are able to use these to motivate and engage the students as successful learners in writing. A useful method to keep some boys actively engaged in literacy learning was for the teacher to engage with the boys' literate culture and their passions to enhance their learning. Smith and Wilhelm (2006) draw from Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of flow[1] and investigate why some at-risk and reluctant adolescent boy writers were passionate about their chosen interests and how the reasons underlying these passions related to their literate activity both in and out of school. Using drama strategies, which are carefully designed, encourages learners to have control over their learning and to advance their literacy in a positive way.

In a similar vein, Martello (2002) argues for the use of drama to extend children's literacy by including their popular culture and home lives. There is an extension of the children's oral language and writing when their learning integrates into their meaningful experiences. Drama strategies to promote literacy in classrooms are supported by Dyson (1997), Wilhelm (1998) and Maynard (2002). Recommendations from their work include the use of these strategies as appropriate in the discourse around effective teaching of literacy for boys.

Importance is placed on drama as a learning area of "The Arts" in *The New Zealand curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007b). It is viewed as a form of expression that can transform peoples' creative ideas into expressive works that communicate layers of meaning. Students' working and learning in "The Arts" are able to "explore, refine, and communicate ideas as they connect thinking, imagination, senses, and feelings to create works and respond to the works of others" (p. 17). Teachers who use drama in their programmes enable learners to use "their imaginations, to engage with unexpected outcomes, explore multiple solutions, construct meanings, produce works, and respond to and value others' contributions" (p. 21). Futhermore the *Arts*

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[1] Csikzentmihalyi describes flow activities are those in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter (see, Csikzentmihalyi, 1990).

in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2000) stressed that drama can contribute to students' literacy development by deepening their ability to engage with, comprehend and respond to written text, to give opportunities to respond to and make meaning from various texts, and to use written language.

Summary

Chapter two has reviewed literature and included the possible reasons why some boys do not like to write, and how these factors might impact on their writing achievement. Schooling impacts differently on boys' and girls' literacy achievement, and the literature provided recommendations for teachers to adopt a range of pedagogical strategies and cultural practices which promote boys' achievement in writing. These included the choice of topics to write about, the use of metacognitive strategies and collaborating to write. Furthermore, a need was identified for teachers to develop more appropriate teaching strategies to advance boys' achievement. From this literature there is insufficient evidence from the findings that investigate boys' voice about their motivation and writing experiences and about what does work for them to achieve in writing. A drama strategy may provide a vehicle for writers to become involved as joint constructors of their learning to enable them to reflect on their writing experiences. This way of viewing students' learning together will guide the exploration of how the boys write in their created meaningful contexts. The present study seeks to fill the gap in recent research by focusing on students' own voices about what helps them to achieve in writing. In the next chapter I discuss the methodology for this investigation that seeks to address some of the issues described in the literature review.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction

Chapter three outlines the methodology and design of my research. This was a qualitative inquiry following the principles of case study design, which investigated a small group of year seven and year eight boys who underachieve in writing. Sociocultural theory provided the theoretical framework to explore key ideas of the social and cultural influences on the boys' learning, how knowledge is constructed through interactions, what is produced collectively and how the learner uses this knowledge. These ideas were examined in relation to the approaches and strategies the boys used when writing. Semi-structured interviews, participant observations and documentation were used to gather information in order to answer the main research question.

The Research design

This study aimed to identify the factors and processes involved in year 7 and year 8 boys' engagement and motivation to write over a ten-week period in relation to collaborating with a peer and the use of a drama strategy, role play.

The main research question was:

To what extent can year 7 and year 8 boys advance their writing when they collaborate with a peer and choose to use a drama strategy?

In order to identify the patterns and processes involved in the boys' understanding of their knowledge about their writing, sub-questions were developed to assist in answering the main question.

The seven sub-questions were:

1. How do boys who have been identified as underachieving writers describe their achievement in writing?

2. What helps them to write?

3. What are their views on using drama strategies as a support to write?

4. What are their beliefs about student writing in the classroom?

5. What specific writing programmes are used in their classroom?

6. What are the boys' views about writing when they collaborate with a peer and use a drama strategy?

7. How does the boys' motivation to write impact on their use of metacognitive strategies?

Sub-questions 1, 2, and 3 were intended to be used to explore the drama intervention and to compare this with findings after the intervention.

In order to examine the boys' classroom writing experiences, and to enable closer scrutiny of how the teacher supports students with their writing, sub-questions 4 and 5 were asked of their teacher before and after the intervention.

As the study progressed and data were analysed after the intervention, sub-question 6 was developed and refined to reflect the emerging evidence of how the boys viewed their writing when they collaborated with a peer and used the drama strategy. It became apparent that attention needed to shift to a closer focus on the boys' own voices about their writing experiences. As discussed in chapter two, whilst there is considerable literature giving examples on how educators motivate writers, less is known about what boys say and think about themselves as writers and what motivates them to write.

The literature revealed that the choice of topic, collaborating to write and the use of a drama strategy were motivational factors seen as likely to impact on the boys' writing development. Therefore, sub-question 7 was designed to identify which motivational factors had the most impact on the boys' metacognitive strategies, to evaluate how successful the intervention was, thereby informing the main research question.

A qualitative approach

This study uses a qualitative approach as the theoretical stance with a sociocultural framework from which to situate the study. Merriam (1998) defines qualitative research as:

> an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible. (p. 5)

This approach is appropriate for examining the meanings the participants attach and bring to their experiences, and it permits a description of patterns of behaviours within a group situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Therefore it is a suitable approach to gather rich data on the students' own perspectives and experiences of their writing in their classroom environment.

A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study as it includes techniques such as semi-structured interviews to explore the scope and depth of the participants' point of view. This included observations that were essential in obtaining detailed "thick descriptions" (Slavin, 2007) of the participants writing experiences and their strategies used. In addition, documentation provided specific examples of the participants' writing. The review of the literature was an ongoing process evolving as the study progressed to help interpret and to clarify the qualitative findings. The data collected placed emphasis on the participants' own words. This enabled the researcher to explore reasons and to understand meanings that a social group gives to the activity they are jointly part of (Slavin, 2007; Yin, 2006; Stake, 2008).

The case study

This is described as a case study within the qualitative paradigm, as it is a small-scale investigation within its real-life context with a specific set of boundaries (Yin, 2003). A case study was appropriate as it focused on the investigation of the approaches and strategies, which the students used in the context of working with their peers in a classroom. Yin (2003) defines the case study inquiry within a set of technical features which relies on multiple sets of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangular fashion. It benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (pp. 13–14). The case study as a research strategy facilitates descriptive data, which helps to provide a deeper understanding of the participants, as their reality is constructed by interactions within their social group (Stake, 1995).

The different roles of the researcher are important. My role as a qualitative researcher was an observer, interviewer, evaluator and interpreter. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe this role as "an *interpretive bricoleur* who produces a *bricolage* – that is, pieced together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation" (p. 4).

Selection of student participants

I approached the principal and the participants from a large city intermediate school. I had already established a relationship with the teacher two years prior to this project as I had worked with the school's teachers in a professional capacity in drama education and literacy. This school had collected writing samples from every student as part of evaluating the effectiveness of their writing programmes. The writing samples had been analysed and moderated by teachers using the *asTTLe* (Ministry of Education, 2003) tool. This body of writing was used to support the selection of eight year 7 and year 8 boys from one classroom. Students were chosen because their *asTTLe* writing results on the Likert-scale showed they did not like writing at school. Further analysis revealed that these boys thought they were not good at writing and they were below the curriculum level norms. The girls from the same class revealed positive attitudes in comparison to those of the boys. Their teacher had identified these boys as low achievers in all aspects of writing. Names and identifying information have been altered to maintain anonymity.

Sources of data collection

This study investigated boys' achievement in writing after they had collaborated with a peer and used a drama strategy. The sources were samples of *asTTLe* writing from a school-wide test, statements from semi–structured interviews with students and their teacher and information from non-participant observations. All data originals were kept in a secure file on my computer (accessible by password only) and the hard copies were kept in a locked file at my home.

The interviews

An important source of case study information is the interview. Yin (1994) states, "case study interviews are of an *open-ended nature* in which you can ask key respondents about the facts of a matter as well as their opinions about events" (p.90). This format of semi-structured interviews was chosen as the method allowed me to ask questions to serve the line of the inquiry, by enabling the gathering of detailed sources of information. To provide corroboration of the interview a tape recording of interviews was used along with written notes, which gave detail. This enabled a check for accuracy and the gathering of rich qualitative data.

The first interviews took place at the beginning of term three 2009. The face-to-face semi-structured interviews using interview schedule number one were conducted with the self-selected pairs of students (see Appendix I). The participants' comments were audio-recorded and notes were taken. As the students had been identified as lower achievers in writing, I decided to read out the questions to each pair of students. The interviews and notes were transcribed. As a form of member checking an oral summary of the key points was made at the end of each interview to ensure the boys' understanding of their correct meaning and to enable them to amend or add further information. This method was used because the students could not be expected to read a long written transcript for checking. All students agreed with the key points made. Following the student interviews, a face-to-face semi-structured interview with the teacher, using interview schedule number one (see Appendix J) was audio-recorded and the transcript of this interview was given back to the teacher to check for accuracy and to make amendments if necessary. The intent here was to enable the teacher to reflect on the statements made and to make adjustments to the transcript if they wished.

After the ten-week research period, which included the drama intervention, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with the pairs of students using the interview schedule two (see Appendix K). This was followed by a semi-structured interview schedule with the teacher using interview schedule two (see Appendix L). Some of Interview two questions differed from interview 1 questions, as they were developed through the course of the intervention. These questions were further developed to elicit more detailed explanation in order to answer the main research question.

Pilot study

A pilot study of the teacher and student interview questions was administered to several respondents, who were not involved in the main study. The pilot enabled the identification of issues that needed addressing before the interviews. Small adjustments were made to the interview questions and procedures to be followed. For example, after the trial of the questionnaire the student respondents stated that they would like fewer questions about their classroom writing programme and more questions about what helps them to write. As a result, two questions were removed. My reasoning for the change was related to the possibility of gaining more information about what motivates writers to write. The teachers interviewed stated they found the questions useful as they helped them to reflect on and evaluate their own writing programmes and student learning in their classrooms.

Participant observations

Direct observation of the participants was useful for providing another form of evidence in the case study (Yin, 1994). Slavin (2007) asserts that by observing students in educational settings, "we can often learn more by actually observing them in the classroom" (p. 189). An observation schedule and procedure was developed by the researcher which included the detailed description of each behaviour to be coded. The observation schedule included observations of each pair of students, twice, over an eight-week period in term three, 2009. Field notes and audio recordings were taken and these were recorded and transcribed as described by Slavin (2007). The focus included descriptions of peers working together, direct quotations, their conversations and my comments. All observations took place in the classroom during

the morning literacy teaching block, at 11.00am until 11.30am. Brief follow-up discussions with each pair of participants followed the observations. The purpose of this was to clarify any questions that may have arisen from my observations and to provide confirmation from the participants.

Documentation

In addition to the data from interviews and observations, relevant documentation from my journal and student writing samples provided useful sources of information.

Throughout the research period I kept an observation journal, jotting down anecdotal and reflective notes on the writing programme recording the participants' conversations, participation and motivation to write, and my reflections after each classroom visit.

Three pieces of writing were self-selected by the participants from their draft writing books, one at the beginning, one during and one at the end of the data collecting cycle. These samples were photocopied and used as artifacts by the participants to refer to and to reflect on during their second interview. These writing samples were compared with the first *asTTLe* writing sample to determine changes in the quality of writing over time. This information was used to augment the evidence from the interviews and observations and in particular helped to provide answers to question three. All this documentation provided information to verify and to enhance validity of data as, according to Slavin (2007):

> One of the most important concepts in qualitative research is triangulation, which means supporting conclusions with evidence from different sources. In particular triangulation involves confirming data collected in one way with data collected in a completely different way. (p. 133)

Constraints and ethics

As a researcher I was mindful of the ethical issues involved in the research process, which included my own philosophical orientation throughout (Merriam, 1998). The procedures of the Victoria University of Wellington Ethics Committee, Faculty of Education (2008) were followed. The school principal was consulted prior to the

study to determine what the school and Board of Trustees required in terms of informed consent. The classroom teacher was consulted. All participants received an information sheet (see Appendices A,B,C) regarding the intended study, explaining the aims of the study and what was required of them. Informed consent by all participants, the principal and the Board of Trustees, teacher, and students, were sought and received (see Appendices E,F,G,H), and the researcher informed parents/caregivers about the study (see Appendix G). Signed consent was sought and received from all relevant parties. It was explained to the participants that they could withdraw at any time, and none withdrew. To protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality, all participants were given a pseudonym as a coding device.

There was one conflict I needed to be aware of. This related to the fact that the teacher knew that I was an experienced year seven and year eight teacher, and a Literacy Professional Development provider. During the teacher interviews I was careful not to interrupt or make any responses that may have been interpreted by the teacher as approval or disapproval.

Analysis of data

Qualitative methods informed the analysis of data collected which was considered appropriate for the small-scale case study. During the research period I was the main collector of data. The data obtained from the perspectives of the participants were descriptive therefore enabling an interpretive and explanatory evaluation (Slavin, 2007). After each interview the open-ended questions were transcribed and taped classroom conversations and field-notes, which provided "rich descriptions" were written up (Slavin, 2007). Notes from the reflective journal were transcribed to provide documentation of the ongoing research. The teacher chose not to keep a reflective journal.

Qualitative analysis is defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as "consisting of three current flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing verification" (p. 10). I found the process of reduction of data to be useful within the context in which the data had occurred. This analysis focused on the organisation and presentation of the words from the "rich descriptions" and the interrelationships between occurring themes in local contexts. As Miles and Huberman (1994) assert:

Most analysis is done with words. The words can be assembled, sub-clustered, broken into semiotic segments. They can be organised to permit the researcher to contrast, compare, analyse, and bestow patterns upon them. (p. 7)

I examined all of the documents concurrently with the student writing samples, and analysed these in relationship to the literature and the emerging themes. Time one data from the interviews with the pairs of students, the observations and documentation were triangulated. This first set of data was compared with the time two interviews and my observations during and after the intervention. Hence, this approach allowed me to determine the perceptions of change in boys' experiences of writing, their attitudes towards writing, and how they viewed the use of the drama strategy to enhance their writing. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) this form of analysis "sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and/or organises in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified". (p. 11)

To enable this to happen the information from the interviews was printed, cut and pasted into relevant themes on large pieces of paper relating to the questions and sub-questions. I developed a colour coding system, which allowed for the related findings and new ideas to emerge. I searched for patterns of consonance and dissonance from the data gathered in the teacher and the student interviews, and from my observations. As I worked with the data, the research questions and sub-questions (see p. 21) were in the forefront of my thinking, which enabled me to explore possibilities of themes or trends emerging from the partially processed data. The three emerging themes were boys' perceptions of themselves as writers, motivating boys to write and the usefulness of the drama strategy as a support for writing. The *asTTLe* writing samples provided a measure of the students' attitude, motivation to their writing and their metacognitive strategies.

As part of this analysis I put the data onto matrices in order to search for patterns and to draw justified conclusions. I chose to use the matrix format to aid the organisation of the information gathered from the partially processed data, as Miles and Huberman (1994) write:

Valid analysis requires, and is driven by, displays that are focused enough to permit a viewing of a full set of data in the same location, and

are arranged systematically to answer the research questions at hand. (pp. 91–92)

I filled these matrices with evidence and preliminary conclusions drawn, which then led to designs of more matrices to test conclusions. This enabled me to triangulate data from the supporting conclusions, and led to the reduction of bias and to increased validity and reliability of conclusions made (Miles & Huberman, 1994, Slavin, 2007) until the final report was completed. I was mindful my research was concerned with the "particularised experience" of one case, so it will not result in generalisability. However, the rich data collected from the participants will provide new ways to proceed in other educational settings (Stake, 1995).

Validity

A problem of internal validity is when a researcher makes inferences every time an event is observed, during an interview or when documentary evidence has occurred. As Yin (2006) states, "the goal of reliability is to minimise the errors and bias in the study" (p. 45). Therefore, the research design and the pattern making from multiple sets of data is one way of addressing the internal validity of the case. Slavin (2007) argues that when research happens in schools, "reactivity is a particular problem, as there is danger of the individuals behaving differently because a researcher is present and this can potentially lead to bias in the results" (p. 214). A form of this reactivity is called the Hawthorne effect in which the participants do better because they know they are in a research group (Slavin, 2007). In an attempt to avoid this possible bias I took the observation data back to the research participants to check the tentative interpretations to ask if the results were plausible. The participants accepted my interpretations. In addition, during the data gathering process the participants were involved in regular classroom literacy events and these may have impacted on the data. Therefore, the threat to the internal validity of the research was acknowledged (Slavin, 2007). I discussed these events with the participants and the teacher, a record was kept, and this history was considered in the analysis of all data.

Developing relationships

For this study to be successful it was important to develop friendly and trusting relationships with the student participants and their teacher. This approach promotes and increases opportunities for the students' 'voices to speak' about their writing experiences. To enable this to happen I observed and took appropriate notes about ongoing behaviour as it emerged in the students' natural setting, which was their real classroom writing time (Winston, 2006).

Over the ten-week period the students and their teacher welcomed me into their classroom. The students became used to me sitting at the back of the classroom writing in my journal, in close proximity to their desks. This enabled me to collect samples of student conversations, both verbal and non-verbal, when they were writing and talking together and using the drama strategy.

I developed relationships with the participants as I explained the project and sought their permission to ask questions, and observe them working in the classroom. In addition, I had already established a relationship with the teacher two years prior to this project as I had worked with the schools' teachers in a professional capacity in drama education and literacy.

This chapter I have described the methods I used to carry out this study in order to answer the research questions. In the following two chapters I present the research findings.

CHAPTER 4

The research findings: Before the drama intervention

Introduction

This study aims to answer the main research question which asks to what extent year 7 and year 8 boys be motivated to advance their writing when they collaborate with a peer and choose to use a drama strategy. In chapters four and five, I address the main research question by relating the data from the semi-structured interviews, observations and the documentation to the seven sub-questions. These seek information on how boys who have been identified as underachieving writers describe their achievement in writing, what helps them to write and their views on using drama strategies as a support to write.

Chapter four contains two sections. Section 1 provides background information to the findings with a description of the school, the students who participated in this case, their teacher and the classroom-writing programme. Section 2 presents the data gathered before the intervention. This includes the first interpretations from a range of data, which included time one semi-structured interviews with the four pairs of boys and their teacher's statements, and the analysis of the students' school-wide *asTTle* writing samples. From this, three themes emerged: the first theme was the boys' own perceptions of themselves as writers, the second was motivation of the boys as writers, the third was the successful use of the drama strategy as a support for writing. These three headings are presented in the second section of this chapter.

Section 1: Background information

The school

The research was undertaken in one class of students in an intermediate school in a New Zealand city. At the time of the research there were 550 students enrolled and 18 teachers in this school. One teacher and eight students from the teacher's class were invited to participate in this study. Their teacher identified eight year 7 and year 8 boys as having low motivation to write and in addition, results from the *asTTLe*

writing analysis tool (Ministry of Education, 2003) revealed that these boys were well below the *asTTLe* norm.

The students

The student participants were five year 8 and four year 7 boys. The information from the *asTTLe* test revealed that four boys had identified themselves as Maori and four as New Zealanders. Over time I developed a positive relationship with them and when I visited their classroom they happily welcomed me and chatted with ease. These boys indicated they were pleased to be part of the writing study. Four boys were confident speakers and two were quietly spoken. The teacher had identified three of the boys as having difficult classroom behavioural problems. All of these boys indicated on the *asTTLe* test that they did not like writing at school and did not think they were good at writing.

The teacher

The teacher had four years of teaching experience with year seven and year eight students in this school. Statements from the teacher's semi-structured interview revealed that the teacher was pleased to support this study. He described his writing programme as almost non-existent due to other curriculum demands such as the teaching of reading and activities associated with a school camp. He identified a difficulty for himself in teaching writing. He said he chose to take part in this study because he had a particular interest in "*getting into writing*" with his students again and therefore "*looked forward*" to positively supporting this research.

From my observations his classroom teaching and learning environment appeared to fit with the sociocultural perspective of the learners cooperating together to construct new knowledge, as described in chapter two (p. 10). Observations of the classroom environment revealed a positive classroom climate where a caring working culture had been established. The students were seated in mixed groups of boys and girls. The teacher described how he worked hard to establish a culture where the year 8 students supported the year 7 students, not only with their academic work but socially as well.

In a quiet area of the classroom, away from the students' desks, a large low table was surrounded with comfortable cushions for writers to use. There was a large area at the front of the classroom free from desks. This was designed for groups of students to sit on the floor and work with their teacher. The classroom walls were "print rich" and filled with students' art, project work and sports posters, which were displayed proudly. The teacher described the students in his class as "*caring and outspoken*". He identified a number of boys as very hard to teach, as "*they have poor behaviour and attitude to schoolwork*". The students appeared to like and respect their teacher.

The drama intervention

The drama intervention consists of students writing in pairs and asking questions to guide conversations about their writing. The writer chooses to use the drama strategy role-play to replay a character in their story. Role-play involves the student imagining that she/he has taken on a unique angle of perception of their own or the perspective of another person. A timetable for writing and the drama intervention (see Appendix N) was established with the teacher for the teacher and the class of students to use over the ten-week research period. This took place every Wednesday, term three, 2009 between 11.30am and 12.30pm. Drama prompts were written on small cards to guide the students' questioning (see Appendix M). The teacher had reflected that establishment of a "*collaborative learning environment in the classroom was part of the class learning culture*" and because of this "*the students were able to write confidently with their partner*". Therefore, the drama strategy and the use of the prompt cards were introduced and modelled by the teacher with my support, to all students.

Section 2: Presentation of data before the intervention

Section 2 describes the data gathered before the intervention. These data were produced from the boys' and their teachers' semi-structured interviews and documentation from my journal notes. The intention was to explore understandings and opinions of themselves as writers, and whether they had experiences of using drama strategies to motivate their writing during their past schooling. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter the information from these themes informs the three sub-questions asked: how do boys who have been identified as underachieving

writers, describe their achievement in writing, what helps them to write, and what are the boys' views on using drama strategies as a support for writing.

Boys' Perceptions of themselves as writers

Enjoyment as writers

In interview one for students (see Appendix I) question number one asked, **how much do you like writing?** The boys could choose from the indicators provided, which were heaps, quite a lot, a little and not at all. Most of the boys indicated that they *"only liked writing a little"*. Reasons were given as *"I get bored"* and *"I don't know why"* and *"I can express my emotions in any writing"*. One student who selected *"not like writing at all"* giving as a reason *"there are heaps of words and I get tired"*. In addition, most boys drew attention to *"having to edit their written work"* as a reason they also strongly disliked writing. This information was compared with the responses they had written on their *asTTLe* writing attitude questions. There was a match between both responses. The *asTTLe* data revealed that most of the boys indicated they disliked writing at school too.

To be successful at writing

The boys had clear and strong views about why they considered themselves to be not so good at writing. Their explanations focused mainly on their inabilities to rework adequately their surface features of writing, and on their capabilities of the mechanics of writing. Examples from the boys included poor spelling and punctuation and the difficulty of *"putting spaces between words"*. As discussed in chapter two, *asTTLe* (Ministry of Education, 2003) defines the surface features of writing as grammar, punctuation and spelling. The deeper features of writing are described as audience awareness and purpose, content and ideas, structure and organisation and language resources. Most boys identified a lack of editing skills, untidy work, poor test results and *"couldn't write on the lines"* as reasons why they considered themselves not to be successful writers. One boy drew attention to his past schooling where his teacher told him he was not good at writing, and he believed this statement to be true.

> David: *Oh! I'm not very good at writing…. the last teacher said that my sister and brother have better books than me.*

The boys viewed successful writers as having written work that *"needed to be neat and tidy"* and writers *"needed to write faster"* as illustrated in the responses below:

David: *I am slow all the time. I like my writing neat. When I like to spell right I'm not so fast.*

Sam: *I write slow to keep it neat. If you go too fast it won't be neat probably scribbly.*

Andy: *I write fast cos if I have an idea and if I can focus on something else I lose it so I quickly write it down.*

The majority of the boys drew attention to how they had to guess whether they were good at writing. Two points are notable; first, although they claimed that their teachers thought they were poor writers the boys could give no evidence to back this up. Second, most boys explained that when parents or caregivers supported them with their writing homework they thought that they were good writers. In contrast, Kenny stressed how the only feedback about his writing ability came from his parents who told him he was *"below average"*. He explained:

... and they think, they think I am not stupid, like dumb and that but they don't think I am perfect. But they think I am not that good either. So they think like, they think I'm just below average.

The boys commented that over their entire primary school days they had not received any feedback from their past teachers as to whether they were good writers.

Use of metacognitive strategies

During interview one (see Appendix I) the students were asked if they could provide reflections on their awareness of metacognitive strategies to help improve their writing. The term metacognition had been explained to them. In their responses four boys showed no awareness of their learning processes or their use of writing strategies. However, four boys commented that improving their spelling and punctuation skills would help their writing. This illustrates the students' belief in the importance of attending to the surface features of writing, which may help to reduce their focus on the important deep features or the meaning of the story. Andy

mentioned surface features but he also reflected on trying to improve on his descriptive language, and explained:

> *Like similes and descriptive language cos I put in words like I put in enormous gigantic and probably I am pretty good with spelling yeah I just need to work on full stops capital letters.*

This is consistent with the findings of McNaughton, Parr and Tuhiwai Smith (1996), and Graham and Harris (1997) that successful writers concentrate on expressing meaning when they write, and less skilled writers tend to just focus on the mechanical features of writing. The boys' reflections of their perceptions of their writing are useful to answer the sub-question how boys who have identified as underachieving writers describe their achievement in writing.

Motivating boys to write

Writing with others

The participants reflected on their experiences of writing with a partner during their schooling, in interview one (see Appendix I). The boys commented on the usefulness of this collaboration with such comments as from "*all of our ideas together gave a real cool story*" and working with a peer *"helped me to think about what to write next".* These examples of their reflections show how their enjoyment of writing with a peer helps with their writing. As noted by Yarrow and Topping (2001), when pairs of students collaborate to write, results show gains in the quality of writing.

Of particular interest, most boys drew attention to writing in groups of mixed gender. Of the eight boys, five said they would rather work with boys than with girls. All gave similar reasons as boys know what boys like to write about, and gave such examples as wars, cars, bikes and guns. They explained that they didn't like to write with girls as they tended to choose to write about fairies and ponies and therefore would not understand boys' thinking. Providing further insight into boys' preference of who to write with, three of the boys said they liked to write with mixed gender groups. They explained that girls were "*smarter than boys*" and because of this it is useful to work with the girls. They indicated that these girls contributed to the boys learning about writing. Sam's comment illustrates why he liked to include girls as writing buddies:

Girls can help us out more sometimes than boys. Cos girls are high tec.
They know more than us…they are smarter they got brains.

Choice of topics

The information from the boys' reflections of their motivation to write and their choice of topic to write about was valuable as this information informed the sub-question that asked what helps boys to write.

In response to question six in interview one (see Appendix I), the most frequent topics the boys "*wished they were allowed to write*" about were war, Hitler, sport, rugby, violence, bikes, guns and "*anything we want*". Most reflected on their past writing experiences from their junior primary school days, when they had chosen to write about topics that their teacher did not approve of, and they recalled the consequences of these actions. For example, Pete described how his former teacher had made him erase a story she/he did not approve of:

I was back at primary a long time ago I was writing about shooting and violence and all of that and my teacher said you are not allowed to write about that, go back and rub it all out and write about something else… I felt….aha stink cos it was just a waste of time writing out all those words.

A similar experience was described by Ian:

Cos, I wrote about something like about guns or paintball she just said go back and rub it out and write about something else.

When I asked him how he felt replied:

Sad, bad … I really wanted to be a writer about that (guns and paintball) but I had to change it all.

David described a similar negative experience of writing when he was younger and his previous teacher's reaction to his topic choice was extreme.

I had a topic like she got really angry… cos I always wrote about things I liked… like motorbikes and BMX. She got really angry and ripped out the page… it went straight in the bin.

These boys stressed that it was a common occurrence for them to not know what was an acceptable topic to write about in their class-writing programme. By way of illustration, Andy explained about an experience he had in the junior primary school. He was writing about what he considered a violent incident in a football match and stated:

> *I write about violence at primary and yeah I got told off. We had to talk about it in class. Cos back in primary you could miss a line so I wrote six pages of violence and then and I got told off and I had to rip all those pages out and it took me about two days to do all of it... I felt gutted. Cos I didn't know we couldn't write about violence.*

Given the expressions of the boys it can be assumed that there is a tension between what topics the boys want to write about and what their teachers require them to write, as noted in Sax's (2007) findings, chapter two.

Using a drama strategy to support writing

This information from the theme using a drama strategy to support writing informed the sub-question, about the boys' views on using drama strategies as a support to write. The boys and their teacher reflected on their experiences of using drama to support their thinking and learning about their writing. The teacher commented on the knowledge and views of drama in education which he could use to enhance student learning. He referred to drama as an essential discipline from *The New Zealand curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007b). However, he had not used drama to facilitate any student learning, as he explained:

> *I love the use of drama but I lack courage and stepping out, you know role play.*

The teacher commented that the reason he agreed to take part in the research project was to become confident with using drama in his future class programmes and to engage his students more fully in learning. He referred to drama programmes that had been modelled during past professional development programmes and reflected on what he saw, which was how motivated students were to learn when they worked in drama.

The majority of the boys commented on having had little experience of drama as a learning medium during their primary schooling. One boy indicated he felt "*stupid*" when taking part in class drama. However, most of the boys' experiences ranged from no classroom drama to participating in plays and playing drama games. David provided an illustration of how he acted out surfing with a friend and by doing this helped with his story writing.

> *We were doing a story on surfing and we pretended we were walking on the surf ... and we worked out the questions and the answers. I fell off didn't know where the end of the story and he fell off coming up on the shore.*

Only one boy explained how a past drama experience helped to motivate him to write. This is of concern, as Chapter two of Anderson's (2002) findings revealed that students make greater cognitive gains when they are working together in their dramatic created worlds.

Summary

In order to provide information for the research question, three sub-questions were under examination in this initial part of the study: how underachieving boys describe their writing, what helps them to write, and their views on using drama strategies as a support to write. The findings revealed that the majority of the boys' statements describing their writing suggested that they do not like writing and they do not feel successful as writers. Three key issues emerged. First, the majority of the boys had limited awareness of what strategies could help advance their writing. They could not talk about their own metacognitive strategies apart from some surface features. Secondly, all of the boys could articulate strongly on their beliefs about having their own choice of topic to write about as an important motivation to write. Thirdly, they all had little or no experience of the use of drama strategies to support writing was evident. This chapter has provided the background for chapter five, which includes data from the observations of the boys working with their peer during the intervention, and describes and discusses the findings after the intervention.

CHAPTER 5

The research findings and discussion:
During and after the drama intervention

Introduction

Chapter four provided the background information on the students, their teacher and the learning environment and presented the findings from the data gathered before the drama intervention. The review of the literature emphasised the need for more research into how teachers are best able to motivate boys to write and to be excited and engaged about their learning (for example, Ministry of Education, 2007a; Alloway et al., 2002). This chapter describes how after the drama intervention, all of the boys revealed a considerable advancement in their knowledge of writing strategies and in their engagement and motivation to write. The chapter compares the data collected before the intervention with those collected during and after the intervention. This is in order to answer the following sub-questions: what are the boy's views about writing when they collaborated with a peer and used a drama strategy to write? How does the boys' motivation to write impact on their use of metacognitive strategies?

The chapter is presented in two sections. Section one presents the findings from my observations and journal notes associated with the drama intervention. This draws from the information noted during the time two observations and the semi-structured interviews with students, where it was apparent that the motivational qualities of the drama strategy supported the boys to write. In section two, results are presented and discussed in relation to the three themes that emerged in chapter four. These were the boys' own perceptions as writers, motivating boys as writers, and the usefulness of the drama strategy as a support for writing. Although these three themes are explored under separate headings they all interrelate and all play an integral role in answering the main question that focuses on the use of a drama strategy to support boys' advancement of their writing.

Section 1: Observation of the drama intervention and discussion

The drama intervention

This section discusses information from the ten-week period of regular observations of the pairs of boys writing together using the drama strategy of role-play. Three questions guided the observations. These were how did the boys choose to use the drama strategy, how frequently did they use this strategy, and how did the drama strategy enhance their writing. Reflections from my journal notes revealed that all of the boys chose to use the drama strategy during their writing time. This occurred when the writer requested support from their peer to expand their imagination. This use is consistent with Andersen's (2002) findings that the use of drama promotes learning in educational settings. It was evident as the participants were observed to choose frequently to use the drama strategy to role-play their chosen character. Most boys used this strategy more than once with each story written.

The following pattern of how the peers used the drama strategy emerged:

1. The writer read his story to his peer to identify the moment in the story where the peer's input was needed.

2. The students discussed and negotiated what was to take place between them, establishing an agreed focus for the role-play by negotiating and creating their chosen character/s, situation and setting.

3. The drama action took place as a free-flow role-play.

4. A discussion followed about the imagined world they had created. They then wrote about this world.

5. Peers used the drama strategy frequently to support the writer.

In some situations the role-play was repeated as the writer asked for adjustments to be made to the imagined world the two had created. I observed that the majority of the boys appeared to enter willingly the imaginative scene in role, which was set by the writer. The writer's peer was actively engaged, contributing writing ideas that emerged from the action developed from the drama role-play. Andersen (2002) advocates that when the children are working within their dramatic creative worlds then greater cognitive gains are made. This was apparent in the response to the interview two question where they were asked how drama helped with their writing? (see Appendix K). Each pair of students indicated that after they had used the drama strategy, the writer immediately continued adding to his writing with the extra support from his peer. These are examples of children's participation in cultural activities being guided by others (Vygotsky, 1978) as outlined in chapter two.

The New Zealand curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007b) emphasises key factors which support learners to learn, including making connections to their prior knowledge and learning, sharing learning, and reflecting thought and action. This was apparent when the boys referred positively to their use of the drama prompt cards (see Appendix M), and reflected on how supportive questions helped to guide them to use the drama strategy. Responses indicated that the drama prompt cards enabled these boys to share their learning by helping them to focus on making connections to their prior knowledge about their own experiences and therefore to reflect on their thoughts and their actions. As the writing programme progressed over the term, observations revealed the boys used these cards less frequently. Some boys indicated that they "*knew the questions well*" and therefore didn't need to use them. Evidence indicated that the drama prompt cards with the supporting guiding questions are enablers for learners to construct meanings in social settings.

In terms of the drama intervention used within the sociocultural context of the boys' writing together, evidence from the student interviews indicated that this strategy played an important part in promoting their cognitive strategies for writing. This learning will be discussed further on in this chapter. This is consistent with Dysons' (1997) and Maynards' (2002) view that when teachers use drama in the classroom, this can successfully extend children's literacy learning. It is also consistent with the view of Poston-Anderson (2008) who argued that with the promotion of learning

through the engaging and motivating characteristics of drama, children's cognitive development becomes apparent. Furthermore, this fits with Hatanos' (1993) view of the constructivist Vygotskian conception of learning which focuses on how the learner interacts with others creating jointly the context of the interaction.

Section 2: Analysis and discussion

Boys' perceptions of themselves as writers

Enjoyment of writing

A key idea from the literature reviewed was the critical factor that all students need to enjoy writing if they are likely to make progress and see themselves as competent writers. Differences are identified in Table 1: comparison between interview, time one and time two boys' responses to the question, how much do they enjoy writing. This table illustrated positive shifts in their responses. The number 1 on this table represent the boys' responses, prior to the drama intervention and number 2 represented their responses after the drama intervention. Notable are the changes: with all of the boys' responses when they reflected on whether they enjoyed writing during the intervention they all reported an increase in their enjoyment. The question was asked, how much do you enjoy writing?

Table 1: Enjoyment of writing time 1 compared to time 2

	Not at all	A little	Quite a lot	Heaps
Matt		1	2	
Kenny		1	2	
Anaru		1		2
Ricky	1		2	
Ian		1	2	
David			1	2
Sam		1	2	
Pete		1		2

This shift in response was from "a little" to "quite a lot" and "heaps". When the boys worked together as noted in chapter four, Working with others (p. 48), they had an opportunity to choose their own topics to write about, to talk with their peer about

their writing and to use the drama strategy to enhance their work. The boys referred to these factors with positive comments. It is possible that the boys were well aware of the fact they were part of the research and some of this positive attitude could well be because of the attention they were receiving. This could be interpreted as the Hawthorn effect (Slavin, 2007).

The boys' most favoured explanation about their enjoyment of writing was that they could choose anything to write about, and work with their peer. To illustrate this Ian explained why he had "*heaps of enjoyment*" with his writing. This was because he had a lot of his own background information from his choice of topic that could draw from.

> *I like writing quite a lot… cause you know what is happening and you don't have to find all the information.*

A common response from all boys indicated that when they could choose their own topic to write about they enjoyed their writing. An example of this is described by Anaru:

> *…because we are allowed to write about anything… we have a free choice, then I'm into it because I get to write whatever… because it's what we want to write not what the teacher wants us to write.*

Another common response related to the boys' enjoyment of sharing their writing time with a peer, as by doing this their writing seemed easier for them. As Pete illustrates:

> *Cos it's easier to work with another person.*

It is also worth noting that most boys reflected positively about their past teachers helping them to learn about the different text types in their class writing time, for example, explanation, persuasive and narrative texts. There was an acknowledgement of what they considered a good class writing programme looks like to enable them to be motivated writers. Most stressed the need for a balance between what the teacher requires the students to learn and what the students choose to learn. There is support in literature regarding the need for teachers to be flexible,

open to collaboration with others and to be creative in the blending of the in-school and out-of-school writing the students do (Gambrell, Morrow & Pressley, 2007).

The boys articulated a strong desire to have a "free choice" writing time, to enable them to select their own topics to write about. By way of illustration Ian explained why choosing his own topic makes it easier for him to write:

> *Cos it's in your head and it's easier to put on paper ... not trying to think about what the teacher tells you to write about.*

The boys' reflection on their need to be able to choose their own topics to write about fits the findings given by Fletcher (2006) and Newkirk (2002) who note that the boys' preferences for choosing topics from their own popular culture impacts on their motivation to write.

To be successful at writing

Data after the drama intervention clearly showed the boys thought that they had improved with their writing. Their reasons included "*I am now using my imagination*", "*I know what to think*", "*I now know how to make up stories*", "*I have lots of choice (topics) to write about*", "*the ideas pops into my head*", and "*I have good ideas to write about*". Reflections revealed a common perception that "good writers" wrote quickly and wrote a large amount. They reported that when they chose their own topics to write about this enabled them to write faster and therefore they felt they had become successful writers, as David explains:

> *then with doing that (choice of topic) I got it down way faster cause I already know how I think of it and that.*

The boys indicated an increased enjoyment in writing and felt successful as writers whilst using the drama intervention and writing with their peer. This was consistent with Hatano (1993) who says that knowledge is constructed when the learner interacts with another embodying the voices of this other, and creating with them the context of the interaction. The drama intervention allowed for this to happen as it contributed to the cooperative activity, which enabled the boys to interact with a peer collectively and to have more control over their choice of topic. This therefore enabled the writers to make more decisions about their own learning and therefore

improve on their motivation to write. This is consistent with the work of Yarrow and Topping (2001) where students made significant gains with the quality of their writing and their motivation to write when they collaborated with a peer.

Use of metacognitive strategies

It is worth noting that in comparison to time one data there were changes in how the boys talked about their metacognitive strategies. Before the drama intervention the boys struggled to articulate clearly an awareness of their thinking about which writing strategy would be useful to help advance their writing. It appeared that most of the boys talked about how correcting the surface features of their writing would help improve on their work. Brown (cited in Bruning et al., 2004) argues that metacognition's two dimensions, knowledge and cognition, include three components, which are described as declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and conditional knowledge. The boys' responses and reflections are discussed within these three dimensions.

The first component, declarative knowledge, that is, having knowledge about themselves as writers and knowing what helps their performance in learning, was reflected in the comments of almost all of the boys. This has also been illustrated in the key three themes, boys' perceptions of themselves as writers, motivating boys as writers and the usefulness of the drama strategy as a support writing, where they clearly talked about what helped them to write. It was clear from the time two interview question, "what helped you to write stories' (see Appendix K), that most of the boys reflected on their strategies that helped their performance to write. Their responses included note taking, brainstorming the main events, listing topics to write about and then choosing the best one to write about. They clarified their writing ideas by summarising important events when they talked about it with their peer.

The second component is described by Brown (cited in Bruning et al., 2004) as procedural knowledge, which is students' knowledge about cognitive strategies. This was apparent as the boys reflected on their increased confidence with their story writing abilities. A key point was that all of the boys drew attention to how they used a comprehension strategy, "visualization", as described in *Effective literacy practice* in *years 5 to 8,* (Ministry of Education, 2006a), to help with their thinking and

imaginations, to draw from their own real life experiences. They identified this happening when they were able to choose their own topic to write about and use the drama role-play to take their important events to a deeper level. To illustrate this Pete reflects on how the drama role-play successfully helped him to visualise the scene, and to emotionally engage with his thoughts, therefore enabling him to enrich his writing.

> *You have an idea pop into your head and you immediately know what you are going to write about. ... In my free choice I just let loose my brain go you know, go anywhere you know... It feels like fun cos you write down anything you are thinking.*

The third component, conditional knowledge, which is the knowledge of when and why to use a strategy (Brown, cited in Bruning et al., 2004), was not apparent when the boys were asked to reflect on this. The majority of the boys struggled to talk about their knowledge of cognition to improve their writing. Only Pete was able to report that he considered his use of re-reading had helped him to notice the amount of writing he had achieved, and then by re-reading his work again he could shift his thinking to an awareness of his use of describing words, and by doing this improved on his writing. During the time two interview the boys were asked to discuss and explain, using examples from their stories, how they planned, monitored their errors and evaluated their work. They found this request difficult to respond to. This is perhaps not surprising considering that Brown has argued that regulation of cognition may not be conscious in many learning situations and that conscious use of these processes may be related to limitations in one's ability to reflect rather than in one's own ability to regulate (p. 82).

The boys were able to talk about the usefulness of working with a peer and their deliberate use of the drama strategy to support their thinking about their writing. However, most seemed to not have the reflective language to enable them to refer to why they purposefully selected strategies to enhance their writing. It is important to note that throughout the time two interview all boys appeared eager and pointed to examples from their stories as they talked about their writing events and their thinking about their learning.

These findings correlate with the teacher's observation of students' monitoring their errors by using prompting and questioning strategies to help support each other with their writing process. The teacher explained how these students had internalised these strategies:

> *When they get stuck they go back to each other and they prompt each other and they ask for feedback on what they were talking and thinking about – the writing structure or the language features… they know how to prompt each other and to use the when, where and why questions to support their thinking about writing … a lot of their questions they have internalised, so it's just there for them.*

The boys clearly identified what had helped them to enjoy writing more and therefore were more motivated to write. What was particularly motivating for the boys were the opportunities for them to discuss their own topics and writing ideas with their peer. Interestingly, the common theme expressed was that they liked to be able to select their own topic to write about, and to have this topic valued by their teacher. They all described positively how writing with a peer helped with their thinking and learning. However, most of the boys could not reflect at the deeper metacognitive level on how and why their thinking about their writing could advance their writing.

Motivating boys to write

Working with others

A comparison was made between Interview one where the boys indicated that they had found it useful to collaborate with their peers as they wrote stories. It is important to note that each of the boys expressed strong positive evaluations on working with his peer. Using the drama strategy along with the drama prompt cards (see Appendix M) helped them to think about their ideas for writing. An example of this is from Kenny who referred to how Matt had helped with his story. He explained how the collaborative approach helped them to figure out what to write next.

> *Matt prompted me with the cards, um helping me giving me clues to write about and stuff.*

Ricki also notes how his peer supported him with his writing:

He helped me remember part of the story I really, really didn't know, prompting, helping me figure out what I didn't remember.

Futhermore, David elaborated on how he would rather work with his peer than his teacher, as this was "*more helpful than a teacher telling the students what to write*". He explained that the peer immediately responds to his lack of ideas by asking prompting questions, and this helps him to write.

If we did our normal writing with the teacher he told us what to do – but with a peer it's helpful cause he asks you questions you might have forgotten in your story. Like if you are writing half way through or something or a quarter through he might ask you something like where was it happening and you think oh yeah I gotta put that down.

One feature to emerge from the intervention was the significance the boys gave to their teacher modelling appropriate examples of the drama prompts from the cards, as described in chapter four. These drama prompts were a useful aid to motivating the boys as writers and to working together. All of the boys referred to how useful these were on the cards in the beginning of the intervention as these provided help with their thinking about the important events in their stories.

Matt described how the drama prompt cards helped with his thinking about writing:

He prompted me and stuff like that. The cards could give you ideas on what to ask. After I wrote 'when my dad took it to the mechanic and stuff like what happened when he got back home. He asked me what happened when you got back to your house and stuff ... cause it reminded me.

As described earlier, before the intervention most boys had indicated that they did not have the "*know-how*" required to talk about their story with their peer. The observations and the time two interview revealed each pair collaborating together, confidently working closely on a number of occasions. After the intervention the boys spoke more confidently and expressed enjoyment through their talking and sharing of their stories. Furthermore, after the intervention the teacher noted evidence of an increase in the participants' level of engagement in writing in the

classroom. The teacher explained that over a period of time the boys gradually realised the benefits of writing together. The teacher described the positive changes to the boys' attitudes towards writing:

> *at first they were reluctant working together, the boys, the girls no worries. But as they started to get an idea of how much it is helping them with their writing and the acknowledgement from their peers for their writing, they started to put more effort into it, to put more focus into it. …this motivated them to actually do writing because they know there is an audience and that they will be sharing their stories with their peer… because they are working with a buddy they have someone supporting them they are not working alone.*

The boys were able to articulate their reasons clearly as to why they felt more motivated to write. This is particularly pertinent for the sub-question asking what are the boys' views about writing when they collaborate with a peer and use the drama strategy. These eight boys have offered their own views about how they have constructed meaningful writing as they talked passionately about their engagement in their own activities such as biking and cars. Interacting and working with others, within a supportive social setting, helps to develop and expand students' thinking and speaking about their own problem solving and understandings. This is well identified in the literature as impacting positively on students (Matthews & Cobb, 2005).

Choice of topics

A key issue that emerged from the second interview with the students was their wish to have more control over choosing topics for writing. The boys reported enjoyment, engagement and considerable success with writing when they could represent their everyday lives, and were able to share these experiences with their peer. They explained how this was for them with comments such as these: "*it was fun*", "*it was interesting*", "*it happened to me before*", "*I know what I am going to write about*", and "*we are using our imaginations*". During the drama intervention, the choice of topic enabled the boys to write with a greater sense of self-confidence, David explained:

Cos it's in your head and it's easier to put on paper, Not trying to think about what the teacher tells you to write… get it down faster cause I already know how I think of it and that.

Furthermore, Pete felt engaged with his writing and responded with urgency:

Cause you have an idea pop into your head and you immediately know what you are going to write… I just let loose, let my brain go you know, go anywhere.

When the boys chose their topics it appeared to give them the opportunity to represent themselves in what matters in their everyday lives. Topics include rugby league, rugby scrums, camp experiences, motorbikes, cars and bike riding. In comparison to time one interview all of the boys showed an enhanced ability to discuss the deeper features of writing.

The teacher drew attention to what motivated these boys to write, and indicated that in class observations they were now able to *"write about their real life experiences"* and when they worked with their peer they *"had an audience to read their stories to"*. He expressed a positive view about choice of topics as he had observed this had a direct result on motivating the reluctant students to write. The teacher explains:

It has to be something that excites them; it has to be something they relate to. They are most motivated …they can write about anything. They write about what they are passionate about, like bikes, friends and cars.

It is critical to note that earlier in chapter four the participants expressed a major concern that they were not in a safe position to write about violence or use swear words in their writing in the classroom. They drew attention to this tension and described their experiences throughout their schooling, of their teachers considering this to be inappropriate or unacceptable.

It was clear from the time two interviews, reflections about this tension were made by a number of the boys as they continued to refer to their concerns. To illustrate this point Pete and Sam discussed topics that they considered teachers would find unacceptable and which they were unable to write about.

Pete: *I want to write about all the bombing you know I would like to write about Hitler…. But if you do free choice you really can't put in swear words in it or like violence.*

Sam: *Yeah get more violence in it.*

Pete: *All the boys want violence … Like funny jokes … like a documentary but these like swearing in the jokes. Cos I have my favourite co medium, he swears in jokes.*

Sam: *That's on comedy central.*

Pete: *We didn't try that. That's what the other boys wanted to do as well.*

However, the boys' concerns about violence or using swear words, did not correlate with the view of the teacher. The teacher explained how all of the students were able to write about any topic they wanted to.

I don't have a problem with them it's not the content of what they write about it's the actual writing. … No boundries at the end of the day I don't want to hold them back from true self-expression. They are most passionate when they write about anything…

The analysis so far has suggested that the boys and their teachers cannot articulate clearly with each other what is an appropriate topic to write about. These negative issues and tensions between gender, literacy and the school have been identified in the literature (Newkerk, 2000, 2002). The concern is about the violent topics some boys choose to write about, and what their teachers and the school consider is acceptable from them (Fletcher, 2006). These tensions can create a challenge for teachers to find a way to enable students to write about some of these topics that are motivating but which are in conflict with the values of the school.

The usefulness of the drama strategy as a support for writing

Data from the observations and the time two interviews revealed a positive link between the drama strategy and written work as they re-enacted a character within an authentic scene from their own writing. The boys explained this drama strategy helped support their motivation and learning about writing, as it helped facilitate

their thinking by *"helping them to be there"* when their partner role-played a character. In terms of improving writing, this drama strategy motivated them to have conversations about their writing before and after the enactment and then to add this rich detail to their writing. This strategy appeared to give the boys a way of supporting themselves as writers by enabling them to build on their prior knowledge, and then through conversation with their peer, link this knowledge to their writing, as Pete and Sam explained:

> Pete: *When he (peer) is acting it feels like you are there so you know what you are feeling inside… It helped cos he like described everything like what the place looked like and all of that.*

> Sam: *It just helped cos it's in the past now cos yeah… it felt it came back.*

Ian used the drama strategy to enable him to think deeply about the event in his story. Ian reflected:

> *Cause it's easier to explain through drama than just talking, and it would help me to memorise what happened … so you can look at the person that is acting it out and know it is happening.*

It is vital to note that the time two statements from the boys emphasised their thinking about their writing. By way of illustration they chose to discuss examples about real life experiences and spoke positively about how the drama strategy offered support for them as writers. David explained how he went biking together with his friend, and how, by using drama strategy this helped him to picture the scene.

> *I asked him to act himself and do what he did on the day. He cut me off and went and they all kept riding and I picked up my bike and carried on racing and when we got up on the bridge we were going down. My mate cut me off and there was a pole on the bridge and there was two ways and I was going to go down. He cut me off down there. So I went straight through into the dirt… Drama it helped me like me with getting it down and picturing it and that. Like when he acts it helps the story…*

An example from David's time two interview illustrates how he successfully used the drama strategy. He described his story (see Appendix O) of how during a bike

race, which involved a group of boys speeding down to a bridge, he kept falling off as he was getting cut off by them. He had organised his ideas by using a brainstorm to sequence the events. He stated that he liked the action and found this story to be very funny. He reflected upon his peer acting the part of himself and falling into a prickly bush, which helped him to think about what to write next. As I read this story I could clearly hear the deeper feature of writing, which was David's voice describing the race and the challenge of cutting off riders so they cannot win.

Another example of the success of the drama strategy is given by Matt who commented on his choice of story (see Appendix P) to discuss with me because he enjoyed writing about an incident from his past. His story recounted how he tried to drive his dad's truck. He described how he got into the truck and took the handbrake off and it went backwards across the road and hit a neighbour's house. He writes about how his Dad had to tie the doors together with a rope and drive it to the mechanic to get fixed. He noted how he enjoyed sharing this story with his peer because they had lots of laughs together as they used the drama strategy and acted out the story. This illustration suggests that when Matt worked with his partner he had an immediate response to support his thinking, what to write about, and therefore this allowed him to express the entirety of the actual experience. As I read his draft I discovered that the writing is a high interest topic for him and the deeper features of writing were apparent, as through the sequence of events there is a sense of tension. For example, Matt sits in the truck and lets the handbrake off and what will happen when his dad comes home. Matt reflected on how the drama strategy was useful in helping to guide him with his conversations, thinking and then writing when he shared his writing with his peer. Neelands (1993) puts forward the view that:

> …writing generated in response to concrete particulars of context can lead to awareness of the genre, register and audience, since the authentic situations of drama provide opportunities for students to experience the cause and effect of their personal writing. (p. 27)

These illustrations of writing and the data from the interviews indicate that the use of the drama strategy was successful as the participants noted that they had used this to help them to engage with their emotions and ideas and by doing this, improved their writing.

Summary

Chapter five presented the findings associated with interpretations of the comparisons between time one and time two data, which were collected during and after the intervention. The boys did show significant gains in learning about writing through working with their peer whilst using drama intervention. The following chapter concludes this study with a summary of the research findings and recommendations for teachers.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion and recommendations

The main aim of this study was to investigate how eight year 7 and year 8 boys who had been assessed by the school's measure of success as not achieving in writing, advanced their writing after they had worked in collaboration with peers and used a drama intervention. Chapter one introduced the need to investigate boys talking about themselves as writers and an exploration of what motivates them to write. The major factors that can enhance learning including collaborating with others, motivation to write, the use of metacognitive strategies and drama strategies were introduced.

Chapter two provided background information on the use of a sociocultural framework to explore learning in the classroom. This framework enabled me to explore the boys' own understandings of learning about writing as they collaborated with a peer to use the drama strategy role-play. The chapter discussed why some boys are not succeeding in writing and how factors such as motivation and drama strategies can promote learning. Using a qualitative approach enabled data to be collected to capture the boys' and their teacher's own point of views about writing.

In this final chapter I summarise the key points from the boys' views of their learning about writing. I describe how they were enabled to write collaboratively with their peers using the drama strategy. The following section includes a brief summary of the research findings, and the chapter concludes with recommendations for teaching and for future research.

Summary of the research findings

Boys' perceptions of themselves as writers

It was considered necessary, before the use of the drama intervention, to investigate the boys' own views on how they considered themselves as writers. This included whether they enjoyed writing, their beliefs about how successful they were, and

whether they could identify their use of metacognitive strategies to support their writing achievement.

Enjoyment of writing

The boys indicated that when they used the drama strategy to role-play their characters and wrote with their peer, they were motivated and therefore enjoyed writing.

To be successful at writing

It appeared clear before the drama intervention that the boys did not feel successful and did not like to write. Their explanations of why they couldn't succeed were their poor mechanics and their lack of surface features which referred mainly to spelling. The boys indicated the only positive feedback about their writing abilities came from parents and caregivers and not from their teachers. Most of the boys had few prior experiences of using drama strategies to help with their motivation to write. The use of the drama intervention positively changed how the boys viewed themselves as writers.

Use of metacognitive strategies

The drama intervention enabled the boys to talk with their peers about their thinking about writing and there was a change in their perception of how to improve their writing. After the drama intervention the boys used a range of metacognitive strategies from the two components, declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge (Brown, cited in Brunning et al, 2004). The shift in the boys' thinking about how to improve their writing was significant. This was noticeable in the change from their initial focus on surface features, spelling and keeping their work tidy. The focus after the intervention was on the deeper features of writing including the writer's voice, purpose, audience, and content. One boy demonstrated his use of the third component, conditional knowledge, which is when and why to use a strategy, to advance his writing.

Motivating boys to write

Working with others

Writing with a peer was highly regarded by all of the boys as they enjoyed working with another boy who understood and valued their chosen topic to write about. This proved to be effective as the boys could share their knowledge, expertise and experiences as they worked together. They could write effectively with their peer who gave immediate feedback about their thinking and considered this as influencing their motivation and enjoyment to write

Choice of topics

The boys' choice of topic to write about was the major factor that contributed to their motivation to write. Topics selected were from their everyday life experiences and this contributed to their being successful and confident writers. They felt a greater sense of self-confidence and success as writers as they had expert knowledge of their topic to share and to write about. A key issue noted was the boys indicated that they would feel more success if they could choose topics such as war, violence, guns and rugby scrums. When students wish to write about violent topics they have power over their text. This does not have to be viewed negatively by the teacher as this can be used as the vehicle for dialogue to discuss the deeper features of the text.

The usefulness of the drama strategy as a support for writing

This drama intervention was valuable as it provided an opportunity for the boys to collaborate with their peer to write and contributed to the boys' feeling of success as writers. The benefits of using the role-play strategy enabled deeper conversations with their peer about their valued events, setting and characters. Drama provided a scaffold for the writers' thinking. Furthermore, the boys' oral discourse facilitated rich conversations and this helped to generate their vocabulary and writing content.

The findings indicated that after the use of this intervention there was a positive change in the way the boys viewed themselves as writers and spoke about writing. A number of aspects contributed to the effectiveness of the link between the drama intervention and writing. The boys used the role-play strategy to re-enact a scene or an event from their narrative. This enabled the peers to have meaningful conversations with their peer about their own experiences, and then write about these experiences with confidence. These dramatised events enabled the boys to role-play, which then provided an opportunity to visualise the moment in time, providing rich information to write about. The drama intervention was effective for enabling the boys to work with their peer scaffolding the learning, as this was specifically located within the boys' zone of proximal development which contributed to the boys' advancement of their writing. The boys had become motivated and confident to write. This confidence and motivation may support their approach to writing when they enter the secondary school where the writing demands are more complex.

Recommendations for teachers

When working to improve the outcomes of boys who underachieve in writing, teachers need to employ a range of modelling writing techniques to demonstrate to these students the language of metacognitive strategies. Such as, writing with the students and using prompts like "I wonder what the reader will need to know when I describe the setting?" This would involve teachers using think-alouds to demonstrate how writers think about the craft of writing as they write.

Professional development on how sociocultural theory can assist teachers to recognise the importance of why drama and writing are both acts of composition, would enable teachers to make links to the students' own experiences. There needs to be a focus on how professional development can be an integral part of teachers' literacy programmes.

There should be an examination of the balance of writing approaches in terms of teacher requirements and the boys being able to have an independent free-writing time. The independent free-writing time could provide an opportunity to encourage boys to write cooperatively and collaboratively on topics of interest to them.

Teachers should examine and explore the wide range of drama strategies, which can be used to support boys' learning as part of their ongoing writing programme. This includes the hot-seat expert interview where a knowledgeable person is questioned about a specialised topic or historical event. This can deepen student knowledge and understandings about the topic and possibly the specialised vocabulary in non-fiction texts.

The use of the many drama strategies should be scrutinised and used by teachers to enable their students to inquire into learning across the curriculum. Teachers and students need opportunities to participate together in *The New Zealand curriculum*'s learning areas. The use of drama can support all students to construct their background knowledge and understandings that they incorporate into their learning.

Teachers should acknowledge and incorporate the boys' own recognition of position of authority over knowledge in their writing and use this to find relevant starting points for conversations about writing. Providing feedback for the next steps in learning is pivotal for their motivation and success in writing.

Teachers should plan for the use of drama strategies in their writing programmes. The drama strategies will support the social interactions to enable students to have conversations about their metacognitive strategies and the deeper features of texts such as voice, audience, purpose and structure.

Teachers should scrutinise the students' responses to their *asTTLe* writing behaviour questions. This information could be the starting point to ask them about their views and experiences of writing. The inclusion of the student's sample of writing which includes topics about their outside interests and possibly refers to violence from their popular culture can be used for the *asTTLe* writing analysis to determine the next steps for teaching and students' learning. This may provide a more realistic assessment of their writing ability than other topics of little interest to them. Their writing from popular culture could also be a starting point for discussions relating to students learning about their own values which are directions for learning in *The New Zealand curriculum.*

Limitations of this research

This study contributed to insights into what helps advance year 7 and year 8 boys' writing achievement when they choose to use a drama strategy. There are two limitations affecting the degree to which these insights can be generalised into wider implications. The first is the length of time the study spanned. While the ten-week period had relevance in investigating the boys' use of the drama strategy as an intervention to advance writing, a longer time would be necessary to investigate more comprehensively why boys are underachieving and what motivates them to succeed. The second limitation was while the main focus for this study was directed at eight year 7 and year 8 boys' who were identified as underachieving in writing, this study did not attempt to address the many different reasons or explanations for the differences between gender, socio-economic factors and writing achievement.

Recommendations for future research

Future research could address the length of time through a longitudinal study of a larger group of boys in a school in order to understand the full extent of how a drama intervention can effectively advance student writing. Such a study would need to examine the boys' understanding of their thinking about their own ability to self-regulate their own writing.

Another area of research relates to the teacher's perceptions of what boys perceive to be a free topic to write about. It would be useful to examine how teachers can construct classrooms that value boys' voices by adopting a range of opportunities for boys to talk about their past writing experiences and how this can impact on motivation to write. Such a study would need to use the writing behaviour questions (for example *asTTLe,* Ministry of Education, 2003; Crooks et al., 2006) to provide an appropriate conversational starting point.

The third area for future research relates to the design of a classroom writing programme that contributes to the students' motivation to write. This could investigate a timetable, which includes the balance between the teacher time for teaching about the features of the different text types and time for the students' own writing.

Concluding thoughts

Finally, despite the two limitations, the evidence presented points to the drama intervention being successful in supporting these year 7 and year 8 students for the advancement of their writing. The evidence also indicates that if teachers can take time to listen to their boys' voices about their writing experiences, to discover what motivates and helps them to become passionate about writing and to effectively use a drama intervention, then in the future we may see more boys who are motivated and achieving as successful writers in the classroom.

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Appendix A: Information sheet for principal and /or Board of Trustees

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PRINCIPAL and /or BOARD of TRUSTEES

A case study: Enhancing year 7 and year 8 boys' achievement in narrative writing using a carefully constructed drama intervention

My name is Karen Coulton and I am a Masters student at Victoria University. For my thesis I am conducting research on the way a drama strategy can be used to help boys become more motivated and progress in their narrative writing.

The research is supervised by Dr John Dickie, Victoria University Wellington, Senior Lecturer, English, ph: 463 9767 and Liz Melchior, Lecturer, Victoria University, Wellington, Ph: 463 9540. I have had many years of teaching experience and curriculum development in the primary area, and more recently as an adviser and lecturer at the Victoria University Wellington, College of Education. The purpose of my study is to find out what happens to boys' motivation and achievement in writing when they collaborate to compose, draft and write through a carefully constructed drama strategy named Authors' theatre.

The research will involve working in a classroom in your school, to conduct a study of writing with eight year seven and year eight boys. This will involve an initial meeting with you and the teacher involved to organise a timeline and to distribute information sheets and consent forms for students and their families. I will need to arrange for an initial meeting with the teacher to set up the programme, followed by further meetings to provide support for the management of the writing programme. I will need to administer writing tests from a*sTTLe*, in order to collect data from the participants at the beginning, middle and end of the research cycle. There will be observations of the students participating in their class writing programme, which will be conducted over a negotiated period of time. I will be interviewing the teacher about the programme and pairs of students about their writing, which will involve one initial interview followed by a brief discussion, and one final interview at the end of the observation process. These interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. The transcriber will have signed a confidentiality agreement.

It is expected that this process will take approximately three months. Confidentiality will be assured as the school will not be identified and pseudonyms will be used for students. The information gathered from this study will be kept in a secure cabinet in a locked office at Victoria University, and will be viewed by the supervisors and myself. The data reported in written form will be kept for a period of two years and then destroyed. The teacher will have a right to check the data collected throughout the observation and interview process. I will give an oral explanation to the students about the findings from their interviews. A summary of the results will be made available on completion of the project, and where appropriate the

research findings will be shared with a parent or BOT meeting. Data obtained may be used for conference papers and or publication and will be shared with teachers and other interested people.

This proposal has the approval of the Victoria University Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

What I need from you:

- Your written permission to conduct my study at your school

- Notification and permission from the Board of Trustees to proceed with the research

- Your assistance with the distribution of the information sheets and consent forms and collection of the consent forms from the parent/caregivers of the students

- Your assistance to liaison between the Chairperson of the BOT, staff, parents/caregivers and myself

- To provide a space at your school where I can conduct my study

- Your permission to use the data obtained for conference papers and/or publication

- Permission for the researcher to take samples of student *asTTLe* achievement results and samples of student writing with no names attached (consent will also be sought from the parents/caregivers and the student)

- Permission for the teacher to take a class writing programme during the research time using the drama intervention author's theatre

- To inform me of any changes which may take place during the scheduled observation times by contacting me at phone: 463 9650

If you have any questions concerning this information please feel free to contact my supervisors for an explanation.

Yours sincerely

Karen Coulton

Appendix B: Information sheet for teacher

INFORMATION SHEET FOR TEACHER

A case study: Enhancing year 7 and year 8 boys' achievement in narrative writing using a carefully constructed drama intervention

My name is Karen Coulton and I am a Masters student at Victoria University. For my thesis I am conducting research on the way a drama strategy can be used to help boys become more motivated and progress in their narrative writing.

The research is supervised by Dr John Dickie, Victoria University Wellington, Senior Lecturer, English, ph: 463 9767 and Liz Melchior, Lecturer, Victoria University, Wellington, Ph: 463 9540. I have had many years of teaching experience and curriculum development in the primary area, and more recently as an adviser and lecturer at the Victoria University Wellington, College of Education. The purpose of my study is to find out what happens to boys' motivation and achievement in writing when they collaborate to compose, draft and write through a carefully constructed drama strategy named Authors' theatre.

The research will involve working in your classroom in your school, to conduct a study of writing with eight year seven and year eight boys. This will involve an initial meeting with you and your principal to organise a timeline and to distribute information sheets and consent forms for students and their families. I will need to arrange for an initial meeting with you to set up the programme, followed by further meetings to provide support for the management of the writing programme. I will need to administer writing tests from *asTTLe,* in order to collect data from the participants at the beginning, middle and end of the research cycle. There will be observations of the students participating in their writing programme, which will be conducted over a negotiated period of time. I will be interviewing you about the programme and pairs of students about their writing, which will involve one initial interview followed by a brief discussion, and one final interview at the end of the observation process. These interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. The transcriber will have signed a confidentiality agreement.

It is expected that this process will take approximately three months. Confidentiality will be assured as you will not be identified and pseudonyms will be used for your students. The information gathered from this study will be kept in a secure cabinet in a locked office at Victoria University, and will be viewed by the supervisors and myself. The data reported in written form will be kept for a period of two years and then destroyed. You will have a right to check the data collected throughout the observation and interview process. I will give an oral explanation to the students about the findings from their interviews. A summary of the results will be made available on completion of the project, and where appropriate the

research findings will be shared with the parents. Data obtained may be used for conference papers and or publication and will be shared with teachers and other interested people.

This proposal has the approval of the Victoria University Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

What I need from you:

- Your written permission to conduct my study at your classroom

- Your assistance with the distribution of the information sheets and consent forms and collection of the consent forms from the parent/caregivers of the students

- Your assistance to liaison parents/caregivers and myself

- Your permission to use the data obtained for conference papers and/or publication

- Permission for the researcher to take samples of student *asTTLe* achievement results and samples of student writing with no names attached

- Permission for you to take a class writing programme during the research time using the drama intervention Author's theatre

- To inform me of any changes which may take place during the scheduled observation times by contacting me at phone: 463 9650

If you have any questions concerning this information please feel free to contact my supervisors for an explanation.

Yours sincerely

Karen Coulton

Appendix C: Information sheet for parent/caregivers

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

A case study: Enhancing year 7 and year 8 boys' achievement in narrative writing using a carefully constructed drama intervention

Hello, Kia Ora, Talofa lava

My name is Karen Coulton and I am a Masters student at Victoria University. For my thesis I am conducting research on the way drama can be used to help boys become more motivated and progress in their writing. I am seeking your permission to interview and observe your child in the class programme.

The research is supervised by Dr John Dickie, Victoria University Wellington, Senior Lecturer, English, ph: 463 9767 and Liz Melchior, Lecturer, Victoria University, Wellington, Ph: 463 9540. I have had many years of teaching experience in the primary area and more recently as an adviser and lecturer at the Victoria University of Wellington, College of Education. The purpose of my study is to find out what happens to boys' motivation and achievement in writing stories when they work together while using a drama strategy named Author's theatre. This research will be helpful for teachers and may assist them with their writing programmes in the future.

This research will involve me working in your child's classroom to conduct a study on their story writing. I will be meeting with the principal and your child's teacher to discuss the programme and to obtain their permission for the research. I have chosen your child for this study as the *asTTLe* test shows that your child is underachieving in writing. During the research I will be collecting photocopied samples of writing from your child at the beginning, middle and end of the research. I will be observing during their writing time, and I will be interviewing your child with their writing partner about their writing in a school office before and at the end of the study. These interviews will take thirty minutes and will be audio taped and transcribed. The transcriber will have signed a confidentiality agreement. At the end of the research I will be taking another asTTLe writing test to see the progression of work. It is expected that this process will take approximately three months. Your child will not be disadvantaged in any way, as he or she will not be missing out on any learning.

The school and your child will not be named in the research, confidentiality will be guaranteed. The information gathered from this study will be kept in a secure cabinet in a locked office at Victoria University, and will be viewed by the supervisors and myself, and the data collected will be reported in written form. The data will be kept for a period of two years and then destroyed. A summary of the results will be made available on completion of the project, and these findings will be shared with parents/ caregivers or a Board of Trustees meeting. The data obtained from this research may be used for conference papers and or publication.

This proposal has the approval of the Victoria University Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

What I need from you:

- Your consent to allow xxx (participant) to participate in this study

- Your permission to collect photocopied samples of xxx (participant's) written work.

If you have any questions concerning the information sheet, please feel free to contact the principal for further information.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely

Karen Coulton

Appendix D: Information sheet for students

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDENTS

A case study: Enhancing year 7 and year 8 boys' achievement in narrative writing using a carefully constructed drama intervention

Dear XXX (Participant)

My name is Ms Coulton and I am an education adviser who works in primary schools. I am studying at Victoria University of Wellington College of Education and I want to find out how drama, called Author's theatre can help with your writing. I chose you to take part in my study because you wrote on the *asTTLe* writing test that you didn't like writing stories and the results showed that you were finding writing hard.

I would like to come to your classroom every week for three months to see and to tape record you writing stories with your writing group, and to learn about the things you do when you use drama to help with your writing. I would like to interview you with another student and ask you questions and to tape record you talking about writing. These interviews will take place in a school office and will take thirty minutes. They will be audio taped and then transcribed. The transcriber will have signed a confidentiality agreement too and I will be checking with you that what you say about your writing is accurate. I will be taking an *asTTLe* writing samples at the end of the study and I will photocopy the examples of your work at the beginning, middle and end of the study. You will have confidentiality, as your name will not be used in this study. You can stop taking part at any time in which case your writing will be returned to you. Throughout the research time your teacher will be supporting you with the writing programme too.

All of the information from this study will be locked in my office at Victoria University, and will be seen only by the supervisors and myself, and will be destroyed after two years.

What I need from you:

- Your permission for me to look at and to record you writing with your group using the drama strategy author's theatre.

- For you to use the *asTTLe* writing test.

- For you to show me your writing over a period of ten weeks.

- To let me photocopy your writing.

- Your permission to take part in the interviews with another student.

If you want to take part in this study you will need to fill in the consent form.

If you have any questions concerning the information sheet, please feel free to ask me for further information.

Thank you for taking part in this study.

Yours sincerely

Ms Coulton

Appendix E: Consent form for principal and/or Board of Trustees

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM FOR PRINCIPAL and/or BOARD of TRUSTEES

A case study: Enhancing year 7 and year 8 boys' achievement in narrative writing using a carefully constructed drama intervention

☐ I have read the Information Sheet and I understand the contents and agree to a teacher and students from this school participating in this project.

☐ I understand that written permission will be sought from each student's parents/caregivers.

☐ I understand the names of the school and all participants will remain confidential to the researcher and the transcriber.

☐ I understand the teacher's and student's participation is entirely voluntary and they are free to withdraw from the project at any time without disadvantage.

☐ I understand that the research findings may be published and will be shared with teachers and other interested people.

☐ I understand that I have a right to withdraw my school from the study at any time in which case any data provided will be destroyed.

☐ I understand that there is no remuneration or compensation for any individual's participation.

☐ I understand that the conversations of the interviews will be audio taped then written.

☐ I understand that data collected will only be seen by the researcher and a typist, will be stored securely in a locked room at Victoria University, and will be destroyed after two years.

☐ I understand that useful information from the study will be shared with the school.

Thank you for your assistance.

NAME OF PRINCIPAL   _____

SIGNATURE   _____

DATE   _____

Appendix F: Consent form for teacher

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER

A case study: Enhancing year 7 and year 8 boys' achievement in narrative writing using a carefully constructed drama intervention

☐ I agree to participate in this research.

☐ I have read the information sheet and understood the purpose, the requirements of the research and the commitment I will be making.

☐ I agree to distribute the Information Sheets and collect the Consent forms.

☐ I understand that I will be taking a writing programme with my class using the drama intervention author's theatre, and keeping a reflective journal throughout these sessions.

☐ I understand that I will receive a transcription of my interviews in order to be able to check and modify the answers. At the conclusion of the research the recordings and the transcription will be destroyed.

☐ I understand that the names of the participants will remain confidential to the researcher and the transcriber.

☐ I understand that the research findings may used for conference papers and /be published and will be shared with teachers and other interested people.

☐ I understand that I have a right to withdraw from the study at any time in which case any data provided, will be destroyed.

☐ I understand that there is no remuneration or compensation for any individual's participation.

☐ I understand that data collected will only be seen by the researcher and a typist, will be stored securely in a locked room at Victoria University, and will be destroyed after two years.

Thank you for your assistance.

NAME of TEACHER   _____

SIGNATURE   _____

DATE   _____

Appendix G: Consent form for parent/caregivers

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT/CAREGIVERS

A case study: Enhancing year 7 and year 8 boys' achievement in narrative writing using a carefully constructed drama intervention

☐ I agree to allow for xxx (participant) to participate in this study

☐ I have read the information sheet and understood the purpose of the research

☐ I understand that interviews with each pair of students will be audio recorded and transcribed and a summary checked with the child. At the conclusion of the research these will be destroyed

☐ I understand that the research is confidential to the researcher and the transcriber

☐ I understand that my child's participation is entirely voluntary and they are free to withdraw from the project at any time

☐ I understand that the research findings may used for conference papers and be published, and will be shared with teachers and other interested people

☐ I understand that my child will not be missing any learning.

☐ I understand that data collected will only be seen by the researcher and a typist, will be stored securely in a locked room at Victoria University, and will be destroyed after two years.

NAME OF CHILD   _____

NAME of PARENT/CAREGIVER   _____

SIGNATURE   _____

DATE   _____

Appendix H: Consent form for students

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

A case study: Enhancing year 7 and year 8 boys' achievement in narrative writing using a carefully constructed drama intervention

☐   I have read and had explained to me the Information Sheet about the research and I understand what it means. I know that I may ask questions at any time.

☐   I know I will be interviewed with my writing partner.

☐   I understand that my interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed and at the end of the research these will be destroyed.

☐   I understand that Ms Coulton will check with me that what she has written is what I really want to say.

☐   I understand that the research is confidential to the researcher and the transcriber and my name will not be used

☐   I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research up to the beginning of the data collection

☐   I know that I can ask for my samples of writing to be returned to me

☐   I understand that the research findings may used for conference papers and be published, and will be shared with teachers and other interested people

☐   I understand that the data collected will only be seen by the researcher and a typist, will be stored in a locked room at Victoria University, and will be destroyed after two years.

I agree to participate in the study.

NAME of STUDENT   _____

SIGNATURE   _____

 DATE   _____

Appendix I: Interview schedule one for students

1. How much do you enjoy writing at school?

    Heaps   quite a lot   a little   not at all

2. How good do you think you are at writing?

3. How good does your teacher think you are at writing?

4. How good do your Mum and Dad think you are at writing?

5. How much do you like writing in your own time (not at school)?

6. If so, when do you usually write? What kinds of things do you write about?

7. Tell me about writing at school. What kinds of things do you write about at school? What are your favourite things to write about?

8. In the classroom what helps you to write stories? Do you enjoy writing stories? What sort of stories? Where do you write them? (Computer?)

9. How often do you write?

    Heaps   quite a lot   a little   not at all

10. Do you write fast? How much do you write?

11. Complete this sentence 'when I write at school I wish we were allowed to…?

12. Complete this sentence 'for me the worst part of writing is…? What do you get stressed about?

13. Do you have a choice of topics to write about? What are they? Tell me about what happens when you have a choice?

14. What helps you with your story writing? What do you need to do to become a better writer?

15. Who else reads what they write? Teacher, parent, brother/sister, friend, other.

16. How often do you read to others what you write?

    Heaps   quite a lot   a little   not at all

17. Do you ever write with a friend or friends? When do you do this at school? If you write with your friend (friends), how do they help you? Who are your friends? Does this make a difference? What is this difference?

18. If you had a choice to write in a group with boys or boys and girls, who would you choose and why?

19. Have you taken part in drama in your classroom? Tell me about it?

20. Have you used drama or another method to help you with your thinking about your writing? What did this look like, how did drama help you? How do you know it helped or did not help with your writing?

21. Have you chosen a topic to write about which has not been acceptable in the classroom. Tell me about this.

22. I'd be interested in any other information you could share with me.

Appendix J: Interview schedule one for teacher

1. Tell me about your writing programme? What does this look like in your classroom?

2. Tell me about the formal and creative writing components.

3. How often do your students write during the day, week?

4. To what extent do your students choose their own topics to write about? What does this look like in your programme?

5. What kinds of things do your students write about?

6. How do you know what topics your students like to +write about?

7. Do your students write narratives? If so do they enjoy writing narratives? How do you know this?

8. Do your students choose their own topics to write about?

9. Do your students choose who they write with? Do they write with friends or choose others? What benefits/ disadvantages do you see in doing this in your programme? What does this look like in your writing programme?

10. What are your beliefs about your students as writers? Are there any similarities or differences between boys and girls as writers? What evidence do you have?

11. What helps students to become better writers?

12. How do you engage your students in your writing programme? Have you any particular strategies that you find are successful to engage your students to write?

13. Have you used drama in your classroom programme? Tell me about what you do and how you have used it?

14. Have you used drama as a support to motivate writers? What, why, explain or elaborate.

15. Do your students write at home? What do they write about? How do you know and what would you look for?

16. What would you do if a student writes about a topic that you would consider crosses a line and goes too far?

17. What boundaries do you think should be in place for your students when they are given a freedom to choose topics to write about?

18. What are your beliefs about teaching students to write?

19. I'd be interested in any other information you could share with me on writing?

Appendix K: Interview schedule two for students

1. How much did you enjoy writing?

   Heaps   quite a lot   a little   not at all

2. What would you need to do to get to heaps?

3. How good do you think you are at writing? How do you know this?

4. How good does your teacher think you are at writing? How do you know this?

5. Have you written in your own time (not at school), if so, when did you usually write? What kinds of things did you write about?

6. Tell me about the classroom writing programme and the kinds of things you wrote about last term?

7. In the classroom what helped you to write stories?

8. How did the written prompts help/not help with your thinking about your story?

9. Did you enjoy writing stories? What sort of stories? Where did you write them?

10. How often did you write?

    Heaps   quite a lot   a little   not at all

11. How much do you write?

12. Complete this sentence 'when I write at school I wish we were allowed to …?

13. Complete this sentence for me the worst part of writing is…? What do you get stressed about?

14. You had a choice of topics to write about. What were they? How did you choose your topics? Tell me about what happens when you have a choice?

15. What helps you with your story writing?

16. How did your peer help you with your story writing?

17. Tell me (and show me) what changes you made to your writing? Tell me about your thinking?

18. When you wrote with your buddy did this make a difference?

19. What do you need to do to become a better writer? How do you know this?

20. Have you and your peer used drama to help with your writing? Tell me about it?

21. How did drama help you with your writing? What did this look like? Can you show me? How do you know it helped (or did not help) with your writing?

22. Would you use drama differently?

23. Did you choose a topic to write about which has not been acceptable in the classroom? Tell me about this.

24. I'd be interested in any other information you could share with me.

Appendix L: Interview schedule two for teacher

1. Tell me about the writing programme?

2. Do you think the participant students advanced with their writing? What makes you think that?

3. After the drama intervention /writing programme did you make changes to your original classroom writing programme. Tell me about this.

4. What is your opinion on letting your students have a free time for writing?

5. When the students wrote with their peers what benefits/ disadvantages did you see in doing this in your programme? What does this look like in your writing programme now?

6. What helps students to become better writers?

7. Have you since used drama as a support to motivate writers? What, why, explain or elaborate.

8. What boundaries do you think should be in place for your students when they are given a freedom to choose topics to write about?

9. What are your beliefs about teaching students to write?

10. I'd be interested in any other information you could share with me on writing?

Appendix M: Prompt cards

The Writer

Thinking before you work with your peer

1. Where does this story take place, who are the characters and what is happening?

2. What do I want help with?

3. Why do I want help?

4. Who will be 'what' in the story?

5. What do I expect them to do?

6. What can they do in 10minutes?

7. How will they know when they are done?

The peer – working with the writer

1. What do I know already from the story?

2. Who am I in this story?

3. What is the problem we are involved in?

4. How can I help the story change?
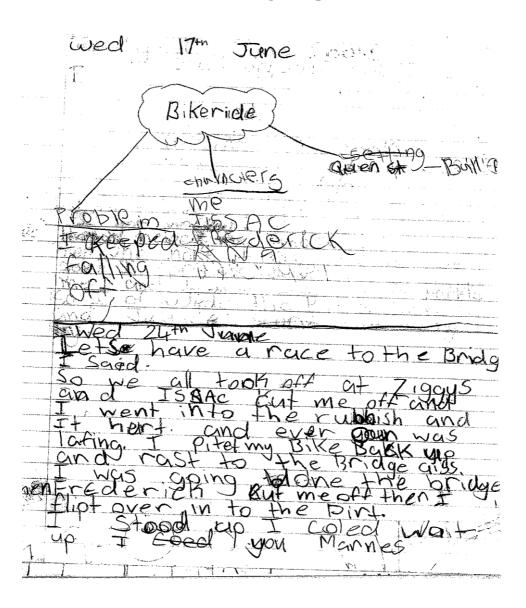
Be that character to help the writer with their story.

Appendix N: Writing/Drama timetable

Writing/Drama timetable

Total time 35–40 mins			
Time	**Teacher**	**Students**	**Notes**
5mins **Teacher modelling**	Discusses writing Models writing with class, • Prompting(questions) • Acting in role Set a purpose or goals – publishing for a class book	Listening	Quick and focused
5 mins **Writers' reflecting on their work**	Rove and help students	Thinking time • Students think about the help they will need from their buddy – use the (drama prompt card) for support	Students work by themselves
10 mins **Peers' writing**	Rove around the groups to listen/ support writers – discussions on their work Reflect on the next steps for modeling to class	Students work with their peer • discussing • prompting • in role (acting a part) peer (drama prompts card) to help with the writers' thinking	
10 mins **Writing time**		Write their next part or writing/ drafting Planning Setting writing goals for next week	Students work by themselves
Class share			

Appendix O: Writing example 1

Writing example 1

wed   17th   June

Bikeriide

characters
me
Problem   ISSAC
I keeped FREDERICK
falling   AND
off

Wed 24th June
Lets have a race to the Bridg
I said.
So we all took off at Ziggys
and ISSAc cut me off and
I went into the rubbish and
It hert. and ever gown was
lafing. I pitet my Bike BaBK up
and rast to the Bridge ass.
I was going done the bridge
Frederich cut me off then I
fliot over in to the Dirt.
I Stood up I coled wait
up I feed you Mannes

Writing example 2

Q Q Q

Tuesday 16 June

plot
I crashed my dads
e truck into the
Neighbors house

When i Crashed My
Dads Truck

Characters
Mum, Dad
brother, Sister
Me

Setting
Driveway
Garage
Neighbors house

When i crashed my dads Truck

I wanted to know what would happen
If i let down the hand brake. So i let it
down. Then it started to roll down our drive,
then it started rolling over there lawn, & then
it hit there house I was worried because
i knew when my dad got home, i would
have gotten a hiding. Once it hit the house
the 2 back doors couldn't close so when
my dad got home and took it to the
mechnic he had to use rope to hold
the doors closed.

For the rest of the night
My dad was really angry with
me.