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Writing to Transmit and Share One's Understanding of the World

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The over-valorization of the study of language at the expense of learning does not create in students the conviction that language constructs a relation to reality. Students know how to use language to act in their spheres (family, friends, neighborhood ...) but it is necessary to build bridges between these forms of language and school activities. The results show that using writing in that perspective to move between oral and written and to compare interpretations among peers not only makes pupil writings more consistent: it improves the quality of language knowledge and reduces the importance of the writing for children who have trouble learning.

La survalorisation de l'étude de la langue aux dépens de l'apprentissage de celle-ci ne crée pas chez les élèves la conviction que la langue construit un rapport au réel. Les élèves savent se servir du langage pour agir dans leurs sphères (famille, copains, quartier ...) mais il est nécessaire de construire des liens entre ces formes de langage et les activités scolaires. Le dispositif met l'accent sur un travail de représentation de textes d'auteurs ou des enfants mené conjointement à des activités d'écriture dans des classes françaises de l'école élémentaire afin de faciliter tant l'appropriation de ces textes que l'acquisition de compétences discursives. Les résultats tendent à montrer que le mouvement d'objectivation que permet le passage par l'écriture a non seulement pour conséquence d'améliorer la cohérence des écrits produits mais aussi de faire découvrir des fonctionnements de la langue et de relativiser les difficultés de l'écriture pour des élèves qui sont peu familiers avec le monde de l'écrit.

1. Context of the Research

The current research was carried out in the CREN laboratory (Centre de Recherches en Education de Nantes, or Nantes Center for Education Research) and originated with an observation made during visits to primary classrooms in France in the context of teacher training. In terms of classroom time spent, French language teaching practices tend to overvalue the formal study of language and associated exercises, relative to applied language learning exercises, in particular the use of reading and writing situations which are more conducive to activating language knowledge in real-life situations (Crahay, 2006). This material includes vocabulary, grammar, and spelling as defined in the French national education system's Official Instructions. Moreover, as noted by numerous studies (Giasson, 1990; Tauveron, 2002), French grammar manuals used in classrooms lead systematically to overly literal questions concerning minor points in written questionnaires about reading. In addition, it is always the content of the student's answer which is corrected, rather than the way the student arrived at the answer (Cèbe & Goigoux, 2006). In short, all of these practices fail to develop the students' belief that language has a connection with their reality, activities, and experience—in other words, *“Bringing order to an inner world or even taking ownership of it, creating links between ‘what I am’ and ‘what I know,’ putting emotion into words, and revealing what is important to me”* (Bucheton & Chabanne, 2002, 32). Of course, the students know to use oral language to interact within their spheres of activity (family, friends, neighborhood), but there is a clear need to build links between these forms of language and language activities at school (Bautier & Rochex, 2007). The aim of the current research is to explore how the use of writing can promote these links.

A dual task centered on children's representation of texts was carried out in ten ordinary second and third grade classes (ages 7–8) in the Le Mans area, with the goal of increasing textual comprehension. (In the French system, these class levels are known as “cycles 2 and 3.” These levels follow the “preparatory course”—the first year of primary school—during which the main work of internalizing the cultural code occurs.) The children were asked to perform written and oral texts—both by authors and by the children themselves—and to write individually about these texts. This resulted in a corpus of student writings from a total of around 200 children, which we have collected and analyzed qualitatively. In addition to gathering the written work, we also recorded and transcribed the exchanges between the children during the oral performance phases. We will present the individual stages of the research process during which the children were alternately led

to perform external authors' texts before writing about them, and to write their own stories that they then performed. These situations combined the goals of encouraging children to adopt the world as their own and to practice learning to write.

2. From Performance to Writing

In the first part of the research, we wanted to find out what children understood from a text read aloud to them. We approached the question by having the children give a theatrical performance of the text before asking them to interpret it through a short writing exercise.

2.1 Choosing a Folktale

We consulted with the teachers of the classes involved and agreed on the choice of a folktale, a familiar genre for children and consistent with French educational programs which place a great emphasis on including heritage texts from around the world. We selected an adaptation of a Korean folktale (appendix 1) which had been used by the French National Education system in 2012 for evaluating student comprehension in second grade classes (age 7), and which the teachers remembered as having been challenging for the children.¹ This tale is quite interesting because it turns out to be both accessible for students of this age and at the same time to involve a certain density of meaning. The spatio-temporal framework fits into the folktale tradition: a forest, a pond, a mountain in China—a foreign country conducive to stimulating the imagination— and an unidentified era that nonetheless seems to belong to a distant past. The protagonist is characterized by his trade, as a woodcutter, and his Chinese-sounding name, Li Chang. The other character is an old white-bearded man who goes unnamed, which creates a challenge in terms of anaphora and pronouns to distinguish the two agents. The folktale's structure also follows a common pattern with the loss of the axe marked by “one day,” the encounter with the magical character, and the three successive events corresponding to three different axes, highlighted by the formulaic nature of the text with its mantra-like repetition of “that is not my axe.” The major role of dialogue in the story should facilitate the staging of the folktale, which presents itself as an apologue delivering a lesson of honesty, the human value emphasized here.

For the purposes of the research protocol, the story was cut short at “is this your axe, woodcutter?” when it was first given to the children so that they could take a more active role in the comprehension process.

2.2 Choice of Protocol to Allow the Students to Make the Story Their Own

The protocol called for six steps:

5. The students listen to the teacher read the beginning of the folktale a first time.
6. The students listen to the beginning of the folktale a second time and try to imagine the situation in their heads.
7. In pairs, they try to act out the beginning of the folktale.
8. One of each pair presents the play in front of the others.
9. The students discuss the presentation as a group.
10. Individually, each student writes down the sentence that Li Chang will say next.

First, we noticed the great difficulty that a majority of the children had in acting out the scene (exchanges between children in steps c, d and e): imagining the two characters, since they have no idea what a woodcutter is,² they have a hard time visualizing the axe as an object, and they don't have a very clear image associated with the word "pond"; steps d and e allowed them to make the situation more explicit. Here are some of the children's suggestions for the question (step f) all from one class:

No, it's not my axe, but I can use it. (Enzo)

No, it's not my axe. (Martine)

Thank you so much, you found my golden axe. (Octavien)

No, that's not my axe since it's not made of gold. (Tahia)

No that is not my axe but thank you for finding it. (Clovis)

No that's not my axe but I'll take it. (Caroline)

That might be my axe, thank you. (Assyāna)

I don't know if that's my axe. (Aubane)

Writing this single sentence uttered by the woodcutter compels the children to give meaning to this scene in the folktale and to think about different but possible conceptions of the world. In the cited examples, even though Martine and Tahia respond in the negative, the other children—and the entire corpus (200 children's responses) goes along the same lines—would happily accept the golden axe, with a few variants: Enzo, Clovis, and Caroline speak frankly, while Assyāna et Aubane are much more evasive as suggested

by the “might” and the use of “I don’t know if”; as for Octavien, he claims the axe outright, as only a fool would refuse such an object! Passing through the step of writing brings each student’s spoken (but now recorded) sentence into confrontation with that of the others and that provided by the text; in the discussion phase that follows, students can individually justify their points of view based on their personal experience. This phase is part of the construction of the notion of a literary genre with its typical characteristics: in folktales, speaking the truth means being honest, which is sometimes much more complicated in real life, and which often turns out to be a source of misunderstanding for the students with more distance from the common literary and cultural codes (Bautier & Rochex, 2007). In this way, the chronology of the story is prepared: the golden axe, the silver axe, the ordinary axe, a scale of decreasing values which is not obvious a priori for a child of this age, although it corresponds to a hierarchy of values in the world.

2.3 Writing as a Route to Problematization

Let us now compare this mode of testing children’s representations of a text with the questions used in the 2012 national assessment, even if the assessment document provided children with the full text, and question 4 can only be understood if this is the case:

Answer the questions:

1. What is Li Chang’s trade?
2. What does Li Chang see appear next to the pond?
3. Where does Li Chang live?
4. How does the white-bearded man reward Li Chang’s honesty?

This type of questionnaire, which is justified as a means of evaluation, but which then establishes a model for teaching practices, places the child at the level of responses to the text rather than that of the questions it raises. The idea that Li Chang is honest and that his honesty is rewarded is so much integrated into the implicit assumptions of the genre that it is not worth questioning. Here we agree with the Michel Fabre’s (2011) position which advocates teaching a problematic world. In his view, in order for young people to find their way in our society, it is important that they learn to place themselves at the level of questions rather than answers, and it is precisely the function of the school provide this orientation—or compass—in the form of open questioning, doubt, problematization. To expand on Michel Fabre’s metaphor, the use of writing as a route to problematization can be the magnet

in this compass, aiming to provide the keys to a complex environment.

3. Writing to Imagine and Present One's Own Story

After presenting the classes with several situations, all designed with the same goals of problematization, a second research protocol was applied. The students were to write a story in which something very pleasant or very unpleasant happened to them; before or after writing their stories, they also had to illustrate them.

The protocol was as follows:

- One or two texts were chosen by the teacher, cleaned up for spelling, and put up on the board.
- The children had to read each story silently and create a mental representation of it.
- A few children perform the text in front of their classmates, who narrate based on what they see.

Here we report and discuss two significant examples from a second-grade class.

3.1 A Story that is Non-Transparent in Meaning

We first take the example of Angel's text because it illustrates the first category of exchanges that will arise during the performance stage.

One day I got on a horse and it's called Fanfan. I walked with Fanfan, and we go for a ride. It's great because I felt big. And then we came back. (Angel, 2nd grade, age 7)

Julien comes up to perform the scene as he understands it. He says: "I'm getting on my horse" and pretends to mount a horse. During the exchange which follows, Robin reacts immediately: "I don't think you say 'I'm getting on my horse' when you get on your horse." His remark is interesting because, while language encodes reality, writing has its own way of functioning that we never discuss explicitly with the children. Léa raises her hand to say that she had a problem imagining the scene: "*I don't know what Angel meant when she wrote 'I feel big'—is she big because she's up high, or is it because she has the impression of no longer being a little girl?*" Léa raises an excellent question, and one that the group is only able to settle by asking Angel, who will explain that it was not the position on the horse but that she was expressing her feeling of doing a grown-up activity. This is how children approach the fact that writing

transcribes their reality, but also that their messages can sometimes include unintended polysemy, like any text, a realization that will help them open to the plurality of meaning while reading.

3.2 An Awareness of Linguistic Choices Related to Writing

We now consider a prime example of the second type of interaction which comes up among the children based on representations of their own texts.

One day, we went for a walk. And on the way back, I was running and I wasn't looking in front of me. So I banged right into a mailbox. And another day, during summer vacation, I banged into a glass door trying to go outside from an auntie's house. (Adrien, 2nd grade, age 7)

In this second example, the students are confronted with two challenges to representing Adrian's text. First "*there's no talking, it's not easy to act out*" notes Théo, which suggests the idea that a story unfolds in the declarative form of a narrative, but also that the use of discourse allows participants' words to be reported, which somehow makes the text more alive. The children will gradually, in their own words and through interactions generated by such situations, clarify the act of writing and what underlies it. If we provide them with the conditions for genuine involvement, even very young children are capable of developing an acute awareness of such fundamental learning processes (Hubert, 2014). Another comment about this text was made by Pierre: "*It is not clear when we're acting because we think it's the next part . . . and it's actually not on the same day.*" "*We could make a signal to say we slept in between*" suggests Clémence—at the same time, she joins her hands together and puts them against her cheek. "*Or say 'Another day' out loud, because in his text it says 'And another day'*" added Clara. Through the interplay between writing and representation, the children not only make such strategies explicit (Cebe & Ghosh, 2006) in order to access an understanding of a text—whether their own or literary—but they do the same for the workings of language in its complexity. In the written form, the reader perceives that there are two different scenes involving the same character, because a group of words placed between the two mark this. It doesn't matter for now that this noun phrase is a temporal adverbial phrase, while the child is beginning to express a need for it to communicate; the role of grammar in second grade with seven-year-old children should surely be to help them develop awareness of the mechanisms of the language. Debra Myhill and Susan Jones (2013) condemn the learning of rules for developing language proficiency, and favor concentrating on lin-

guistic choices for writing; this is precisely what the current research explores. In the previously cited case, many academically struggling children had not at all understood from reading the text alone that it actually related two anecdotes; it was only after seeing the scene unfold before their eyes that they understood it.

3.3 Sets of Representations

This approach positions children as receivers of texts, but also as producers and receivers of their own writings, allowing them to experience the complete communication loop (Ferreiro, 1990). Some children were most challenged by writing a short text about themselves, and they took refuge in familiar formulas, such as “There was once a King . . .” or “One day the robot . . .” This is no doubt because for some, it still seems impossible to write their own story on paper, if their daily lives are too painful to take on, or simply that writing, especially at school (Barré-De Miniac, 2000), is not seen as a means to express who they are, what they do, what they experience: “

School-based writing is thus produced with an orientation toward compliance with what is assumed to be expected by the grader. Like all school writing exercises, the pieces they write about themselves are subjected to this double paradox, but the request for use of the autobiographical material reinforces it: in writing something based on their experience, students must first prove their linguistic skills. (Bishop, 2006, p. 23)

By promoting free writing, Freinet was already concerned with not disconnecting the child’s world and the world of school, the child’s writing and the student’s writing:

We are restoring the unity in the children’s lives. They will no longer leave the most intimate part of their lives at the classroom door to wear rags which, even if embellished and modernized, will still only be garments for schoolchildren. (Freinet, 1960, p. 19)

Moreover, in previous work we have shown that many adults treasured their first grade notebooks because they enjoyed rediscovering their first sentences, recording childhood experiences with which they felt they were reconnecting (Hubert, 2012). A lasting engagement on learning necessarily raises the question of the relationship of these learning experiences with the

lives of the students; this is the dimension of “reference” developed by Gilles Deleuze (1969) and insufficiently put into practice by the educational system, particularly in France.

The concept of representation as we envision it in our research proves to be polysemic. The representation is a mental image in the brain, but in our approach it is also at once performance, dramatization, projection, and an obstacle to overcome—we have already shown this through the examples discussed. Writing as representation is part of an exchange with other minds and makes our reality understandable:

Social representation is an organized body of knowledge and psychic activities whereby men make physical and social reality intelligible, fit into a group or an everyday exchange, and release the powers of their imagination. (Moscovici, 1961, pp. 27-28)

For some, discovering that their classmates could tell a very short story featuring them in a way, just themselves in their daily lives, was a real revelation and many asked if they would be able to do it again another day. As for Angel, who happens to be a fairly shy girl, she felt particularly valued seeing the class interested in her text the same way as with authors’ texts:

There is a sweetness in knowing that out of the details of one’s own very ordinary life, one can bring out forms where others will find meaning and will recognize themselves. (Lejeune, 2006)

According to her teacher, this experience has fueled her involvement in writing situations. We observed the same phenomenon with other children whose writings were included in the corpus.

4. Writing to Make the World One’s Own

Students were alternately asked to write about situations related to their own experiences and other situations from literary or cinematographic works. We will now discuss the second part of the research protocol in which children were asked to write after reading folktales.

4.1 Choosing Another Folktale: A Gift for the Sky

In consultation with the teachers, the choice of the next base story (see Appendix 2) settled on a folktale in the oral tradition with an unknown author.

For second and third grade students, this story's plot creates a poetic image of the rainbow as a natural phenomenon, which proves to be appropriate for the children's age. One of the obstacles to comprehension lies in the large number of participants in the story, all of which are named using common noun phrases rather than having proper names to designate them. Furthermore, the characters are of different types: various animals, like in many folktales, but also the sky, which appears to be more abstract for the children. It therefore seemed predictable that confusion would arise between the different characters—and as we will see, such confusion does not fail to occur. A further difficulty inherent in this text is linked to the few instances of direct reported speech: the repetitive nature of the Bird of Paradise's request to the different birds is not directly expressed and is thus implied. In addition, the Bird of Paradise who, along with the sky, is a key character in the course of story, never speaks in direct discourse, which requires the students to mentally represent what he actually says. Moreover, the Bird of Paradise is an imaginary bird; in contrast to the others in the story, it is not actually a bird but rather a bush whose spectacular flower resembles a bird. Finally, the color of the feathers reflects that of each bird, most of which the children probably do not know, hence the idea of using photographs of the different birds. This tale therefore seemed particularly appropriate because for second and third grade students, being able to understand it at all requires a significant effort in terms of mental representation.

4.2 The Second Research Protocol

The goal of this third phase to use writing as a means of understanding, and understanding as a stimulus for writing, with both activities fed by the set of representations.

The protocol was as follows:

- The teacher reads the whole tale aloud once.
- The teacher reads the tale aloud again, but puts a photograph of each bird on the board, in order of appearance in the text, as a comprehension aid.
- The teacher asks the children to observe a period of silence during which “we all try to imagine the story in our heads.”
- The teacher asks the children to “rewrite the story with their own words” referring to the photographs lined up on the board with the name of each bird below.
- The teacher asks some children to read what they've written, and it is

matched with a theatrical performance.

We will comment below on three such examples of writing by students, two in second grade, and one in third grade: the first two were chosen because they are characteristic of obstacles to comprehension that the children encountered, and the third because it illustrates the perspectives shaped by the interactions as aids to representation and writing.

4.3 Text 1: Nayara (age 7)—who is King of the Animals?

It's the story of a sky that was crying because he felt all alone.
One day the King of the animals went to visit the sky. And
since the sky was crying, the bird and his friends gave him
some feathers that made him stop crying.

Nayara's text shows a fairly good overall understanding of the story and a strong ability to focus on the essentials: she doesn't list the various birds but her three sentences represent the minimal narrative outline. Only one element was not grasped—it is the periphrastic form “the King of the animals” that she has confused with the Bird of Paradise; writing makes explicit the knowledge that falls within culture and literary codes. In tales, the King of the animals, if nothing else is mentioned, is the lion, which some of the students also perceived in the sentence, “the King of the animals assigned the most beautiful of them, the Bird of Paradise, to go visit the sky.” For others, though, writing provides an opportunity for learning these literary codes which are often less familiar to children from less privileged backgrounds. These codes play a role in the comprehension of texts whose subjects belong to a foreign cultural imaginary world which is reinforced in school. Some children will only realize that there are two different characters by seeing it staged and hearing the mission entrusted to the Bird of Paradise.

4.4 Text 2: Simon (age 7)—the Lexical Stumbling Block

The sky is sad because he's all alone. And one day a bird
comes with some feathers and a bird had a scarecrow. And
when the sky is sad he takes out the scarecrow.

There is no trace of the animals for Simon who, rightly, doesn't see in them any essential characters in the story, but rather focuses rather on the sky's sadness, which the gift will be responsible for alleviating. However, this time, the writing shows a confusion between the words “scarecrow” (*épouvantail*) and

“fan” (*éventail*), which opens the discussion to a lexical note about a word that is central in the story. Of course, the teacher had a fan on hand to establish the relationship between signifier and signified, and to show an object needed for the mental representation of the story, as the axe was in the first protocol.

4.5 Text 3: Yassine (age 8)—Writing as a Representation of Understanding

One day the sun was so sad that the animals of Earth couldn't stand it anymore. So the King of the animals sends the bird of paradise. The parrot gives him a purple feather, the parakeet gives him a? feather, the peacock gives it a beautiful blue feather, the green woodpecker gives him a green feather, the chickadee gives him a yellow feather, the kingfisher gives him an orange feather and the robin gives him a red feather of course. And the bird of paradise puts them all together and makes a fan and he flies he flies flies flies and reaches the sky and says to him why are you sad? And he gives him the fan. And he's happy and he makes a rainbow.

Yassine's writing is presented as his own reconstruction of the original story, whose essential steps he covers well. He explains while reading it that he put a question mark for the parakeet because he does not remember the color, which he didn't know—"indigo," a little-known color among children. For the rest, Yassine goes beyond merely rewriting what he has memorized, as the end of his text is actually a revision of the tale in his own words, a sort of original writing. The repetition "he flies he flies flies flies" does not exist in the original story, it is nevertheless a pertinent writing choice to represent the length of the bird of paradise's journey. Yassine's teacher was very surprised by the quality of this text because this child had up until then been completely closed off to writing. The situations with which he was confronted for the research, perhaps because it presented a clearly defined creative activity, progressively gave him confidence that was not subsequently diminished. Yassine's case is not isolated in our corpus. Comprehension of statements is not immediate, but is built by successive reformulations, and writing clearly has its place in this work of understanding. Classroom time for interactions about the writings provides an opportunity for exploration of the common code of written language, including lexical items (fan) or implicit knowledge (the lion is the King of the animals). Through writing, the children make the world their own at the same time as internalizing the common codes.

5. Image and Text: Other Sets of Representations

To conclude, we will take a final example following the same approach but this time using video, which is yet another form of representation. We watched two repetitions of the first scene of the animated film *Azur and Azmar* by Michel Ocelot, following exactly the same practice as with the written texts. In this scene, a woman with dark skin speaks with a white child on one knee and a dark-skinned child on the other: she teaches them in two different languages, to say *Mama* for one and *nanny* for the other. The children were asked to respond individually in writing to the following question: “Who is the woman?” Here we report on the writings of a mixed class of grades 2-3, which were written on the board to allow the children to see the variety of responses and discuss them.³

5.1 The Children’s Responses

The mother of both children.

She’s the mama of both children. (x4)

The woman is the children’s nanny. (x9)

She’s a woman who looks after the children. (x3)

The woman is Egyptian.

She’s a villager and a mama.

The mama has children.

She’s the children’s mama. She teaches them English.

She’s a child’s nanny.

The woman is a nanny.

The woman is the white child’s nanny and the brown child’s mama. (x2)

The woman is the blond boy’s nanny and the little brown-haired boy’s mama. (x2)

The woman is the little French child’s nanny and the little Arab child’s mama (x2)

The woman is one child’s nanny and the other one’s mama.

5.2 Writing as a Way to Perceive Reality

By facilitating participative feedback on all of the answers, the inclusion of writing as a step in the activity allows each of the children to question their own understanding of the fiction. In this way, they gradually see that there are different ways of expressing it, and that some are valid (“The woman is a nanny”) while others not (“She’s the mama of both children”). This decoding of the image is based on the children’s personal knowledge of the world, built from each child’s individual history but also from what has been learned. Few students of this age know that, in the past, a rich woman did not raise her child herself, and that she entrusted this task to a lower-class woman who had recently had a child and therefore had milk to feed the child. In this excerpt, the nanny teaches her son to say “Mama” and the other child to say “nanny” but he repeats “mama” like the other child. Some have clearly perceived the difference in status between the two children: “*The woman is one child’s nanny and the other one’s mama.*” while others still have the impression conveyed by the image: “*The mama has children.*” Others still have focused their attention on the foreign appearance of the character: “*The woman is Egyptian,*” which cannot be concluded from the excerpt; one student even perceived a language that he did not understand, which he expressed as “*She teaches them English.*” The two students who write “*The woman is the little French child’s nanny and the little Arab child’s mama*” are of North African origin and probably recognized the language in which the woman sings; they then interpret the text using their own reference grid.

It is also important to repeat this type of situation with the children because, as a socially developed and shared representation, writing contributes to the establishment of a common view of reality for a given group (Jodelet, 1991). This means taking into account the subject’s relationship to the language, as well as working with different processes for representing statements (Dabène, 1990). It is in this context that we must place the different stages of our protocol, which were designed to build on interactions among peers to bring to light the multiple and complex sets of representation that the child must learn. The interplay between the use of diverse forms of staging of literary or cinematographic works on the one hand, and writing exercises on the other, is central to the approach. The only goal of this process is to “*make the objects of knowledge visible in the acquisition of discursive skills*” (Crinon & Marin, 2012), or to show what is hiding behind writing skills: “*Alternating between a writing practice, in which knowledge remains implicit, and developing an awareness of the knowledge which underlies ways of writing through a practice of reformulation and explanation contributed to the internalization of knowledge*

and language skills” (Crinon & Marin, 2012). The same complementarities are at work in our approach between writing and oral interactions based on the representations.

6. Conclusion

As a creative perceptual and mental process, writing transforms social objects (persons, contexts, situations) into symbolic categories, which activates the resources of the imagination and allows the child to become engaged as a singular subject in a collective entity, a society or a world whose codes are being internalized little by little. But the act of writing as a representation and path to “harmonization” with the world (Hubert & Poché, 2011) is a gradual process of adaptation and requires explicit instruction which is not provided in the majority of primary classes. Even if the research presented here should ideally be conducted over a longer span than a school year, it reflects the value of working on and examining the sets of representations that occur in the writing process: from the written form to the act of writing, from writing to speaking about writing, from speaking to writing, from the image to writing, from writing to drawing, and so on. Within this complex interplay, each representation may feed into the multiple readings of a given text, exposing the child to new possibilities while cutting off others.

It is by encouraging reflective distance within the context of school—through exchanges among peers around the problems that arise, the possible solutions, the strategies chosen, and the potential mistakes—that learning to write can take place. This requires a protected environment, conducive to open questioning of individual suggestions by the rest of the class, and in which the teacher promotes risk taking and attempts as safe and appropriate. A year later, throughout the set of 200 students observed, we noticed a sharp decrease in non-responses in situations of both written questioning about a text and writing exercises: only 4 students who experienced major “encoding” difficulties still had trouble producing writing. Another constant, although the differences among children remain significant: 85% of them now write more lines than they did last year in the same type of writing situation. Identifying characters in writing is the point showing the most significantly improvement, as well as grammatical agreement between the subject and verb. However, it is difficult to accurately measure the impact of such an intervention, as the children continued to grow and mature over the year, and of course benefited from other formal learning experiences including grammatical instruction and practice. As a direction for further research, another project would include closer examination of lexical expansion in such children.

At this stage in the research, we can say that the initial results tend to demonstrate that if the protocols put students in a position to interact with the process of literacy development, the use of writing for comprehension results in two important changes. In this study, it has not only led to improved coherence in the writings produced by students, as well as the quality of these writings in terms of language mastery, but it has also helped to reduce the pressure inherent in the relationship to writing for the students experiencing the greatest difficulty.

Notes

1. Up until 2012, the French National Education Ministry organized evaluative assessments in all second grade classes in order to measure student achievement at a key moment of their schooling (the end of a “cycle”).
2. The term in French, *bûcheron*, is much less transparent than its English equivalent containing *wood+cut*.
3. In this class, for reasons of class size, children in second and third grades are together.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: A Korean Folktale (French Adaptation by Georges Rémond)

Far, far away, on a mountain near China, lived a poor old man named Li Chang. He earned his living by cutting wood. He was a tireless worker.

One day, when he cut a tree, his axe flew out of his hands and landed in a nearby pond. Li Chang could not find it. He was desolate, being too poor to buy a new axe. What could he do to earn his living? While he was worrying, a thick fog covered the pond, and an old man with a white beard appeared and asked:

Why are you crying, woodcutter?

Li Chang told the old man of his misfortune. The bearded man said to him:

I will try to find your axe, and he disappeared into the fog.

After a little while, he reappeared holding a handsome golden axe, and asked:

Is this your axe, woodcutter?

Li Chang, disappointed, replied:

No, that is not my axe.

The man with the white beard once again disappeared and soon reappeared, this time holding a silver axe, and asked:

Is this your axe, woodcutter?

Li Chang, disappointed once again, replied:

No, that is not my axe. My axe is an ordinary axe with a wooden handle and a steel head.

The man with the white beard disappeared a third time and soon reappeared holding a steel axe.

There it is, my axe, my axe! cried Li Chang happily, that's the axe that I lost.

And he cried tears of joy.

Appendix 2: A Gift for the Sky

The sky was so sad that he could not stop crying. The giant tears that kept falling started to worry the animals who lived on Earth. In order to stop the flood that threatened them, the King of the animals assigned the most beautiful of them, the Bird of Paradise, to go visit the sky and try to console him.

He didn't want to make a visit without a gift and he asked each of his seven best friends to give him their most beautiful feather: the parrot gave him his most beautiful purple feather, the parakeet an indigo feather, the peacock a blue feather, the green woodpecker a green feather, the chickadee a yellow feather, the kingfisher an orange feather, and the robin, a red feather, of course.

The bird of paradise made a fan with the feathers that he carried with him. After a long journey, he finally reached the sky and asked him why he was so sad. "I feel so alone," replied the sky. Then the bird of paradise gave the fan of feathers to the sky, who was very happy and finally wiped away his tears.

He also promised to come see him often with all the other birds of the Earth. "What a beautiful gift" the sky said in thanks, "I will always keep with me, and I'll take it out when I feel alone and sad."

Since then, whenever the sky happened to feel sad, he would take out his fan, which would make him smile. At the same time, from the Earth, a beautiful rainbow could be seen unfolding in the sky.