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Source: *Research in the Teaching of English*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Dec., 1980), pp. 331-341

Published by: National Council of Teachers of English

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40170784>

Accessed: 18/08/2010 11:11

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Notes and Comments

CHILDREN'S REWRITING STRATEGIES

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In a small New Hampshire school, three full-time researchers pull their chairs close to children as they work at their desks, easels and block castles. Through a grant from the National Institute of Education, Donald Graves, Susan Sowers and I watch sixteen children while they compose with shapes, colors, and most of all, with words. We will follow day-to-day changes in their composing process for two years. Through observations, video-tapes, interviews and interventions, we let the children tell the story of their composing.

Researchers need to pull their chairs alongside of children before they can isolate and investigate critical factors in writing development. We need to build a tentative developmental map of how children change as writers before we can raise questions and form hypotheses. We must identify and describe the *what* of children's writing before we can attempt to explain the *why*.

In our case-study research project, children continually remind us that constructing a piece of writing is a problem-finding, problem-solving activity. As we document the writing process of children, we also document their thinking process. Writing is hands-on thinking. Rewriting is manipulating thinking, it is thinking about thinking.

These notes describe four different kinds of rewriting used by third graders. They suggest possible reasons for the difference. They are written mid-way in our study, and they are an invitation to further research.

Procedure My focus on a few children led me to ask questions of all children in one classroom. I observed the composing process not only of the case study children, but also of their classmates. My observations involve 17 of the 20 children in one of the two third grades in which our research took place.

No studies exist which document young children's rewriting strategies. Therefore a significant portion of my task has been to develop procedures for eliciting and recording information on the composing process. The data presented come from:

1. *Case Study Observation:* On a day-to-day basis for a year, I observed four third graders while they wrote. The children were encouraged to think aloud as they drafted, conferenced and reread their work. I recorded their comments and behaviors, noting where they occurred within the process of a draft. The first column, below, comes from xeroxing Amy's draft and then adding numbers which correlate with the notes in column two.

*Twelfth Draft**Notes on Twelfth Draft*

- (1) (2)
I was sitting on the porch
(3)
watching ~~what~~ Patches
(4)
clean herself. "Me-ow"
I didn't see ~~Patches~~
(6)
(her) mouth open.
(5)
1. Amy is still working on her 11th draft. She abruptly says, "This is all it'll have to be for now."
 2. She gets out a new piece of paper and begins a 12th draft. She writes more neatly than usual.
 3. She thinks about 'I was sitting' or 'I sat.' Choose 'I was sitting.'
 4. Changes, as she writes, from 'watching what Patches was doing' in 11th draft, to 'watching Patches clean herself.'
"I thought of this change yesterday when I was getting ready for recess and I decided to keep it in my mind until today."
 5. Amy looks back and forth between drafts carefully.
 6. Goes back and changes 'Patches' to 'her.'
2. *Observation of Sampling Other Children:* I observed all the children in the class informally during the year. After studying the folders and simulated rewriting exercises (see #4 and #5) of the class, I selected representative children to observe more closely. I especially observed behaviors during rewriting. These observations were done on several occasions but much less frequently than observations of the case study children.
 3. *Interviews:* Interviews occurred mostly *in the midst of the composing process*. "Why'd you make this change?" "What are you planning to do next?" During intervals in the writing process, I asked more general questions. "What's different about your writing now?" "What does a person have to do to be a good writer?" "What's rewriting for?"
 4. *Simulated Rewriting Exercise:* The children were given a paragraph and asked to copy it into their own writing. The content of the paragraph was familiar to all children for it was about their actual experience in writing class. After the children copied the paragraph, I worked with them in a one-to-one session.
"I'd like you to pretend this is a draft you just finished writing," I'd say. "Pretend you read it to your friends. They wanted you to tell what your teacher interviewed about," I said, pointing to the line which I was referring to.
Each time I asked a question, I pointed to the appropriate section in the draft. Some of my questions solicited information; some of my questions challenged the information in the paragraph.
My interest was not in their answers, but in what they did with the new information. Did they insert it into the appropriate section of their paper, or merely write it on the end of the piece? Did they change the pre-existing content in order to incorporate the new and sometimes conflicting information?

5. *Collections of Writing*: Charts were made of cumulative collections of each child's work. In order to explain the charting procedure, two of Andrea's pieces have been charted below.

1 Date	2 Title	3 Finished	4 # Dfts	5 % New Dft	6 % 1st Kept	7 % Final=1st
10/78	Lin su	yes	1	0%	100%	100%
10/78	Learning to Fly	yes	4	50%	50%	5%

In the *first column*, the writing pieces have been listed chronologically, using an approximate date. The *second column* gives a title for each piece.

Column three refers to whether the child wrote a final draft. During writing time, children must write, but they can choose to begin a different piece, or they can continue to work on a previous one.

Column four shows that Andrea did one draft of "Lin Su" and four drafts of "Learning to Fly." *Column five* shows that two of Andrea's four drafts of "Learning to Fly" (50% of her total number of drafts) are new. For the purpose of this article, a child writes a "new" draft if the child:

- begins the piece again, and writes at least 4 lines. (This includes re-copying the piece.)
- writes about the same topic as the preceding draft, but doesn't refer to the earlier draft.
- rewrites the earlier draft, changing some sections and keeping others.

Andrea's first draft of "Learning to Fly" was a page of beginnings (leads). The leads do not each count as a separate draft because they are under four lines long. Her second draft is an exact copy of the selected lead. Nothing "new" was written so the draft does not count as a new draft. In the third draft, Andrea recopies the lead and then writes forty new lines. The third draft is called "new": Andrea's fourth draft is a nearer version of her third draft. None of it is new material. Two of her four drafts are "new", and so 50% is entered into the fifth column of the chart.

Column six refers to the percentage of the first draft which appears in the final draft. This column shows that Andrea keeps 50% of "Learning to Fly" and uses it as 5% (column seven) of her final draft. *Column seven* shows that the kept section is only a small part of Andrea's longer final draft.

Findings and Discussion The children in this classroom write and rewrite. But re-writing is a conglomerate term. When children rewrite—when they make successive drafts—they may be recopying, or they may be making totally different drafts. *Rewriting* (drafting) does not necessarily involve *revision* (deliberate changes).

The data suggest that the third graders in this study can be grouped according to four kinds of rewriting:

Random Drafting

These children write successive drafts without looking back to earlier drafts. Because they do not reread and reconsider what they have written, there is no comparison or weighing of options. Changes between drafts seem arbitrary. Rewriting appears to be a random, undirected process of continually moving on.

Refining

For some children, rewriting means refining what they have already written. These children may copy a piece over and over. They may change spellings, neaten penmanship, add a few lines. But their subject and voice are determined by the first draft. Rewriting is a backwards motion of refining a draft. It is not a process of discovery.

Transition

These children move between periods when they refine drafts and periods when they abandon drafts, continually beginning new ones. They sometimes appear to be Random Drafters, but they are closer to being Refiners. Like Refiners, these children can look back to assess and refine old drafts. But unlike Refiners, they are not content with their earlier drafts. When Transition children abandon old drafts and begin new ones, they show a restlessness which may lead them to become Interactors.

Interacting

For these children, revision results from interaction between writer and draft, between writer and internalized audience, between writer and evolving subject. Children reread to see what they have said and to discover what they want to say. There is a constant vying between intended meaning and discovered meaning between the forward motion of making and the backward motion of assessing.

Each of these kinds of rewriting reflects a different level of time and space flexibility. For children in the first group, rewriting is an exclusively forward motion. These children do not have the flexibility to look back on their writing process. The next two rewriting groups—the Refiners and the Transition children—rewrite by using what can be described as a ‘backwards’ motion of returning to the draft. These children are able to look back at what they have done, but they do not have the Interactors’ ability to shift between reader and writer, between critic and creator. The Interactors can not only shift between looking forward and looking backward, they can also view their draft from several perspectives, and juggle several concerns. They have a more flexible and controlled sense of time and space, and this affects their rewriting process.

These are tentative groupings. They are meant to be a groundwork for further research. They are meant to sharpen our questions as we continue to pull our chairs in and let the children surprise us.

In these notes, a representative child from each rewriting group is described and then data is presented on all the children who share a similar rewriting process. Each kind of rewriting is presented through both a representative case and through data on all children in the group. After each kind of rewriting is presented, it is discussed.

Random Drafting. Patti’s folder bulges with scraps of unfinished stories, a paragraph about chasing boys, three leads on Brownies, a wrinkled paper entitled, “My New Coat.” Her drafts are sometimes well worked over, with scratched out sections and added paragraphs.

The curious—and significant—thing is that even after Patti has reread and sometimes altered a draft of her writing, the next draft is done as an entirely new piece. Later drafts are often written on the back of earlier ones. She rarely looks between them.

Professional writers often write like Patti does when they want to find

their subject or their voice. The difference is that these children never stop randomly drafting, they never make choices or establish closure.

Sometimes Patti's later drafts are more focused than her earlier ones. She may have recalled new details, or her thinking may have become more organized. Instead of beginning: "I like rabbits," she begins, "There are three reasons I like rabbits." But the changes are accidental. Patti does not deliberately learn from her previous drafts. Each draft is separate.

Patti is one of two children who fall into this kind of rewriting. There are three other children in the class whose folders were incomplete and therefore they were not part of the study. I suspect these children, like Patti, are always moving on to separate drafts and this is why their folders are incomplete. These statistics are for the two who did have complete folders. The figures represent averages which have been computed from charts of each child's collected writing.

Name	5 % New Dfts	6 % 1st Dft Kept	7 % Final Dft = 1st Dft
Patti	99	10	9
Tracey	100	11	11

Both Patti and Tracey continually write 'new' drafts (see definition of 'new' on page 333). Column five of the chart shows that all of Tracy's drafts over the year are classified as 'new' and 99% of Patti's are 'new.' Column six shows that neither child keeps much of her first draft, using it in the final draft. Patti keeps only an average of 10%, and Tracey, 11%, of the first draft. For both children, this kept section comprises very little (9-11%) of the final draft.

In the simulated rewriting exercise, Patti and Tracey were asked to add bits of information into their paragraph. Neither of them reread the original paragraph in order to insert the information into the appropriate place. Neither reconsidered the original sequence of information in light of the new material. They merely added the information onto the end of the piece—where it did not belong.

The kind of rewriting these children use shows their time and space framework. Patti and Tracey continually operate in present time. They do not look back and reconsider what they have done. What is finished is over, and they are continually moving on. When Patti finishes a draft, it is as if she's saying, "Here's another . . . if you don't like it, I'll do more . . ." She writes one way; she writes another way. There is a randomness to her successive tries, and a sense of on-goingness, of forward motion. Her drafts are open to change—to arbitrary, unselective change. The all-purpose, influx nature of Patti's writing process means she willingly messes her paper; scratching out lines, changing sections. Yet Patti's drafts more closely resemble a child at play than an adult at craft. There is neither comparison nor choice behind Patti's redrafting process.

Patti and Tracey continually use the present tense, the now. Their time and space framework isn't flexible enough for them to travel backwards in time and reconsider their early decisions. Nor do they look ahead enough to consider a potential audience's need for sequencing and order.

Temporal inflexibility becomes spatial inflexibility. Because these children can't shift back to earlier times and replay their process of writing; they can't see the links between one draft and another. A different angle on the subject,

a different amount of detail, a different sequence, means the piece is entirely new. Patti and Tracey don't view space as flexible enough for a single piece of writing to exist in many forms.

Piaget claims that the ability to reverse an operation is a hallmark of the developmental sub-period called concrete operations. Between the ages of seven and eleven, children usually develop the ability to follow a line of reasoning back to where it started. Reversibility of thought, according to Piaget, is closely connected with changes in a child's ability to classify things according to several characteristics, and to relate classes with each other. Piaget also groups the onset of reversible operations with a new ability to assume the viewpoint of others.

Patti and Tracey's rewriting seems to indicate that neither of them has obtained the reversibility which Piaget suggests as one characteristic of the sub-period of concrete operations. Their writing process suggests the temporal and spatial rigidity of a pre-operational child who can't replay a process in his mind, consider several classifications at once, or take viewpoints other than his own.

Refining. Across the table from Patti, Alan works on the fourth draft of his "Baseball Cards." It is the same as his first draft except his letters are more square, and he has corrected a spelling, added a detail, and changed a phrase.

Since September, Alan has written an average of 3.9 drafts for a piece of writing, but his content and structure rarely change from draft to draft. He makes small changes in language, but never independently revises to find a different perspective on his subject or to change his focus. Only an average of 48% of Alan's drafts are classified as new drafts, and over the year an average of 97% of his first drafts appear in the final draft.

Although Alan often includes more details in later drafts, he doesn't treat a draft as a working manuscript. He doesn't use arrows or starred inserts.

Seven (41%) of the 17 third graders studied fit into the Refining Group. A child's rewriting process falls into this group when it fits at least three of four criteria:

- Average % of drafts finished: 100%
- Average % of drafts which are new: 40 - 50%
- Average % of first draft in final draft: 75%
- Average % of final draft which is first draft: 80%

The children listed below satisfy at least three of the four criteria. The statistics show year-long averages. They do not show the flux along the way. Nor do they show the fact that most children are moving from less to more rewriting over the course of the year.

Name	4 % Finished	5 % New Dfts	6 % 1st Dft Kept	7 % Final Dft = 1st Dft
Chip	100	60	83	81
Steve	100	66	84	80
Shawn	100	56	86	75
Larry	100	50	93	92
Alan	100	48	97	77
Jon	75	49	75	86
Mike	57	83	92	99
Jen	70	45	75	86

Alan and the other Refiners rewrite differently than the Random Drafters. The following chart contrasts Patti (Random Drafting) and Alan (Refining.)

Name	4 % Finished	5 % New Dfts	6 % 1st Dft Kept	7 % Final Dft = 1st Dft
Patti (Random Drafting)	30	99	10	9
Alan (Refining)	100	48	97	77

Column four shows that Alan writes a final draft for 100% of his early drafts. In contrast, Patti completes the writing process for only 30% of her drafts. Column five shows that whereas Alan's drafts are 'new' 48% of the time, Patti almost always writes 'new' drafts. Column seven shows that Patti keeps an average of 10% of her first drafts. Alan, on the other hand, keeps 97% of his first drafts and adds onto it to make it into a final draft.

When Refiners were asked to add specific information into a given paragraph, they did look back. Many reread the paragraph several times. Most of them struggled with where and how they could insert the suggested information. An interview with a child in this category might look like this:

- Researcher: Pretend this is your draft. Read it over and see if there is anything which you think should be changed.
- Child: I'd leave it just the way it is.
- Researcher: (Points to draft) Up here you say your teacher interviewed in front of you. What did she interview about?
- Child: X-rays. She brought in X-rays.
- Researcher: Do you think that's important information? Should you put it in?
- Child: I don't know. I don't know where to put it. (rereads) I *would* say, "Writing class this year began the day our teacher brought in X-rays and wrote about them in front of us."
- Researcher: OK, put that in.
- Child: Where? On this paper? (takes new sheet)
- Researcher: Whatever you think. Do what you would do if this were your draft and you were fixing it up.
(Child writes a new piece on a separate sheet of paper.)

Children from this level showed varying degrees of discomfort over how to change the draft before they resorted to doing it over. Some of them copied parts of the original paragraph. Most of them ignored the first draft completely and wrote the new one without looking back.

Alan's ability to look back and his struggle over how to insert information into the piece suggest that he—and other children in this group—has a broader and more flexible time and space framework than the Random Drafters. Alan appears more ready to revise than Patti.

Yet children from both groups lack the flexibility and control of time and space which is needed to deliberately change the content, design or voice of their pieces. For Patti, the problem was in looking back. Alan, however, can circle back and think about a piece which is already completed. But Alan can't

use looking back as a means to push ahead. Only Interactors have a flexible and controlled perspective which allows them to continually shift between assessing and building, between looking back and looking forward.

Looking back does not require the ability to shift gears—the flexible perspective—which a child needs in order to reconsider and alter what he has done. In order to see other options for a piece, a child has to replay the process of writing it; he has to read what he has written as if the choices were not already made, as if the ending was not already written. Alan seems unable to do this.

When Alan was told, in the simulated rewriting exercise, to add specific information into his piece, his rewriting process still did not involve considering options or making substantive alterations in the first draft. Alan seemed unable to view his original paragraph as a flexible entity.

Refiners, for the most part, do not use arrows to move paragraphs, or codes (/ *x) to insert lines. They rarely cross out sections of their papers. Each draft is written as if it were final. For these children, print is not a revisable medium.

Do Refiners view print as unrevisable because they do not have the abstract thinking skills necessary to see ways to alter their original draft? Do they view print as final because they cannot picture that an arrow or a code symbolizes a different sequence or design for their piece?

On the other hand, the inflexible nature of the Refiners' media may in part be the *cause* as well as the *result* of their inability to consider other options for a piece. When print is seen as unrevisable—as being like magic marker instead of like clay—then children do not have the opportunity to physically lay out their options. If they can't cut up their page and lay it out in a different order, then they need abstract thinking skills in order to consider other ways to sequence what they have written. If written words are final, then revision must be abstract.

Piaget points out that physical activity can become the groundwork for abstract mental concepts. If Alan built and rebuilt his writing with his hands, would he develop the ability to visualize his piece in many forms? This requires more investigation.

Transition. Robie fit into the Refining Group until Christmas. He finished a final copy of 86% of the drafts he began, and an average of 79% of his first drafts reappeared in his final draft.

After Christmas, however, none of his writing seemed good to Robie. "It's all terrible," he said, as he began one piece after another. For three months Robie hasn't done a final piece of writing. He writes one draft after another and gets discouraged. This is his last piece of writing, retrieved from the garbage.

It's boring to write about nothing. You think about everything. You say, "They're boring." I want to write but when I write something, I crumple it up and throw it away. Then the teacher comes over and says, "Where are your starts?" I say, "I'll get them," because I know we're supposed to save even the awful stuff. I go to the garbage and get them out. Then I start a new piece and tear it to pieces.

Jason, Diane and Kristin, like Robie, have moved between extremes of making no major changes after their first draft, and of continually drafting totally new pieces. This chart shows the way children in this category move between extremes.

¹ Name/Date	³ % Finished	⁵ % New Dfts	⁶ % 1st Dft Kept	⁷ % Final = 1st
Jason				
9-12/78	87	100	86	86
1-3/79	40	100	35	35
Robie				
9/12/78	86	76	79	79
1-3/79	0	100	0	0
Diane				
9-11/78	100	55	98	65
11-12/79	20	89	25	17
Kristin				
9-12/78	80	76	35	35
1-3/79	100	69	77	69

When these children were asked to add information to a paragraph, they all reread the paragraph and struggled to fit the information in where it belonged. Two of the transition children eventually rewrote the piece in order to fit the information in, and the other two tried to squish microscopic letters between the lines so as to add the information without 'messing' the piece.

As a Transition child, Robie has reached a stage where he is not content to refine and recopy early drafts. Now he appears at first glance to be a Random Drafter. He continually abandons pieces, writing entirely new drafts. A closer look, however, shows that his rewriting process is very different from the Random Drafters. Rewriting, for Random Drafters, is a forward process of continually moving on. For Robie, writing involves the 'backwards' motion of assessing what he has done. When Random Drafters were asked in the simulated rewriting exercise to add specific information into their pieces, they did not reread the original paragraph, and they did not struggle to fit the information in where it belonged. The Transition children, on the other hand, all looked back and found a way to insert information into the appropriate places.

There seem to be a variety of reasons why Refiners are no longer content to merely refine a draft. For Becky, the need to continually try a new draft, a new piece, coincided with her parents' divorce. For other Transition children, their new restlessness seems to result from having developed higher standards for themselves.

Robie is a good example of the frustration which Revisers can experience when they are able to look back and assess their work, but are not able to use their self-criticism towards significantly improving their work. I suspect many Revisers will move into this transition group in time. As children develop high standards for themselves and become more self-critical, they become more and more frustrated with what they have done, and more and more unwilling to reread, recopy and refine what they view as 'lousy' to begin with. They will want to throw their writing away, and to begin again (and again, and again.) Or they won't want to write at all.

Psychologist Howard Gardner (*New York Times*, March 23, 1979) writes:

Indeed, I suspect that there exists a kind of "sensitive period" during the years

preceding adolescence. The future artist needs to acquire skills at a rapid rate so that, by adolescence, he is already accomplished in his craft. If he is, then he can withstand the rise in critical powers . . . and still conclude, "I'm not that bad."

Interacting. "I don't think about titles for my piece until I've written enough drafts to find out what I'm writing about," nine-year-old Andrea says. Like professional writers, Andrea discovers what she has to say by seeing what she has said. She puts print onto the page in order to get her hands on it. "I don't know if this part's good, but I'll put it down so I can see," Andrea will say. She reads the section out loud, hearing and looking at her words as they lie on the desk in front of her. She may circle a line, saying, "This gives me an idea for something better." The line is rewritten several times. As Andrea toys with the words at hand, she experiments with the direction and voice of her whole piece.

Amy and Gina, like Andrea, write drafts in order to interact with them. They do not only rewrite drafts—they revise them. Revision for these children is a hands-on rethinking process. Choices emerge from tension—between writing for information and writing for grace, between inclusion and focus, between intended meaning and discovered meaning.

These statistics are taken from collections of all the Interactors' writing from the whole year, including the first months when they did little content revision.

Name	⁴ % Finished	⁵ % New Dfts	⁶ % 1st Dft Kept	⁷ % Final Dft = 1st Dft
Amy	75	80	51	36
Andrea	100	84	60	60
Gina	55	75	44	45

When these children were asked to read the paragraph in the simulated rewriting exercise, they immediately asked if they could change parts of it. One change led to another. Arrows, lines, stars and carets were used. Here is part of the transcript from Andrea's revision of the piece.

- Andrea: The beginning is hard to understand.
(She draws an arrow and rewrites it at the bottom of the page.)
- Andrea: I'd explain this part, tell *why* it was fun.
(At the bottom of the page she draws a line underneath the first rewritten section and now rewrites this part.)
- Andrea: I'd explain what we did in groups.
(She does this at bottom of page, and uses a symbol to show where it fits into draft.)
- Andrea: Wait, let me see how it is.
(She rereads it with the changes she's made.)

Although Andrea, Gina and Amy are only nine-year-olds, their revision process is much like the process professional writers experience. Donald M. Murray, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, describes this process:

While the piece of writing is being drafted, that writing physically removes itself from the writer, and the writer interacts with it, first to find out what

the writing has to say, and then to help the writing say it clearly and gracefully.

Like Professional writers, when Andrea rereads, she cycles between assessing and discovering. Sondra Perl (New York University, *Education Quarterly*, 1979) describes the back and forth motion of the composing process.

It can be thought of as a kind of "retrospective structuring;" movement forward occurs only after one has reached back, which in turn occurs only after one has a sense of where one wants to go. Both aspects, the reaching back and the sensing forward, have a clarifying effect. . . But constructing simultaneously involves discovery. . . .

This shifting of perspective and intent requires a controlled time and space framework which neither Refiners nor Random Drafters exhibit in their re-writing. Interactors, however, can sense ahead to see where their line or paragraph may lead them, and they can sense backwards to reconsider choices they have made. Interactors are able to control their perspective and direct their thinking.

The Interactors in this classroom did not always revise like professional writers. Early in third grade, Andrea wrote twenty-six pages in a story without making any content revisions. Her revision process resembled the Refiners, until her teacher gave her permission to mar her page, and showed her how to use arrows to insert information. This was not a private lesson. Alan, too, and all their classmates, were encouraged to use drafts as working manuscripts. But Andrea, unlike Alan, was ready to hear the lesson. She was ready to move beyond refining.

Soon Andrea was using arrows, carets, and scratching out to reshape and refocus her writing. A first, every option she considered was put onto the page. It was as if she needed the physical act of laying out her choices. Later, I watched Andrea's revision move from overt to covert.

Teachers and researchers need to look closely at Andrea and other Interactors in order to develop a map of how children change as writers. Have other Interactors, like Andrea, first been Refiners? What sequences did they go through in learning to interact with their drafts?

Summary All the third graders in this classroom draft and redraft their writing. But they do not all share the same rewriting process. Some children are Random Drafters; others only Refine what they write; others Interact with their drafts in order to discover and to clarify what they mean to say. Each kind of revision seems to involve a different level of time and space flexibility, with Random Drafters as the least flexible because they do not look back at what they have done as they redraft. Refiners are a level above this because although they do look back, they cannot shift back and forth between looking back and pushing forward. Transition children may be a level higher, for they seem to be straining to substantially improve their drafts.

These tentative groups offer an invitation to further research. We need to watch more children as they rewrite, and see if the groupings apply to them. We need to observe children over a span of several years, and see whether they move from one kind of rewriting to another. Above all, we need to continue to pull our chairs in, and let children show us the story of their composing.