achievement on two of the tasks required by each student was taken. It showed that in New Zealand and in the United States (and to a certain extent in Hungary) the students write equally well (or equally badly) without regard to the task. In Chile and Finland achievement tends to be somewhat task related.

Chile entered the IEA Study of Written Composition in order to assess the existing curriculum and practice in writing in the Chilean school system against an international background. As a result of a series of reforms over a period of more than 25 years, education has become more accessible to a higher level for the majority of the population, but with resulting problems of overcrowded classrooms and teacher shortages. Over a period of time there was a perception of lowered student achievement, especially in the critical areas of reading and writing. At the same time, the level of students' writing ability was perceived as being not only an educational but a national concern. The availability of the verified valid evaluation and diagnostic instruments of the IEA international study was seen as an important fulcrum for the planning of further reforms. An international confrontation of results was thought to provide a more general rationale, not country or language specific, but pertinent to a moment or a historic-universal consequence in improving the quality of written communication teaching at primary and secondary school levels. Some results of the Chilean data were discussed.

In an attempt to explain differences between pupils' achievement in free writing in Sweden, the IEA used a Partial Least Squares program to test a theoretic causal model of factors of importance to pupils' proficiency in writing. The background data included, among other things, the pupils' sociocultural background, the teachers' experience and the classroom practices in writing instruction. They used pupils' marks on the argumentative composition to represent the standard of their achievement in writing. The theoretic model was verified showing the strongest correlation between background variables and writing achievement to be the sex of the student, especially as it related to the pupils' attitude toward freewriting. However, no relationships could be found between teaching in school (as represented by the variables in this study) and pupils' achievement.

**USING MESSAGE LEVEL CRITERIA TO EVALUATE PRIMARY WRITING**

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In April of three successive years, we collected writing samples from all English and French Immersion primary classes, about sixteen hundred samples in all. Students wrote according to procedures that are consistent with a process approach to writing. At least two persons evaluated the samples using a six-point scale, which focuses on the message level of the writing, i.e. on the child's success in conveying meaning.

Evaluators agreed on the message level in 65% of samples in grade one, 63% in grade two, 52% in grade three, with no more than one level of disagreement in 94%-99% of the samples (depending on grade level). The writing scale appears valid in that the percentage of writing samples at the different levels moves up the scale from grade one, to grade two, to grade three, with more than a third of grade three samples meeting criteria at the 5-6 end of the scale.

Evaluators drew a number of other conclusions from the study: most students have no difficulty choosing a topic; interesting samples were written by students from all schools, regardless of socioeconomic level; boys as well as girls produce top level writing; students do not make revisions unless they write on every second line; and opportunities to share writing with others are critical in fostering writing development.

Classroom teachers use the writing scale to evaluate the content of a student's file, not to mark individual pieces of writing. Half-a-day's practice with the scale is sufficient to make teachers comfortable with its use.