

CONCENTRATED LANGUAGE ENCOUNTERS: THE TRAEGER PARK LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

PART 3: IMPLEMENTATION: NOTES

This set of notes is incomplete. It covers some aspects of the program at Traeger Park

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NOTE 1: A TAXONOMY OF TEXT GOALS

It was important for the program framework to create taxonomies of texts for various reasons.

- First, because they helped to organise and select program goals on a systematic basis. From within these categories, texts for spoken production and writing and reading were selected for teaching. Texts for reading teaching were obtained from commercially available children's books, texts written by children with the teacher in joint construction work and (less frequently) texts written by myself and teachers for the children. The use of basal readers or any other type of controlled language reading series was avoided in order to present the students with texts that used language choices in a manner appropriate to literate discourse.
- Second, and just as importantly, teaching goals were framed not only around the production and reading of literate text, but also included a need to make the strategies and reasons why writers make particular language choices clear and accessible for the students. Similarly, the process through which readers might respond to the writer's language choices was also made explicit to the children. For example, *this is how the strategy makes us feel, what do we think about the writer's strategy, do we agree with the writer's approach?* Once particular language choices and their effects were pointed out and discussed with students, the students were encouraged to bring these literate resources to the writing of their own texts.

In addition to the focus on 'text' as a key outcome goal for teaching, I was also very concerned to set the quality and complexity of the texts studied and produced. They had to be at a level that ensured the children would at least catch up to, and even surpass, the levels found generally across mainstream schooling since the children very quickly fell behind their mainstream peers even at the beginning of schooling.

The selection of **text** as an outcome goal was an important step in determining the nature of the program at Traeger Park. Setting outcome goals as **text** meant that I was specifically avoiding the purely child directed experiential language teaching model that was becoming prevalent at the time. This child directed model essentially

represented outcome as children's 'talk' and the amount of talk produced was seen as an indicator of teaching success. This model was discussed earlier in reference to Malcolm (1979, 1987). In addition, my observations at the school had shown that both attempting to 'follow' the lead of the children and asking 'open' questions led nowhere.

The next step was to begin to define a teaching approach that could lead to the children gaining control over the production of outcome texts. What I wanted to avoid also, at all costs, was a teaching process that ended with piloting (Lundgren 1981). Earlier, I pointed out that 'piloting' produced the kind of ritualised learning that was so common in the schooling of Aboriginal children. In piloting, the teacher leads a child or children through a task by asking questions as the task progresses. However, because the children share little common knowledge with the teacher about the nature of the problem and the necessary goals, they learn nothing from the activity that can be retained as useful in applying or generalising the information in other contexts.

I wanted to teach the children **how to generate** appropriate texts **not merely about** the texts or the features they contained. That meant I needed a teaching approach that could actually account for the development of competence of this kind and this meant I had to engage with the dynamic processes through which decisions about language choice were made in the process of interaction. Just because 'text' and explicit knowledge about text might be set as an educational goal in a classroom, this doesn't mean that the language potential to realise (produce) that text in use is actually being taught.

Teacher/student negotiation was focused on the production of a literate text

At the time of the project, research on language development was beginning to highlight the importance of control over 'written' as opposed to 'oral' language. The notions of written text and oral text being used did not refer to whether a text was written down or spoken as such (written text could be spoken and oral text could be in print). The term 'written text' was used to refer to texts that essentially referenced within themselves. That is, they were explicit in the sense that they made few presumptions concerning the understandings that were required. Meanings were carefully constructed and logic and sequencing carefully elaborated and explained if necessary. This was different from 'oral' texts that depend on listeners or readers being able to bring much more information and understandings shared with the producer to its interpretation. Each of these ways with words fulfil different and legitimate social roles and are designed to achieve different and legitimate social purposes.

Thus, there are two sets of meanings for the terms written and oral, the common meaning (e.g. something that is physically written down or spoken) and the technical meaning (the nature of the text's organisation and purpose). This can make for confusion in discussing classroom programming and teaching. In order to avoid confusion, from this point, this discussion will use all lower case (i.e. written, oral) when the common meaning is intended. When the more technical meaning is intended, the words will begin with a capital letter (i.e. Written, Oral).

The decision to set Written texts as the primary goals for language teaching imposed serious challenges to the previous program at Traeger Park. At no time in the previous program had the children been exposed in any substantial manner to such texts. For example, reading teaching in the school had involved simplified

'phonics' and 'basal' readers and because of the children's lack of success, their use persisted well into the upper primary grades. Writing was built around low level recounts of experiences or observation/comment (i.e. draw a picture and write a sentence)

An important implication was that an appropriate range of texts had to be set out and teachers had to understand what it was that they had to teach in order to support the children. In the setting out of the target Written texts, I took a broad definition of what constituted a Written text. Written texts were produced mostly in both spoken and in written form. For example, the program aimed to produce students who could both **explain** a process to a listener and write a Written **explanation** text.

The term Written, as it was used at Traeger Park, also included texts that were strategic in the sense that their organisation was formalised around the performance of a particular social role. For example, when an order is taken over the phone, specific information needs to be recorded. At a business level, this recording process is formalised to prevent mistakes. So it is usually recorded onto an order form. Both the oral process of taking the order and the writing process of recording the information would constitute the two texts for study in addition to the rationale and format for the form itself.

A further point is that there was a recognition in the program that the produced texts could not be artificially massaged into perfect versions of the text that was required as a goal. The text produced was the text that the children had developed the skills to produce over the course of the sequence of lessons prior to the production session. If it was felt more should have been achieved in the writing of a text, the teaching sequence was improved for later texts.

Finally, if it was considered appropriate to the social purpose of the text, Oral texts were also set as goals even if the texts produced were to be written down. Although, the majority of texts set as goals were Written in the sense outlined above.

I identified three basic categories of Written text that were produced. These types were,

- a. Transactional
- b. Factual
- c. Literary

a. Transactional Texts

These texts were generally texts produced by participants in an area under study for theme work. Themes studied in the new program usually included one or more excursions. Often, they focused on a centre that existed within the community. For example, an Aboriginal health clinic, the entomology section at a remote area research station, a bakery, a chicken farm, a hospital, a restaurant, a radio station, a police station, a pet shop, a veterinary surgery and so on. The transactional texts produced and studied by the students were the working documents that originated in such workplaces. They included, forms, records, notices, notes, labels and so on.

b. Factual Texts

The range of factual texts that were selected and set as goals in the concentrated

encounter sessions attempted to draw on the factual genres by Martin at the University of Sydney (e.g. Martin 1985). At the time, Martin's taxonomy of genres was only in the process of being set out. Using Martin's developing work as a base, the following range of factual text genres emerged to direct teaching goals as the project progressed.

Recounts
Procedures
Explanations
Descriptions
Reports
Arguments

By 1984, the program had been consolidated, at least in the language unit activities, across the grades, Transition, Two, and Three. By this point, most of the text genres listed were being covered on a regular basis in the program. However, the genre that Martin identified as 'argument' had not been targeted. This was primarily because, at the time, a model for its development in concentrated encounters with children in early childhood had not yet been worked out. It was expected that argument as a genre would be easier to develop beyond the early childhood years before Grade Three. An obvious candidate for older students would have been an Aboriginal community organisation.

Most of the factual texts were composed from the study and discussion of experiences such as hatching chickens, baking bread, mustering at Singleton Station and others such as those listed for transactional texts above. However, the discussion of these experiences also drew heavily on reference factual texts that explored the phenomenon the students were exploring through their experiences.

c. Literary Texts

Again, adapting as best as I could at the time, I eventually settled on the following types of "Literary" texts.

Recounts
Narrative
Aboriginal stories for children
Poetry
Legends
Fables

These types of text represented the range of Literary writing that was incorporated as outcome goals for teaching.

At Traeger Park School, the most common genre or text form produced under the general classification of 'literary' was narrative. All of the types listed above were covered in the program for early primary grades. In some cases, models for teaching (speaking, reading, writing) were drawn from commercially available children's books. Sometimes the narratives were developed and written by teacher and children working jointly together.

Sometimes also, experiences (e.g. visits, activities) provided the base for teaching. This happened with the category called recount which typically drew upon the retelling of an experience, for example, the recounting of an adventure with a

monster that was played out on an excursion. In these instances, the text produced was far more developed than the type of recount mentioned in the reference to 'class stories' in Part One of this paper.

Another category where experience played an initiating role for the creation of texts was labeled 'Aboriginal stories for children'. Sometimes model texts were available in books published for children and sometimes they derived from stories told to the children by community members. In the study of these texts the language choices in the source presentation or the book/text was maintained for study and writing.

NOTE 2: A LESSON FRAMEWORK FOR NEGOTIATING GOALS

As the type of goals to be set for teaching and the general approach to learning negotiation was being developed, a third need arose for the program and this had to do with the identification of a suitable vehicle to allow the principles derived largely from research in home settings to be accommodated into the school curriculum framework. The means to provide for the transition from home to school context was found in the work of Courtney Cazden (1977) who proposed the notion of concentrated encounters as a vehicle for framing and organising both learning and assessment in the classroom. She described the key features of concentrated encounters in the following terms,

“...they are condensed forms of familiar interaction experiences. They represent our best examples of teaching encounters and are as close as possible to them in setting, participants and topic. But they are more focused by teacher direction...” (Cazden 1977:52)

Cazden elaborated further in other sections of her paper.

“And in addition to the situations that can be created in school, dramatizations and games can simulate additional contexts and provide more concentrated encounters. Such simulations can be particularly important, as intensive practice in new roles and their communicative demands, to help some children overcome previous habits of coping with their world in non-verbal ways or through restricted codes alone. Simulation drills are better than pattern drills for two reasons. First because the focus is always on communication, not imitation, on meaning, not form. Second, because they can provide a variety of communicative contexts while pattern drills, by definition, offer the child a more limited range of contexts and options.” (Cazden 1977:49-50)

Cazden’s notion of concentrated encounter provided the conceptual vehicle needed to bring the teacher/learner negotiation strategies in the child-development literature with the notion of text as goal to be negotiated. I was concerned to differentiate the teachings process at Traeger Park from the exclusively child-centred and undirected nature of the interaction to be found in traditional language experience programming. A key difference in language experience work is that no teacher mediation of the children’s language input occurs in any of the ways that are present in parent/child routines. Also, there is no repetition of discussions to allow for development as in home language development routines. At the time I used both the terms concentrated encounter and concentrated language encounter to refer to the same curriculum activity structure. In an early paper, Gray (1980) I described concentrated language encounters as,

“a role play, dialogue or discussion session that is shared by the teacher and children for a specific purpose. It could be a simple sharing of an experience or a story. During concentrated language encounter sessions the teachers try to get the children to use spontaneous oral language that is relevant to the topic. They explore both oral and written texts. Concentrated encounters can be repeated as often as necessary for the children to develop the language skills needed for effective communication”. (Gray 1980, p7)

A concentrated encounter ‘sequence’ was a series of lessons that emulated the repetition of routines to be found with, for example, bedtime stories in literate

homes. In these situations, the same text is revisited and shared and in the process the child learns both the language of the text and about the language of the text. What stayed constant across a series of lessons was the focus on either the construction or deconstruction of a particular text. The nature of the individual sessions could vary considerably. However, they still allowed for the maintenance of the routine that had been established around the text.

The terms concentrated encounter, concentrated encounter lesson and lesson routine were used interchangeably to refer to the individual lesson events. There was some confusion at Traeger Park over the use of concentrated encounter and concentrated encounter sequence. Also, some teachers were concerned that by doing concentrated encounters they were somehow not doing lessons. Because doing lessons is something teachers are comfortable with and the term concentrated encounter sounded to them like a specialist language activity, the term lesson routine was commonly used to refer to the individual concentrated encounter lessons. This was done to underline the point that concentrated encounter sequences represented a model for organising all teaching especially when large differences existed in the situation definition for learning between students and teachers.

What could constitute an individual concentrated encounter or lesson routine varied greatly. It might, for example, involve teacher and children reading and discussing a book, or practising how to conduct a lesson on something, or being shown and practicing how to take a phone order for a pet shop, or do some activity like taking temperature, or observing and discussing the working of an incubator, or observing eggs in the incubator and learning about embryo development from a book, or talking about a tape or video as they watched it. Essentially, a concentrated encounter session or lesson routine was a session that could be repeated in a way that allowed the teacher to maintain the students' interest. Each encounter was relatively short, approximately 15 -20 minutes depending on the activity and sometimes the sessions were combined to take advantage of complementarity.

As an example, in a theme unit on hatching chickens, the main text goal was that the children would be able to produce an explanation of the process through which the chicken embryo developed into a chick inside an egg. For children in Grade One to describe and sequence the developmental changes that occur over the 21 day incubation process is a daunting oral task, let alone writing and reading books about it. Obviously a lot of work had to be put in to achieve a suitable level of competence across the class.

A number of different concentrated encounter formats were devised to allow for continual visiting of the explanation text. First, an incubator was acquired and the children helped the language unit teacher set it up in the room. This incubator was visited each day of the incubation period and the discussion that the teacher led continually focused on what had happened to the growing chick, what the chick was like now and what was going to happen next. A number line of 1-21 was set up on the wall and the teacher worked with the children to locate the current day in the incubation sequence. This also allowed the discussion to revolve around talking about and attempting to articulate the stages of development. A series of illustrations of the developmental stages of the embryo were enlarged from a book and laminated onto large cards cut as egg shapes. These could be used in conjunction with the observation of the incubator or located in the number line during discussions. They could also be used in 'games' to again lead to the teacher led discussion on what we know about our growing chicks. A text written for upper primary grades (Egg to Chick; Selsam 1972) was used as a discussion point. The

teacher and children would leaf through the book discussing previous things the teacher had read and told them about the organisation and language choices in the text. Then the teacher would read the section that was appropriate to the current day and discuss it and its illustration with the children. I wrote a less wordy version of the explanation based on the Egg to Chick book and made it into a large format book complete with fold out illustrations and this was used as a shared book reader and point for discussion



Julia Price responds to a child spontaneously pointing out a word that begins with the /m/ (m-ore) sound as they discuss and read the abridged version of Egg to Chick.

At appropriate stages, the eggs were candled and the developmental process and current stage of development discussed. The children dissolved the shell of a non-fertile egg in vinegar to discover what the egg sac looked and felt like. This allowed for further discussions. Also, the children watched the eggs hatching as well as the process through which the chicken became able to walk. This process was photographed and discussed as a language routine.

By the time the children had covered all of these routines, they and the teacher had developed a high degree of common knowledge about the explanation text to be produced. At this point the children began working to develop a text of their own using a set of photos of their chicks and illustrations taken from books. The teacher led them through a series of concentrated encounter sessions that focused on refining what they were going to say for each illustration in their book. Then, when they were comfortable with this, the teacher sat down with the students and they jointly negotiated their text that became a vehicle for reading teaching.

I identified two basic types of concentrated encounter sequence at Traeger Park. These two were labelled Type A and Type B.

Type A: Most concentrated encounter sessions were centred around discussions. These often concerned an object or process that was regularly taken as a focus for

the lesson - observing and discussing, for example, the working of an incubator, how butterflies developed from larvae to adult, baking bread and so on. In a concentrated encounter Type A sequence the language was mapped onto the experience (e.g hatching chickens) in the sense that repeated explorations in the teaching routines built up a language map that provided shape and texture to the experience.

Concentrated encounters could also be focused on an event that had previously been experienced by the children on a class excursion, for example, the process through which a doctor's receptionist recorded patient details and symptoms. They might be developed around the reconstruction of a mini lesson, for example, one given by the school nurse on "how to take temperature". Discussion activity became the point from which target spoken and written texts were created.

Type B: concentrated encounters derived from experience with texts. In these encounters texts were read, to, with or by students and discussed. In these sessions, the teacher mediated, using the learning negotiation strategies outlined later, the children's ability to both produce and discuss writer strategies employed within the focus texts. In a Type B concentrated encounter sequence the process was essentially the deconstruction and reconstruction of the mapping process outlined above. This time the starting point was an existing book or text (map) that was gradually pulled apart to discover the outline structure (text structure) and the relationships that existed between the features (language choices) that worked together to produce the coherent map.

Often, both of these types of concentrated encounter lesson sequences were used in parallel. For example, a Type A sequence built around discussion of chicken hatching in an incubator to develop an explanation of embryo development within an egg was paired with a Type B sequence that discussed a text that provided a written explanation of the same process. The second sequence helped shape the language choices and structure used in the joint construction of a written explanation of embryo development.

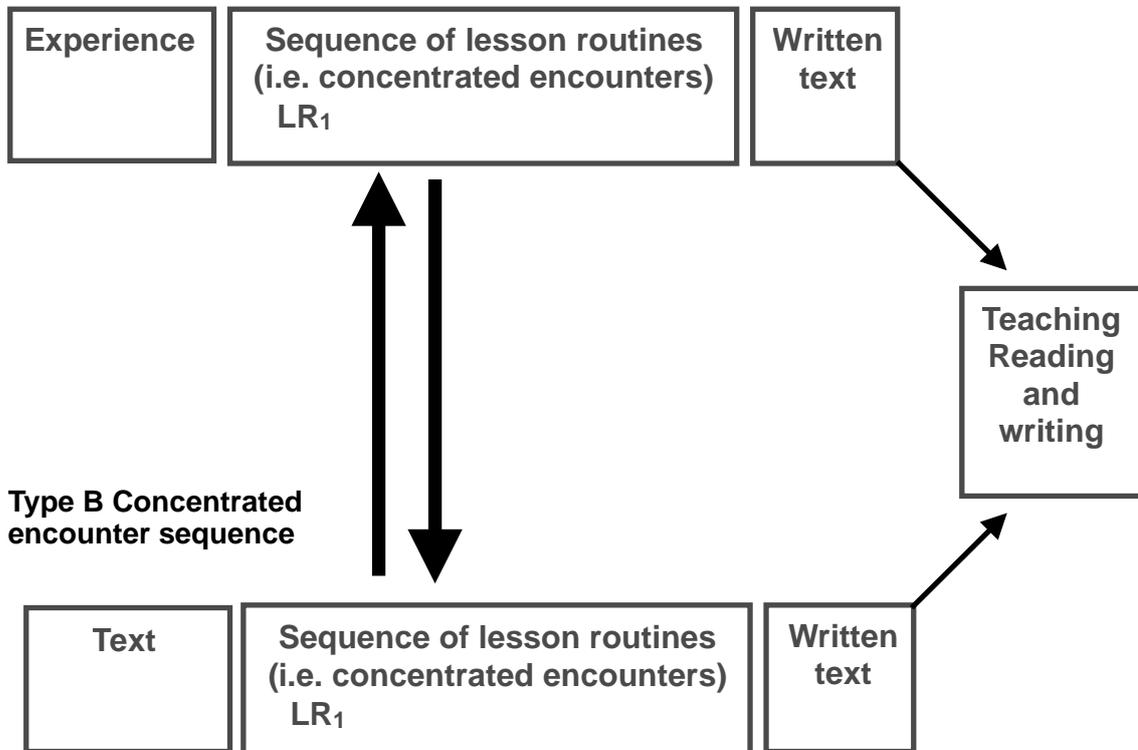
Often books, illustrations, (especially illustrations of steps within activity sequences), photos, felt board cut outs or any other kind of physical representation were employed to help shape the discussion over time as the concentrated encounter sessions progressed.

When appropriate, much of this discussion activity was incorporated in and used to extend the scope of role play, for example, "taking and recording an appointment by phone" or "recording patient details" or "taking a temperature" would be incorporated into role play around a health clinic.

Typically, once the text or parts of the text were internalised (i.e. well rehearsed and shared in teacher/student minds), the text was written down by the children and teacher to produce a class book in what was called joint construction. Modifications of these broadly defined concentrated encounter sequence types were used to achieve various curriculum ends, for example, to support the independent writing of individual and group stories by the children. The diagram below gives a graphic representation of the basic process that occurred in each type of concentrated encounter model.

Basic teaching sequences in Type A and Type B concentrated encounters

Type A Concentrated encounter sequence



The diagram provides a visualisation of the basic programming concept for concentrated encounters that has been discussed above. That is, an experience of some kind or a text is explored over a series of lesson routines in which the teacher supports the students to develop the capacity to produce an extended text. Typically the text produced in the routines was a Written text. This text was then used for reading and writing activities.

Often the Type B (experience initiated) concentrated encounter work paralleled the work on a Type A sequence (text initiated). When this occurred, the language choices and their rationale were consciously fed into the parallel Type A sequence work to provide the language resources the students required. Conversely, the experience being explored in a Type A sequence also provided the underlying grounded understandings required to interpret the text used in the Type B sequence. This interrelationship is represented by the reciprocal arrows between Type A and B in the diagram above.

NOTE 3: GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR INTERACTION

The theoretical basis for teacher/student interaction strategies was outlined in Part two of this paper. They were drawn from a number of sources but the primary source was the observations of the children at Traeger Park School. These observations were referenced back to the research literature. The primary areas for which a theoretical framework were drawn were the theoretical work of Vygotsky (1967, 1978); knowledge about parent/child interactions that had been shown to support language (and especially literacy) development; psychological research on self awareness, development of 'self' and attachment as well as the language development work and grammar of Halliday (e.g. 1975, 1984).

This research into language and literacy development highlighted the strongly supportive nature of the interactive process that needed to occur. It also showed that children entered into learning most effectively when they saw engagement in a positive social light (i.e. when they felt secure and that they belonged). The notion that learning commenced initially as a social interaction process before it was internalised as the learners internal knowledge was a feature of this research. For that reason, I included, within the emerging program at Traeger Park, teaching situations that were overtly social in nature. Thus, the nature of the social interaction that needed to occur was a priority across all of the teaching activities. In fact, in some instances, an effort was made to provide contexts that, by their very nature, allowed for a different, more social and collaborative interaction process between teachers and their students in place of the more formal separation of teacher/student roles of the mainstream classroom. For example, 'making toast' was the context for the first language and literacy work encountered by 4-5 year old children when they commenced school. In fact, the making and sharing of food was a common topic in the first 3 years of schooling.

However, it was clear from my observations in the language unit that simply choosing an appropriate context for discussion was not enough to ensure successful teaching and learning. I had identified communication breakdowns occurring over a broad range of classroom interaction strategies. Dysfunctional strategies had the potential to derail the learning negotiation process for Aboriginal students no matter how 'social' a particular activity might appear at its onset.

Significant changes were required in two key aspects of the teacher/student negotiation in the classroom,

1. Teacher strategies for behaviour management
2. Teacher strategies for promoting learning

These two aspects of teaching had to be established as positive and affirming processes for students. Moreover, both of these areas needed to be working in harmony to produce effective classrooms, especially with Aboriginal students. At the school, I worked closely with the language unit teacher Julia Price who took on the strategies and incorporated them into her teaching with a high level of sensitivity and respect for the children. To the point that a number of ex-students confided as adults later that their daily visit to the language unit became the highlight of their day. The teaching in the language unit then became a model for assisting to spread the new program more broadly across the school. Some significant strategy changes introduced in the language unit and promoted within classrooms are outlined below.

a. Teacher strategies for behaviour management

The general principle that drove changes within behaviour management strategies was that no strategies should mark the child as outside the learning group. I had noted that such strategies had a particularly detrimental effect on Aboriginal students at the school. Recognising the evidence in the literature that affiliation at an interpersonal level was critical for engaging children, we tried to avoid any kind of behavioural management strategy that made the children feel they did not belong to the learning group.

At a gross level, strategies were devised that could replace direct reprimands targeted at individual students or groups of students or even, for that matter, the whole class. It was much better to invite them in, for example, "Come on Jenny we really need your help here." or "We need to be quiet and listen to Jane because she is saying something that is very important." "At other times, the teacher might pause and wait.

Teachers also employed positive strategies for behaviour management that were applied proactively and not only used at the point at which some disruption occurred. These persisted throughout the discussion in the classroom, for example, at a very basic level, when the teacher was engaged in discussion during teaching sessions she made the choice to use "we" whenever possible rather than "I" or "you".

At a finer level, control strategies that are sometimes thought of as innocuous were also scrutinised. For example, teachers frequently ask students who they think are not paying attention a question to indirectly shame them back into participation. This strategy was discouraged at Traeger Park because it could be observed to have a disproportionately negative effect on children whose self esteem was continually confronted by failure. It also constructed them in their minds as "outside the group".

When taken as individual actions, such strategy changes may appear minor but when they are used cumulatively within a general regard to constructing children as belonging participants rather than outsiders this can have a major effect. The cumulative effect of the kind of approach outlined above was that students experienced an affirmation of their engagement with learning tasks rather than having their lack of attention or behaviour emphasised.

For frustrated and stressed teachers, inclusive strategies such as those listed above are difficult to negotiate. They are 'long term' in the sense that they rely in the development of a relationship of trust and common purpose between the students and their teacher. They also don't come into effect instantly. However, they are highly effective in the longer term although they require a degree of persistence and tolerance. These long-term strategies can be contrasted with short-term responses that typically involve coercion. Coercion strategies may provide immediate resolution for the teacher in the short term but are generally not effective in the long term. In fact, they set up a cycle of resistance that is increasingly difficult to breakdown over time. This was found to be especially the case with students at Traeger Park and many teachers required support to sustain their commitment.

Finally the behavioural management model implemented at Traeger Park recognised that a clear association existed between behavioural control and learning. When children are not learning and when they feel alienated most attempts at management, especially those that are overtly coercive, will not succeed. Thus it was doubly important to develop an approach to learning negotiation that was

inclusive and supportive as well as providing for high level outcomes.

b. Teacher strategies for promoting learning

The supportive environment sought in behavioural control situations was carried over to the strategies teachers employed as they attempted to promote learning engagement. A number of key principles were drawn from the work of Vygotsky and the associated child-development literature. These were,

1. The adult (i.e. teacher) supported the child in the learning task by supplying those parts of the task that the child/children could not do when left to their own resources. Whatever the child/children could do the adult/teacher let them do it.
2. Learning occurred across sequences of related lessons that were organised to form 'routines' or 'formats' similar to bedtime reading sessions.
3. As experience with the task progressed over a number of 'routines', shared knowledge built up and the adult/teacher was able to extend both the complexity and depth of the shared learning. As this extension process progressed, children were encouraged to contribute and lead the extension activity.
4. There was a recognition that, especially in the early stages of the children's engagement, they joined in not because they understood fully what they were learning but because of the collaborative and positively social nature of the task.

In addition, some of the strategies for learning negotiation that had been common before this model was introduced had to be changed to accommodate it. The general principle that drove changes within these strategies was that no strategies should place the children in circumstances where they were likely to fail or contract them as outside the learning or knowledgeable group. This especially applied to failure in front of their peers. I had noted that failure inducing strategies were pervasive across the school curriculum and had a particularly detrimental effect on Aboriginal students. In most instances the direction of change needed was relatively clear. However, two areas of the old teaching approach, in particular, needed special attention and specific change strategies needed to be devised. These were correction of responses and questioning strategies.

Dealing with correction:

The primary factor underlying failure inducing strategies was the use of correction when response was produced. The correction or challenge is often viewed as a stimulus that pushes the child to learn a better or more correct response. A major concern for the school around speaking and writing at the beginning of the project was whether or not teachers should correct or accept any Aboriginal English syntax produced by the children. The response from my observations was direct and applied to both correction per se. (e.g. writing) and responses to question answers.

Do not correct something that has already been produced

The reason for this stipulation was that when correction is attempted in circumstances where there is a significant mismatch between teacher and students concerning the goals, expectations and strategies involved in the production of a product, any attempt at correction cannot find the common ground required for the child to assimilate the information being presented through the correction. The following interaction illustrates this problem.

The Grade Two class had just written their daily journal as part of a Process Writing activity and the teacher was conducting individual reading conferences in which the students read their writing with her and she then attempted to get them

to develop what they wrote. Samantha had just written, "Last night I saw a TV". The same thing that she and most of the other children wrote every day with minor variations. (In this and in all following transcripts names, when used, are changed)

- T: Can you read your story to me?
S: Last night I saw a TV
T: Wow, that's great Last night you watched the TV. Where did you watch it?
S: My house
T: I think people would like to read that. Do you think you could write that down in your story?
S: No (definite)
T: Oh, well it's a very good story anyway.

The whole setting here is replete with agendas that were not made available to Samantha. Even the teacher seemed to be confused about the nature of a personal journal when she commented on other people reading it. It is tempting to argue that Samantha did know, hence the definite "no". However, sadly this was not the case. Samantha would have produced this text even if she had been asked to write for the whole class. It is what she did whenever she wrote.

The issues for Samantha around writing were manifold. In this instance, she had no idea of what constituted a personal journal. This knowledge was presumed in the teaching process. Samantha had no knowledge of what she was expected to write or any of the techniques required to shape writing to achieve her messages. She had no knowledge of what would constitute an acceptable topic for writing not only in her personal journal but in fact for anything she wrote. She did not realise that another hidden agenda was that her writing was really an exercise to do with her overall development as a writer and that the teacher's input was given to assist her to improve her skill. She had no perception that clause expansion was something relevant to the production of written text. The observation here was that there was a deep need to develop the kind of pedagogy that ensured that students like Samantha approached the writing task with a similar kind of task definition to that of the teacher. In short, the alignment of the perceptions of the teacher and Samantha had to be built into the preparation process prior to the writing activity that took place. The kind of communication breakdown discussed above occurred in all areas of the curriculum. It was not just confined to language and literacy teaching.

Observations at the school had revealed that many times any attempt to explicitly correct the children's response at the point at which it was being produced caused children to resist or withdraw from participation. For example,

- C: He go shop (*as an answer to a question*)
T: Yes. He went to the shop (*emphasis*)
C: *Child reacts by becoming visibly shamed and unresponsive - Some of the children slyly catch the eye of the responding child and make subtle facial gestures.*
T: *Teacher interprets the children's actions as 'teasing' and tells them to stop*
C: *This makes the situation worse for the responding child and she withdraws even further*

In fact, even when such 'teasing' did not occur, correcting of this kind far too frequently led to resistance and withdrawal. Such reactions and effects are well documented in the early childhood research literature.

I had also found that appeals to some kind of generalised rationale to justify the correction had no effect on the nature of the resistance and withdrawal that resulted, for example, when the teacher responded to Aboriginal English by saying, "Yes, but we need to talk in School English and say - he went to the shop".

Likewise, attempts to appeal to "meaning" by asking questions about things that the children were familiar with, for example, toys, also led to communication breakdown. I concluded that it was not just because the the children's habitual ways of deploying language were being directly confronted by correction attempts. Resistance and withdrawal was being compounded because children were being asked to change something when the communicative purpose behind the change was neither clear nor acceptable to them.

The coupling of 'teasing' in the above transcript with the correction of the child's response illustrates very well the point made in the previous section concerning the interdependence that exists between learning and behaviour management. Teachers considered 'teasing' to be a behavioural issue and did all they could to discourage it with little impact. However, while the children were clearly being affected by the "teasing" from their peers, the primary cause of the children's resistance and withdrawal was not (as the Traeger teachers presumed) the teasing activity itself. Rather, it was the fact that the teachers' correction strategies themselves were legitimising the the teasing process. The correction and modelling strategies being employed were, therefore, the root cause of both the withdrawal response and the resultant teasing.

In a very short time after the program commenced, teachers working in the project found that the problems caused by correction and teasing had simply disappeared. The recurring nature of the sequences of lessons/routines and the supportive strategies employed provided contingency and allowed the children to pick up and adopt language competences appropriate to different purposes without any challenge to their customary oral production. The children could easily differentiate and take on the language choices required for producing the texts they studied in the teaching sessions and their uptake of the new language competencies did not clash with their ability to switch to Aboriginal English in other contexts.

Dealing with the effects of questioning:

Do not ask children questions when you are not sure if they know the answer or how to find it

The important point here is that the dictate above does not say that questions are wrong just that they are wrong when there is no alignment in task definition between the teacher and the student. Thus, in many ways the issues around questioning paralleled those around correction. At Traeger Park, breakdowns and withdrawal occurred whenever students could not see the purpose of an activity and did not understand the goal or the type of response that the teacher was expecting.

The notion that questions should not be asked when children do not know how to access the answer is a daunting and confusing dictate for most teachers because questioning is such an important component in all mainstream approaches to teaching. The teacher attempts, via questions, to check that children have understood previous teaching or to 'draw the children's understanding of the task forward' - to extend their understanding using various kinds of probing questions. Questions are also a mechanism through which teachers promote engagement and

clarify focus around the goals of learning tasks. Questioning, in fact, is a fundamental practice that is common to all methodologies encompassing both poles of the teacher directed to child centred spectrum. In teacher directed pedagogy, the emphasis is on giving back or extending concepts presented by the teacher. In child centred pedagogy, the emphasis is on drawing out the child's interpretation of their experience and pushing them to extend their understanding. Either way, questioning is central to the educational process.

One area of teacher questioning that has attracted considerable attention in educational literature has been the identification of characteristic patterns of teacher/child interaction that have been referred to as IRF (Initiation^ Response^ Follow-up - Sinclair and Brazil, 1982) or IRE (Initiation^ Response^ Evaluation - Mehan 1979) structures (where ^= followed by). Sinclair and Brazil (1982) give the following example to illustrate a 'sequence' that is comprised of a related set of 'exchanges'.

Exchange 1

T: What kind of word is always?	I
P: An adverb.	R
T: Good	F

Exchange 2

And wonderful?	I
P: An adjective.	R
T: Good	F

Exchange 3

And tranquillity?	I
P: Noun.	R
T: Good. So you should be able to work out the structure of that phrase now.	F

The above sequence consists of three exchanges each of which is structured according to the IRF pattern identified by these authors and is generally considered to constitute a significant feature in much of classroom discourse.

At Traeger park, teacher attempts to employ this model experienced continual communication breakdown that was also frequently terminal. These breakdowns happened whether the task was teacher directed or whether the teacher tried to create contexts in which questioning was of a more following, indirect nature. The example below is from a teacher directed pre intervention language unit activity with a grade one group of children. In this language activity centred around the direct teaching of grammatical structures, the teacher provided a model and then asked the students to provide a copy of her model. The lesson here was to do with teaching the distinction between *ask* and *tell* and the children were to ask other children what they've got and then tell others what they have. The teacher provided models and then the teacher asked Karen to tell the others what she (Karen) had, "Right, Karen, tell us what you've got? Karen answers "The red indian" (she has a toy figure) so quietly that the teacher doesn't fully hear. After a couple of attempts to get Karen to clarify don't work, Karen withdraws into silence and remains so for the rest of the session. One by one, the rest of the children join her.

T: Shhh I'm trying to listen to Karen What has she got? Darling?
K: No answer
T: What's this thing?
K: No answer
T: Do you know what this is?

K: No answer
 Two other children comment to each other in barely audible whispers
 T: Karen can you ask Sue what she's got?
 K: No answer
 T: Or Sue can you ask Karen what she's got
 S: No answer
 T: Cheryl you ask Karen what she's got
 C: Karen what have you got?
 T: You tell her Karen, you tell Cheryl
 What have you got?
 K: No answer
 R: An indian, you got the indian (Raylene whispers to Karen)
 T: Marie, can you ask Sue what she's got?
 M: What you've got?
 S: No answer
 T: Sue Marie's talking to you.
 You tell her what you've got
 S: No answer
 T: Sue?
 A: It's und...(unclear)
 M: What you've got?
 T: Not listening, did she?
 S: What have you got? (Quietly)
 T: Marie, you tell Sue what you've got
 M: No answer
 T: Sue, are you listening?
 Marie wants to tell you something
 You tell Sue what you've got
 M: What you've got
 S: No answer

Another group of students doing the same kind of learning task (ask/tell) illustrated another facet of the communication breakdown in these types of lessons. This group was considered more verbal than the previous students. However, breakdown still occurred. (Different children are numbered C1, C2, C3 and C4 in this transcript)

T: You tell C2 which pre-school you went to (to C1)
 C1: C2 What...

The fun begins when C1 begins to ask C2 but this is not what the teacher wanted - she directed C1 to tell not ask. So the teacher intervenes and asks C1 directly if she went to kindergarten. In doing so, she makes three common teacher communication 'miscues' with Aboriginal children. First, she makes a 'false' start and has to reform her question as she tries to respond quickly to correct C1. Second, she uses another common repair strategy of teachers. French and MacLure (1981) call this a question reforming strategy. In this particular strategy, the teacher asks a direct question to get C1 to say what preschool she went to. When she responds with the name of the preschool, the teacher will then say " Ok now you tell that to C2 - this is what she had originally requested. Her third 'miscue' is to assume the children equate pre-school with kindergarten.

T: You ask...You tell... C2 Did you go to kindergarten?

C1, however, still misunderstands her intent and responds by asking a question of C2 rather than answering the teacher's direct question to her.

C1: C2: Did you go to kindergarten?

The teacher is now faced with the need for another repair. So she asks the question again with emphasis on 'you' to reinforce her original meaning.

T: No, did you go to kindergarten C1?

C2 this time responds to the direct question.

C1: Yes

The teacher now has the first step of her question reform strategy in place and can now attempt her repair. So she reframes the intent of her original question to C1.

T: Right, will you tell C2 which which kindergarten you went to?

C1: (No answer)

T: What's its name, do you know

C1: (No answer)

The children's responses in teaching activities such as these had led the teachers at Traeger Park to conclude that the children possessed very little English language competence. On the surface this assumption seems reasonable for if children don't know the difference between *ask* and *tell*, then, surely their English must be at a low level. What was interesting was that the day before in a concentrated encounter role-play session in which the children had been acting out vet/patient interactions, the following interactions were recorded from C1.

Interaction 1.

T: Now, we've got to tell her what you're going to do...
What are you going to say?

Tell her what you want... going to do with him?

C1: I'm going to give him a needle.

Interaction 2.

T: Now, can you tell her why you're giving him a needle?

C1: Because he's got sore ears.

This clear difference indicated that the problem within the children's language was an assumed one that was occasioned by the circumstances in which they were required to perform.

For the above reasons, at Traeger Park, unsupported questions were never directed at individual children until the teacher was confident the child could provide an adequate answer. Especially in the early stages of a sequence of lessons, questions were directed to the group generally. Even then, the teacher targeted prior understandings that she knew had been shared between herself and the children in previous lessons within the sequence.

One important change was the introduction a very different pattern of teacher/student questioning in the language unit and promoted its adoption in the classrooms (Gray 1998). This approach to questioning was far more supportive than those in common use in classroom teaching. Parents in homes that produce children with the academic capital for success in schooling employ such supportive strategies. It is through this kind of interaction that children come to learn what

constitutes a relevant, effective response in academic learning. Within this more supportive pattern. In all of the interaction in lessons at Traeger Park, two goals were being simultaneously pursued.

(i) On one hand, the negotiation between teacher and children in the Concentrated Encounters was building their ability to produce complex and fluent literate text.

(ii) Simultaneously, the interaction process was building the children's ability to negotiate learning in mainstream educational settings.

The more supportive patterns introduced at Traeger Park stands in contrast to the I-R-E (i.e. Initiating Question - Child Response - Teacher Evaluation and/or Expansion) pattern that is common in mainstream classrooms. They also contrast with the common strategy of following one I-R-E sequence with another in the presumption that it is a way for teachers to stimulate children to deeper thinking. This kind of teaching *through interrogation at the point of production* was not effective with the children at Traeger Park because they were not privy to the language purpose and ground rules for taking part in teaching interaction that was structured in this way.

A basic principle underlying the development of the supportive strategies was the dictate that is the heading of this section - Do not ask children questions when you are not sure if they know the answer.

In place of the old questioning approach, strategies drawn from early childhood language development studies were used. For example, just as parents establish a joint focus as a starting point for developing discussion, the teachers at Traeger Park employed similar strategies especially in the early stages of work with entry level children. The teacher might, for some children, judge that they are very unsure and tentative and need to be shown how make comments about the ongoing process they were observing, for example,

T: Look!!

(Children look)

T: It's getting warm, or, The toast popped up and so on.

In the initial stages then, the teacher would draw the children's attention to the key aspects of the process that are going to feature in the staging and the wording of the extended procedural text. She would also, if required, tell them directly that a certain stage was going to happen.

**T: The first thing we have to do is take the bread out of the packet
Who thinks they can do that?**

One very central questioning strategy was based around what I termed Preformulation and Reconceptualisation. The basic frame of this questioning pattern is set out below.

**Teacher Preformulation -
Teacher Question -
Child Response -
Teacher Acceptance -
Teacher Reconceptualisation**

Each stage his questioning pattern is explained briefly below:

Teacher Preformulation

In the first step of the question pattern (pre-formulation), the teacher pointed the children towards the answer being sought. In some instances, this could involve virtually telling the child what the required answer was going to be (e.g. Now yesterday we said that there was something we had to do first. Remember, it was something about the bread).

Teacher Question

Second the teacher asked the question (Does anyone remember what we had to do with the bread? - note the question did not nominate an individual child and it referred back to commonly shared experience).

Child Response

Third, the children replied (e.g. Get the bread - this illustrates a response that may have been less than the teacher was seeking)

Teacher Acceptance

Fourth, the teacher accepted the response (e.g. *That is so right - note that even if the children had said "bread" or even an approximation or even if they had just pointed she could have accepted genuinely*).

Teacher Reconceptualisation

Fifth, the teacher now had the chance to reconceptualise the child's response. (e.g. We had to get the bread out of the packet so we opened the packet first and then we took the bread out). In reconceptualization, the teacher either modified or extended the child's response. As she had already told the child he/she was correct in the previous step, like parents in the early childhood literature she was now in a position to extend or recast details of the response. She could, in effect, clarify or modify the child's response while still affirming the child as a member of the group of successful students. Even if the child had given an answer the teacher felt was completely appropriate, she still had reconceptualising options. The simplest option would have been to repeat the child's response in order to establish the response as commonly held by all children within the group. That is, she could announce and model to the group, "This what is required for an effective answer". The second option would be to repeat and then extend and develop the complexity and knowledge given in the child's response.

This pre-formulation/reconceptualisation questioning sequence, like all of the discourse strategies introduced into language interaction was highly supportive because it made the nature of the response that the teacher was seeking visible and accessible to the child. An example is given below;

Teacher and children were discussing the differences between a 'mother' hen on a nest and their class incubator. They had their incubator in front of them and a book with a picture that showed a 'mother hen' sitting on a nest to hatch eggs. They had already talked about "mother hen" and the teacher has just given a detailed explanation of how "mother hen" turned the eggs.

Preformulation:

T: We haven't got a mother hen
to turn our eggs

Question:

What does...what do we...what happens with our eggs?

What turns our eggs?

Response:

J: Um, the arm

Acceptance:

T: That's right

Reconceptualisation:

This arm here...

see

this arm turns it round this way

and then back that way

and that's just like with mother hen

when she does it with her beak

Such questioning was effective primarily because it utilised the common knowledge that was built up between teacher and students over a sequence of lessons that were focussed on the production of the same text. Often, the pre-formulation/reconceptualisation pattern was built into the flow of the interaction and the pre-formulation and reconceptualisation stages were merged, for example,

Acceptance:

T: Yeah, Good girl

Reconceptualisation:

we had to fill the bottom of the incubator up with water

Pre-formulation:

Wonder

why we had to do that?

Question:

Why do we have to make sure that...

Response:

J: So it can make them moist

Acceptance:

T: Good girl

Reconceptualisation:

T: So it can make the eggs moist

Just a little bit wet

Pre-formulation:

because if the eggs get too dry

Question:

Yeah, what happens to the eggs
if they get really dry?

Here the teacher pre-formulates her question (We had to fill the bottom of the incubator with water) before asking that question which is targeted to the whole group and not to an individual child. Then, when a child responds, she first accepts then repeats the response and elaborates the meaning of 'moist' (so it can make the eggs moist - just a little bit wet). She does this to ensure the answer and its meaning are fully grasped by all of the children in the group. This way she is ensuring that the development of common knowledge is embedded across the group and not just the provenance of the child who answered. The teacher then begins to expand the response further (because if the the eggs get too dry....) when she sees the children are with her and ready to respond so she turns the expansion into a direct question (Yeah, what happens to the eggs if they get really dry?).

As common knowledge built up over time, the teacher's questioning strategy could also change away from one that employed heavy pre-formulation to a more direct

questioning approach. A common bridging strategy was to ask a direct question that the teacher knew, from previous concentrated encounter sessions, the children could answer. The teacher then used the reconceptualisation of that response as a point of departure for a more demanding question. Child initiations were also reconceptualised and once again the reconceptualisation could form the basis for a question pre-formulation, for example,

Child initiation:

A: And the blood...

Teacher response:

T: Then there's these...

Child response:

J: Blood vessels

Teacher acceptance:

T: Yeah, good girl

Teacher reconceptualisation:

these little red things, like little roads...roadways, aren't they?
coming into the little chick
all the blood vessels come into his belly button
Little chick's got a belly button [just like you have and just like
Mrs Price has]
yes, and all those blood vessels go in there

Teacher question:

and what...what's inside those blood vessels?

Once common knowledge had built over the course of a sequence of concentrated encounter sessions, the need for pre-formulation diminished. However, teacher reconceptualisation remained a major component of the interaction, first because it provided a means of building cohesion into the flow of the discussion and second because it proved to be the key element behind both the development of text complexity and the ability of the students to take control of the discourse. This will be pursued in later discussion on these latter two topics.

Dealing with other areas of teacher/student interaction

Another concern deriving from observations was the common teacher strategy insisting students engage in individual speaking activities such as 'morning talks'. 'Morning talks' or 'news' are a daily ritual in many early childhood classrooms. Aboriginal children at Traeger Park typically became mute when expected to meet the teacher's implicit requirement for a confident, spontaneous, display of new information in these situations.

Because of the build up of shared knowledge between teacher and students, the sequences of repeated 'routines' allowed teachers to support children's engagement in producing extended and coherent texts and to ensure their participation was free of any hint of failure. In fact, on occasions children who were emboldened by a general climate of success would enthusiastically volunteer to undertake tasks that were beyond them. When the teacher perceived this was the case, she would be in a position, because of the shared common knowledge, to seamlessly assist the child. For example, in one instance the teacher and a group of children were defining roles for a group role-play on the greedy grasshopper,

T: Who wants to be the grasshopper?

Cn: Me, Me, Me...

T: Okay, you can be the grasshopper

(and so on for all of the characters in the story)

T: Who wants to be the reader?

C: Me (child can't read the text and is attempting to retell the story)

T: Okay... Would you like us to do it together?

C: nods

In this transcript, the teacher was simultaneously supporting a child in her first weeks of schooling to engage with early concepts about reading and to build up her competence to produce a coherent extended text. She was doing this in circumstances that did not require the child to experience the confronting nature of a morning talk

The construing of activity as joint participation through the use of “we” was also carried on through strategies that attempted to develop learning activity as well as in behaviour management (discussed previously). This was possible in repeated routines because of the common knowledge that was being shared between teacher and students as the sequence of sessions progressed, for example, the teacher could easily state, *‘We know...’* or ask, *“What do we know/remember about?”*

Examining and reconstructing teacher/student learning negotiation in this way was an ongoing process of review at Traeger Park. As the review and reconstructing of teacher/student interaction progressed, an atmosphere of positive risk-taking in learning activities was encouraged. The effect of this approach on the attitude and engagement of the children was dramatic.

NOTE 4: ESTABLISHING AND BUILDING CONTINGENCY

To give some deeper understanding of the program it is necessary to expand upon the negotiation strategies that were used to build contingency both between and within lessons within the concentrated encounter framework. Five areas, in particular, need to be developed. The five areas are to do with the expansion of text complexity, expansion of child control, developing explicit awareness of social roles, the development of multiple texts in class programming and some observations on the use of role play in the program. Each of these areas will be discussed in turn below.

1. Concentrated encounters and the expansion of text complexity

Each concentrated encounter did not function as an isolated lesson. Rather, the lesson existed as part of related sequence of lessons that all supported the development of the same text. In each lesson, common knowledge was built up that could be brought forward and extended or developed in the next. Each concentrated encounter session resulted in an incremental increase in the children's language competence. In this way, concentrated encounter sessions mimicked the routines that had been identified in early childhood research on the development of both oral and literate language competence.

During the course of the theme unit, teachers and children revisited the production of the target text as frequently as possible and through as many varied concentrated encounter tasks as ingenuity allowed. It was the construction of individual sessions as part of an ongoing routine of activity that made it possible for the highly supportive questions to work.

Consequently, when the teacher knew she was tapping into shared knowledge, she would use sentence completion to encourage extension of a response.

T: And have a look at our little chick now (shows book illustration)
N: It's getting bigger
T: It's getting really big and...
N: with long feathers
T: Good girl

These questions are often frowned on in mainstream pedagogy and are called 'leading' with the presumption that they are leading children into responses they do not understand. However, in the context of the buildup of shared knowledge in concentrated encounter sequences they have their place in the teacher's repertoire.

In the early stages of a concentrated encounter sequence, teacher reconceptualisations of children's answers and initiations were often quite extended, for example,

Teacher and children were discussing the difference between a hen and an incubator
T: But have we got mother hen?
J/A: No
J: We got a incubator
T: Good girl
we've got an incubator (stresses the word incubator heavily)
That's right
we use an incubator
and that incubator's gotta be on all of the time for about twenty one days

Going all the time
 to keep those little eggs warm
 And see
 When mother hen sits on her eggs
 she has to give those little chicks exercise too
 so what she does is [[that she hops off the nest]]
 and she gets her little beak
 and she turns the eggs over with her beak
 (*mimes turning eggs over with her beak*)
 and just rolls them over...little bit...just a little bit
 She sits back on the nest
 and then she comes...
 and gets off the nest later
 and...and pushes them the other way

Working in this way meant that the teacher had to research thoroughly the text that she was going to develop. If the text was going to be extended over time the teacher had to be in a position to supply thought out information to the children. She also had to be clear just what it was that she was going to develop for the particular children she was teaching. Likewise, when she picked up a book to read to the students this had have been considered also.

In a similar manner to the processes operating in parent/child language and literacy development, it was the teacher's reconceptualisation that was picked up and given back to her by the students on the next occasion the topic was revisited. This meant that the continued reconceptualisation process led to an exponential increase in the quality and complexity of the language the children were producing over time.

By the time the first year infants students who were the target of the above early concentrated encounter session were nearing the end of the 21 day incubation period required to hatch their chickens, they had developed considerable capacity to produce coherent explanations about the process they had been observing. The following illustrative examples were taken from the discussion on day 19. In the transcript the teacher's accepting and additional following comments have been separated to the right to make the cohesive nature of the children's self directed discussion easier to see.

Examples of the complexity of cohesion for spoken language developed over a concentrated encounter sequence

Example 1.

0040 Na: It's all gone	
0041 D: It's gone	
0042 Na: It's all gone	
0043 D: And he's in a water sac	
0044	T: And he's in a water sac
0045 N: If he tried to peck that...that egg	
0046 the water would burst like a balloon	
0047	T: That's right
0048	The water bursts
0049	Right the water sac bursts like a
0050 N: I know	balloon
0051 what he's getting	
0052 when he's hatched	
0053	T: What?

0054 N: He's getting a little tooth
0055
0056 T: **Yes, he's getting a little egg tooth**
Good girl

0057 D: Here....Here's a little egg tooth
Points to illustration in book

0058 J: And that helps him
0059
0060 T: That helps him to...
That's right...
That helps him ...

0061 T: to peck out of the...?

0062 N: Egg /0063 D: Shell

0064 J: Egg
0065 T: **Yes. Good girl.**

Example 2

0182 J: And the arm....The arm goes over
the screen

0183 S: You don't have to turn it over with
your finger

0184 T: No

0185 S: You just leave it

0186 and....(unclear)

0187 N: The arm goes over to the screen
0188 T: The arm goes over to the screen

0189 T: and the little eggs just turn round

0190 S: slowly

0191 J: And then it come back
0192 T: and then it comes back

0192 T: again

0193 and the little egg turns like that
0194 T: That's right

0195 J: And it comes back

0196 T: 'Cause the little chick has to
be kept moving in the egg

0197 so he doesn't get all like...

0198 Cn: Yeah

0199 T: He needs a little bit of exercise
in there

0200 J: An he don't die

0201 cause the mother hen...

0202 S: We don't have a mother hen

0203 We have an incubator

0204 J: An he's not hurt in the....inside....
inside the egg

0205 T: That's right

0206 We have an incub...
Responding to Sylvia

0207 That's right

At this point of development, the children were ready to participate actively in the joint construction of a text that they called 'Hatching Chickens'. The joint construction of a text towards the end of a concentrated encounter sequence usually took place in the language unit. The availability of the specialist teacher and

teaching assistant allowed the class to be divided into groups. Each group took turns at writing the text. The writing process involved in the production of a joint text involved considerable discussion to determine what was to be written and how it was to be written down (this point will be developed further later). At their current state of literacy development, the children writing this text were particularly concerned with the mechanics of writing words and letters. Discussion of this took up much interaction time.

The teacher did not hurry this discussion process. I had earlier determined that a problem area for teaching at Traeger Park occurred when teachers felt they had to rush through a lesson to ensure a particular task was completed in the time they had originally allowed. When a teacher is working with her students in the zone of proximal development the process of negotiation is the paramount concern. The basic rule is *'quality of input determines the quality of the output'*. Sometimes a writing session would only produce part of the text. However, because of the high level of common knowledge that existed across the whole class about what was to be written down, the next writing group could follow the previous development of the text and then add their own progressive contribution. At other times, each group in a class (usually 3 - 4 groups) would produce their own separate text over time. The embryo development text introduced above was jointly negotiated by one (not multiple) group over three sessions.

The children who wrote this text were in a transition/grade one class and were in their first year of school. Consequently, they did not have the resources to produce this text independently of the teacher. The children were not independent readers. They knew some letters and sounds, and were still developing some concepts about print. The four children in the transcript discussed below produced a section of the final text. Then were placed together in a smaller group than usual (normally about 5-7 students) because they were considered to be challenging to keep on task. There was one non-Aboriginal child who had been diagnosed with a moderate level of cognitive dysfunction (Jenny (J)) and three Aboriginal students (Natalie (N); David (D); Melissa (M)). The text that the teacher and the children produced is worthy of comment in the light of previous discussion so it is given in full below.

*We didn't have a mother hen so we used an incubator to keep the eggs
warm*

The incubator has a thermometer that tells us how hot the eggs are

The orange light comes on every time the eggs start to get cold

When the arm turns over it moves the eggs around to give the little chicks

exercise

First, we switched on the electricity and put the eggs in

The little chick looked like a dot

It stays in the egg for twenty one days

His food is the yolk

The little chick grows a little bit bigger

He grows a tiny head, a tiny heart, tiny eyes and tiny blood vessels

Then he grows tiny ears, tiny wings and tiny legs

Next he grows a tiny tail and a tiny beak

Then he grows tiny feathers and an egg tooth

While the little chicken is in the egg it is floating in a water sac

When it is twenty one days the little chick cracks open the egg with his egg

tooth

It's hard work

At last the chicken is out

He is all wet and weak and wobbly

When he dries out he is soft and fluffy

It is worth noting that this text was produced in joint construction by grade one students so it is useful to identify some of the grammatical control over technical (factual) language resources that it displays. The first point of note is the consistent use of what are conventionally called adverbs as theme markers to shape the progression of the text (these are more sensibly called 'continuatives' in Halliday's grammar).

When the arm turns over
First, we switched on the electricity
Then he grows tiny ears, tiny wings and tiny legs
Next he grows a tiny tail and a tiny beak
Then he grows tiny feathers and an egg tooth
While the little chicken is in the egg
When it is twenty one days
At last the chicken is out

Second, the text consistently uses the simple present (rather than past) tense in the manner employed for giving technical information in factual writing.

It **stays** in the egg for twenty one days
His food **is** the yolk
The little chick **grows** a little bit bigger
He **grows** a tiny head, a tiny heart, tiny eyes and tiny blood vessels
Then he **grows** tiny ears, tiny wings and tiny legs
Next he **grows** a tiny tail and a tiny beak
Then he **grows** tiny feathers and an egg tooth
While the little chicken **is** in the egg
it **is** floating in a water sac
When it **is** twenty one days
The little chick **cracks** open the egg with his egg tooth
It's hard work
At last the chicken **is** out
He **is** all wet and weak and wobbly
When he **dries** out
he **is** soft and fluffy

Third, there is a sophisticated level of strategic use of clauses to elaborate upon the elements contained within the text. These employ dependency relationships, for example,

*It moves the eggs around
to give the little chicks exercise (non-finite enhancing clause)*

and also complex embedding of clauses (embedded clauses shown in brackets), for example,

*The incubator has a thermometer [[that tells us [[how hot the eggs are]]]]
The orange light comes on every time [[the eggs start to get cold]]*

In the first line above there is a double embedding in which embedded clause is inserted within another embedded clause (marked by the brackets within brackets).

Fourth, the students are quite comfortable with the development of complex logical relations between clauses,

*We didn't have a mother hen
so we used an incubator
to keep the eggs warm*

Fifth, the elaboration of elements in the text is precise and detailed in the manner of factual text, for example,

*He grows a tiny head, a tiny heart, tiny eyes and tiny blood vessels
Then he grows tiny ears, tiny wings and tiny legs
Next he grows a tiny tail and a tiny beak
Then he grows tiny feathers and an egg tooth*

Furthermore the sequence of development in the text mirrors the actual developmental sequence for the embryo.

Fifth, within clauses the transitivity structures are explicit and detailed. This is important in factual writing where information has to be given clearly, for example,

*while the little chicken is in the egg
it is floating in a water sac
when it is twenty one days
the little chick cracks open the egg with his egg tooth*

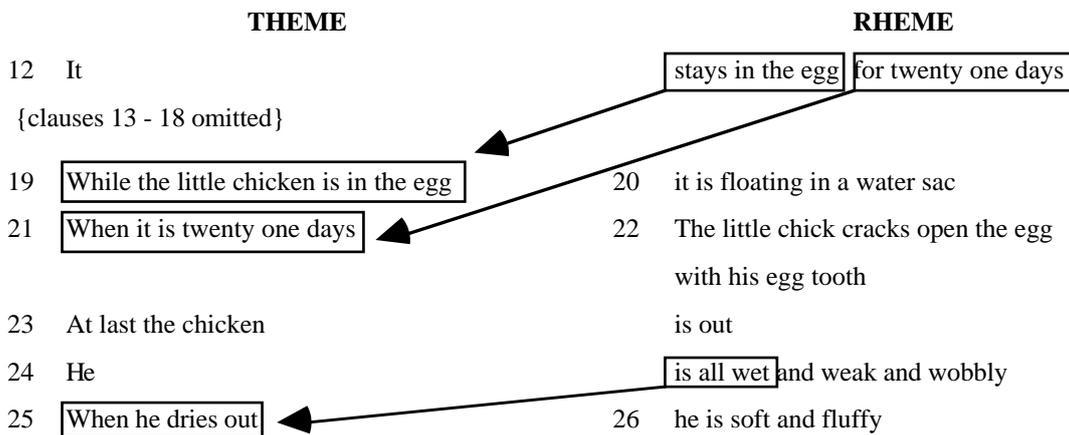
A full transitivity analysis won't be developed here because of the general nature of this paper. However, what it means is that the children are providing, in a very sophisticated manner for young children, all of the information that teachers, for example, seek when they try to encourage students to "Give me a full sentence". Conceptually, in the above example we also have a very subtle shift here between 'while' and 'when' to mark a shift from an ongoing state (being in the egg for 21 days) to when to mark a specific point in time. Here we also have the very effective use of 'it' to reference back to 'the little chicken'. In fact, pronominal reference to nouns is excellent through out the whole text. A very effective use of pronouns is the abstract relational connection that is posed between the pronoun 'it' and 'twenty on days'.

All of the above features go together to build a complex level of coherence that is entirely appropriate to the writing of a factual (expository) text of the kind the children were attempting. There are other choices that could be pointed out also but these will be overlooked here with the exception of one more set of language choices that illustrate the purposeful nature of the children's writing. This set of choices requires a short explanation before it can be discussed.

Sixth, one sophisticated use of language that is highly valued as a means of creating coherence in the production of factual texts especially, has to do with the manipulation of the relationships that exist between the 'Theme' and 'Rheme' of clauses. In linguistics, the Theme of a clause is what is being talked about in the clause, so in the clause *'The little chicken looked like a dot'*, the thing that is being talked about is 'the little chicken'. In common sense terms this is often referred to as the topic or subject. The Rheme, on the other hand is what is being said about the Theme. This is the 'new' information while the Theme contains the 'given' information (i.e. what has already been established in the text). Thus, the Rheme in the above clause is 'looked like a little dot'.

Especially in factual writing where the primary purpose is explaining information and phenomena, it is a very strong strategy to ensure that new information is first introduced in the Rheme position before it is used in Theme. This builds the coherence and logical flow of the text. Figure 2, below, shows the children using this language resource effectively in their text.

Figure 2: Clause relationships from new information to given in the children's text



The existence of these relationships in the children's text shows that they are developing their capacity to use this strategy in their attempts to produce explanations in writing. This is a strategy many secondary students struggle with.

This last comment also clearly challenged presumptions about language competence and the reasons for the failure of students like these in the previous program at Traeger Park. At the very least, this text showed that when a common definition of the task situation existed and when the teaching environment promoted a systematic build up of common knowledge between the children and their teachers the children were capable of quite an astonishing level of performance.

Given that Sharpe (1976) had identified differences in Traeger Park students between the Aboriginal English of the students and Standard Australian English it can be stated quite emphatically that this text illustrates that the differences identified by Sharpe did not affect the ability of these Aboriginal children to succeed in mainstream schooling. Furthermore, as the children began to succeed, attendance picked up dramatically. As well, some of the parents may have had low literacy levels but this text (and many others) showed that if the school was teaching in a supportive manner this issue and the 'dearth' of books in the home need not affect progress either. These issues were often raised as reasons for the failure of Aboriginal children in mainstream schooling.

2: Concentrated encounters and the expansion of child control

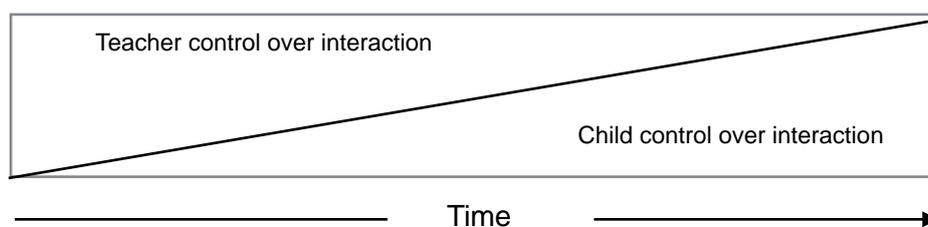
The central process through which the teacher promoted the ability of the children to take control of their learning behaviour was through their participation in concentrated encounter lesson sequences. Thus, in addition to promoting the development of the complexity of the text that was being produced, the teacher would be working simultaneously on another front. She was also endeavouring to progressively hand over her control of the discourse to the children. Within the

Traeger Park program, this 'handover' of control in the production of the text was a multifaceted process. It applied not only to production of oral text but also to the development of independent control in the writing task itself.

In a general sense, as the competence of the children increased the teacher backed off. She moved away from reliance on pre-formulation/reconceptualisation questioning patterns, for example, and asked more open questions. She also actively encouraged the children to spontaneously extend and initiate within the discussion that was taking place. This transfer of control within the interaction from teacher to children is a process taken from early childhood research that began to emerge at the time of the Traeger Park project. Much of this research was, in its turn, inspired by the theories of Vygotsky, especially the collection of works translated and made available as *Mind in Society* (1978).

The early childhood researchers labelled the processes surrounding the transfer of control as 'scaffolding' and the transfer of control within scaffolding is usually represented by the following diagram.

Transfer of discourse control in scaffolding over time



In this diagram learning starts with a high level teacher direction and support and ends with teaching learning situation somewhat similar to the kind of interaction that would take place in a child-centred teaching process. In many respects then, the teaching perspectives developed at Traeger Park do not stand in contrast to child-centred or teacher-centred methodologies but rather constitute a new way of viewing a relationship that is usually represented as one of polar opposites. In the beginning of a teaching sequence, the teacher would be leading and directing the learning process. However, towards the end of the concentrated encounter lesson sequence, the learning would be driven very much by initiations made by the child.

T: 'Cause the little chick has to be kept moving in the egg
So he doesn't get all like ...

Cn: Yeah

T: He needs a little bit of exercise in there

J: An he don't die
Cause the mother hen ...

S: We don't have a mother hen
We have an incubator

J: An he's not hurt in the Inside inside the egg

T: That's right
We have an incubator...(Responding to Sylvia)

That's right
That's the water That's the water sac

The water sac stops the little chick from [[getting hurt]] **RECONCEPTUALISATION**
If it gets knocked (*Responding to Jenny*)

(section omitted) (soon children pick up the teacher's reconceptualisation)

- S: We don't have mother hen
T: Yeah We don't
S: If mother hen kicks it
 It's going....
 The little chicks can't feel it
T: Yeah. Why?
Cn: Because they're in the water sac
T: Yes, because they're in the water sac
 Yes

Within concentrated encounters the developing common knowledge and encouragement to take control within the teacher/student negotiation could produce student responses that eagerly sought to assume control in the learning task. Moreover, students were even prepared to challenge teacher knowledge and academic authority if they thought the teacher was wrong. Previously, the only challenge children at Traeger Park had been able to mount was to teacher authority concerning discipline and procedural control (i.e. to misbehave). A challenge that, unlike the ability to question knowledge, was highly unproductive in the context of the classroom.

In actual fact, the children were remarkably focused over the writing session. Of the 376 clauses recorded across the session, 93 per cent dealt with either deciding what to write or how to write letters and words (53 % for what to write; 40% for how to write).

The distribution of clause production between teacher and students for discussion on what to write was 50% produced by the teacher and 50% produced by the children. The teacher's clauses concerning what to write were generally attempts to focus and shape the direction of the text. The children's clauses were generally in response to the teachers direction focus. The negotiation model the teacher used was to ask a question that targeted common knowledge about the content to be included in the text next. When the children replied, the teacher then asked how they wanted to say the information in the text. When this was sorted, the teacher then either wrote for the children or encouraged them to try themselves. Because the children were limited in their writing ability she focused them on writing a word rather than the whole sentence or clause. Her characteristic interaction pattern concerning 'what to write', looked like the following extract.

- T: Is it easy for the little chick to peck...peck out?
J: No
T: Is it easy for the little chick to peck out?
M/J/N: No (*together*)
D: Yes (*because presumably the chicken had grown an egg tooth*)
N: That... It's hard work
T: Do you want to say "it's hard work?"
D: Yep

Because of the practice to orally produce the text in prior concentrated encounter work, the children had little difficulty engaging with a coherent sentence rather than a one or two word response. They also knew the teacher was requiring a sentence or clause to write down. Consequently, the teacher didn't have to ask a question about how to say the sentence. Consequently, the question about how to say the

sentence became an affirming one that sought group approval. In short, the task definition had been shared through the previous concentrated work.

When it came time to continue writing the sentence they had been jointly constructing, the children were all in tune with what was being done.

N: Mrs Price
T: When it is twenty one days the little chicken cracks the egg open with his egg tooth it's.....
(reads sentence they have been constructing up to the position of new word as a cue)
J: hard work
T: Woops it's
T/J: hard
T writes 'hard'
J: work
T: work. Now I have to start over here now. Finished that line
(T writes 'work' at the beginning of a new line)

Much of the discussion in the text had entered on relationships between letters and words and how to write them, for example,

T: his.... (teacher writes *his*)
D: egg
T: egg.... (teacher writes *egg*)
Cn: tooth....(in unison)
T What's tooth start with?
J: /to/
N:/to/
M/D: /t/
T: /t/ /t/

At the end of the sequence of lessons that led contingently towards the joint writing task, everyone was substantially on the same page about exactly what they wanted to write. The teacher and children had a book that could allow them to continue to explore reading and writing development. Moreover, it was a text that possessed a high level of **contingency potential** that could be exploited further in that later work.

3: Concentrated encounters and the explicit awareness of social roles

Teacher consciousness about making explicit for the children the communication roles and the communicative purposes of the word choices that went to construct the target texts was a continuous focus throughout the operation of the teaching activities. Texts and the contexts from which they arose were studied and analysed prior to teaching to determine their potential for building perceptions of the social roles in which they were embedded.

While the emphasis on communication purpose and the rationale for making various wording choices was pervasive, some variation in approach also occurred. The approach varied, for example, depending on the type of text that was the intended product of a concentrated encounter lesson sequence. Generally the variations depended on whether the target texts were derived from experiences generated from experiences or from the study of other texts. Thus, transactional texts and

factual texts contained similar approaches to the teaching of social roles while literary texts which often arose from the analysis and discussion of other texts required a somewhat different approach.

3(a): Defining social roles for the production of experience based texts

All of the transactional texts and most of the factual texts taught in concentrated encounters arose from work place or site excursions. On some occasions more than one excursion took place, for example, in a theme about insects, students visited a remote area research centre to talk to an entomologist as well as a bush site to collect eggs from which to hatch butterflies at school. All of the excursion visits made to workplaces and sites required considerable preparation. This preparation involved prior visits by myself and teachers on at least two occasions prior to the excursion to identify and collect texts (both transactional and factual) and to study the social roles involved in their production.

On the first visit, the texts to be included in the program would be identified along with the role they played in the workplace. After the texts for study in the school program had been identified, a second visit, usually closer in time to the proposed student excursion took place. The point of this second visit was to work out an excursion program with the people in the workplace. Thus, if a concentrated encounter was being prepared around a particular role, for example a receptionist at a health centre, the receptionist would be asked to explain specific tasks associated with receptionist role to the students on the visit. This might be to show how to record personal details from a patient or perhaps answer the phone and take a message. On the day of the visit, the process and the explanation would be photographed and recorded on video and taken back for use in concentrated encounter lesson sequences on, for example, how to interview a patient etc. Similarly for a doctor, how to carry out a diagnosis or for nurses, how to test eyes or how to take temperature etc.

Other factual texts arose from the knowledge base that was appropriate to the social roles, for example, the beekeeper could explain about the swarming behaviour of bees or the doctor about how the heart works or the entomologist about the life cycle of a butterfly. The teacher and children could also study books that contained these texts and if the texts available in the books were too detailed and complex these could be re-written to bring them within reach of the children.

Most importantly, prior to the visit, the children were prepared through concentrated encounter work in the class and language unit. For example, when the children visited the entomologist at the remote area research facility and the entomologist told them about the life cycle of a butterfly, they had already commenced concentrated encounter sessions on that topic and were hatching their own butterfly eggs in the language unit. When he showed them an insect taxonomy mounted in a glass case, the children were already familiar with the mounting process and had started writing labels for their own collection of insects in concentrated encounter sessions.

As well, when students went out bush on a trip to collect eggs from which to hatch and grow their own butterflies in the language unit, the understanding of the purpose and nature of the excursion was already advanced through previous work in the concentrated encounter sessions. These early sessions took as their focus for discussion, books, illustrations, video, and charts. All of these activities in the concentrated encounter sessions both before and after visits was directed specifically towards enabling the students to articulate orally and then write an

extended factual text (an explanation of the life-cycle of a butterfly). Thus, when the class visited the excursion site, the children went with a specific purpose to learn more about the production of those texts and the social roles they supported.

The sample texts, video and photo sequences became part of the raw materials that were employed in concentrated encounter sessions in the language unit and classroom after the visit. The concentrated encounter lesson sequences that were developed around engagement with these texts were referred to by the teacher and children as workshops or training sessions. Thus, it was explicitly accepted by all that the students (and the teacher for that matter) were training to fulfil a role, for example, to become a receptionist, a doctor, a nurse, a pet shop owner and so on.

During the course of the concentrated encounter sessions with transactional texts, the teacher continually reinforced the reasons why, for example, the forms being used were filled out in a particular manner and why the information was necessary to collect. The teacher also discussed with the children the meaning and purpose behind the wording that occurred in the form, for example, why the word choices on forms were abbreviations of questions. Teacher and students also discussed the meaning of words such as gender, surname etc. Role-play activities also provided a situation that gave the opportunity to further highlight such things.

In addition, much spelling and writing activity occurred as the teacher and students discussed strategies for writing answers and other information required in the production of the transactional texts.

With factual texts, a particular role was abstracted and continually emphasised. This was the more generalised role of 'expert'. Much of the rationale for the construction staging and language choice in the preparation of factual texts can be justified through an appeal to the fact that an expert needs to make these choices in order to convey information and ideas to others.

As common knowledge built sufficiently over a sequence of sessions, the teacher and children would then negotiate a joint construction of a model text. When the text was used in role-play, whatever writing the children were capable of was acceptable, for example, the use of a single letter to represent a word, invented spelling and so on. If children were unable to begin an attempt an adult participant in the role-play was there to support them.

A very simple illustration of the kind of activity generated using the Traeger Park teaching model is provided by a teaching unit on "making toast" with Transition students (aged 4-5) first entering school.

Each day when they came to the language unit, students sat at tables in groups with a teacher to make toast together. As they did so, they talked about the process. Teacher and children also spent sessions discussing a series of pictures that would eventually illustrate their book. They also spent time attempting to explain the process and to teach the process to others such as other teachers and the principal who to the children's delight often required considerable tutoring. Eventually, the children became confident in their ability to produce this extended text. During the process the teacher continually emphasised the social role that was appropriate to the authoring of factual text - that of expert. She also pointed out that experts write for the social purpose of teaching others so when they address the learner in the writing of a recipe they use 'you' and not 'we' or they start with the action, for example, 'take the....', 'place the...' and so on.

When a suitable degree of common knowledge was held, the teacher led children in a joint construction of a written text titled 'How to Make Yummy Toast'. This joint writing activity took at least a week of sessions even though the text was short. The teacher used the opportunity to focus on the appropriate selection of wording (a process that had begun in a number of earlier sessions prior to writing).

Discussion around the selection of wording involved considering why a writer would choose specific words, the effect they had on characters and even the effect specific wording had on the feelings of readers. For example, 'first' (First, you have to get the bread out of the packet) tells the reader this is what has to be done to avoid mistakes. It also tells the reader that other things to do will follow (e.g. "When we write 'first' like this the reader knows there is going to be a second thing after it. When we write as experts who know how to make toast we have to make these things clear for the learner - it is part of being an expert and if anyone is an expert on making toast - we certainly are."). To illustrate such points, I even went to the extent of writing a short story book about "Mr Fuddle" a very confused individual who did not attend to the order of activities in a procedural text. Mr Fuddle did not pay attention to words like 'first' or 'second' or 'then' or 'next' and, of course, reaped the consequences when he tried to make a sandwich from a recipe.

As well as discussing word choice as the teacher constructed texts with the children, she pushed them to think about how they might spell words and form letters. In the joint construction, especially, the teacher's approach was deliberate and sequenced and designed to point out the difference between oral and written language as well as the motivation behind word choice and the orthographic system. As she worked, she also focused the children's attention on a specific set of thinking stages to do with the writing process.

(a) First of all, she would ask, "What are we going to talk about now?" (i.e. at this point in the text) to elicit discussion of appropriate content.

(b) Next she would shift attention to the way in which the information the children gave her needed to be composed and presented as written text, "So we know what we want to say, how do we need to say it in our book? - We want the reader to know this is the first step so what would we have to start it with? "

The shift from an information only emphasis to the composition requirements for presenting the information as written text would not have been new to the children as it had been covered in prior concentrated encounter sessions. So, whatever words children produced would be at the very least partially correct because of building up a pool of common knowledge and the process of explaining the process of making toast to other people. Thus, the teacher would be a position to accept and affirm the children's attempts and to suggest an expansion by appealing to already shared knowledge, "Remember when we were explaining to people the things they had to do, we used special words to tell them when they had to do a new thing. Who can remember what the word for the first thing to do was?"

(c) Once the exact the wording had been sorted out and everyone was happy, the discussion moved on to "How do we write it?" This discussion covered the production of various aspects of letter writing, phonics and spelling depending on the stage of development of the children. The discussion about letter formation, capitals, punctuation, spelling and sounding would be ongoing throughout the process ("Who remembers how to write the letter for the sound /f/ - Can you hear the /f/ sound in first? - Let's see if we can hear it /f...irst/ ") and so on.

(d) Eventually, a text was produced that was made into a book which became a resource for teaching reading sub skills.

While one could expect to find activities such as making toast in child-centred classrooms practicing language experience or whole language teaching. However, concentrated encounter sessions around making toast were substantially different in nature because of the focus on the production of text and the conscious development of contingency as the basis for interaction development.

3(b): Defining social roles for texts derived from other texts

Literary texts were produced generally from the Type B Concentrated Encounter contexts that were identified earlier. In Type B contexts, the Concentrated Encounter sequence took an already written text as a model for consideration and analysis.

In Concentrated Encounter sessions and also in the classroom, the text was read to the children on a regular basis. Of particular importance, given the age and type of book experienced by children in early childhood classes, were the illustrations because these carried much of the interpersonal meaning that was to be found in the book. In later grades these inner personal meanings and description of context would begin to appear more frequently in the wording of the texts themselves, for example, identifying the features in the illustration of the hungry giant that made him look angry or why Rosie the Hen walked with her head held high and beak pointed to the sky. Was it because she was silly like Petunia who walked in the same way? Or, was there some other reason? What was the fox thinking when he continually failed to catch Rosie? Why did he need to catch her? What would happen to him if he didn't?

Discussion of wording, the meanings produced and the purpose in identifying a narrative was common, for example, the significance of using "once" or "once upon a time" to begin a story. Role-play activities were sometimes used to help the children to reconstruct the meanings in the story and aspects such as, for example, the fact that the greedy grasshopper grew bigger and bigger as he ate more and more or, why Horace the Guinea Pig was always grumpy?

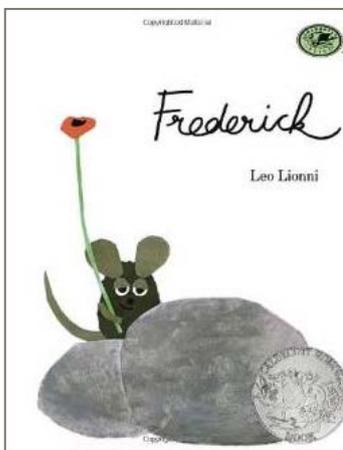
Important aspects of the text structure (e.g. the Complication) were identified and pointed out, during teacher reading, joint reading with children and when children could read without teacher assistance. Other stories were read and more structural elements and the purposes, meaning and effects produced by word choice on readers also became the focus of discussion. Over each series of Concentrated Encounter sessions these aspects of the texts were revisited frequently and commented upon.

A key consideration here was that the children at Traeger Park were not going to think these things up by themselves. They weren't going to initiate such discussions and they were not going to respond to probes that attempted to draw these ideas from them. Just as literate parents build these kinds of perspectives into the world view of children who come to school with relatively developed understandings of how one takes meaning from text, these perspectives needed to be made visible to the children at Traeger Park. In fact, even children from literacy oriented homes who appear to arrive at school with advantages in these aspects of schooling have only just begun to make the necessary journey. To give an idea of the kind of literate resources that the teachers had available for engaging the children around literacy it is useful to consider a book that was developed as a reading book for children in

their second year of school.

In a unit theme about pet shops, a narrative strand revolving around books on mice was developed using concentrated encounter lesson sequences. While the teachers introduced a range of mice stories for reading and discussion, the story 'Frederick' by Leo Lionni (1967) was selected as a text that would be used as a key reading book. The text goals were that the children would discuss and learn how to retell the story over a concentrated encounter lesson sequence. When they could do this they would write their own version of the story. Once they had done this, another series of lessons would support them in the writing of their own imaginative small group story about mice. This would lead them in turn to another concentrated encounter lesson sequence that would lead to the writing of individual stories about mice.

Before we look at the results of their writing, it is useful to consider the kind of language resources that the teachers had available to discuss with the children. This discussion will look at only the beginning of the text.



All along the meadow where the cows grazed and the horses ran, there was an old stone wall.

In that wall, not far from the barn and the granary, a chatty family of field mice had their home.

But the farmers had moved away, the barn was abandoned, and the granary stood empty. And since winter was not far off. The little mice began to gather corn and nuts and wheat and straw. They all worked day and night. All - except Frederick.

"Frederick, why don't you work?" They asked. "I do work," said Frederick. "I gather sun rays for the cold dark winter days."

There is much that could be discussed even in this small segment of the story. The teacher certainly made sure that the children could understand the referential meaning of keywords such as granary, gather, meadow etc. However, there was some information on another level that she selectively focused their attention on.

This new level focused on writing strategies and reader responses to the text. When we read the start of the story we get a feeling that the mice live in a very peaceful little world. The question is, how does the author achieve this? If we reflect on that question we finally see that the author gives us a whole lot of description about peaceful things before he tells us about the mice. In addition, he chooses words that paint peaceful images for us, cows grazed, horses ran (happily). The wall is old and in a meadow - a word that describes a small area where the grass has been allowed to grow. Meadow is also an old word and the author is telling us that the farm is in an older time. A time in which farming was not as busy as it is now. The field mice themselves are chatty. This tells us they are talking happily together and like the horses and cows no one is bothering them. These things were not told to the children in one session but they were added to the discussion as the sequence of lessons progressed. Once the children caught onto these notions especially the point about describing the scene, the teacher told them that when they write their version of the story they might like to do something like that. In fact, she told them that if they like the way Leo Lionni said it they can borrow it for their version of the story.

The teacher told the children other things about the strategies the author used, for example how the author showed the mice were starting to get irritated because Frederick seemed to be doing nothing. They discussed various ways that colours in nature could make little mice feel warm, That the red of a rose of could be a fire to keep you warm on the dark cold nights, How the yellow of a butterfly's wings could be the sun that melts the freezing ice and so on. They did this not only as an introduction to metaphor but as a way of building an understanding of an even deeper metaphor - that when he wrote, Leo Lionni was being like Frederick. He was painting the colours in his words that made us feel what the mouse world was like. All of his words made us feel things, for example, the calm peaceful world of the mice.

Other areas for discussion had to do with reader response. As the teacher explored with the children a critical level of interpretation of the text they could consider, for example, *was Frederick just a lazy mouse? After all may be if he had collected with the other mice they would have had enough food for winter? Or, was the fact that he had collected all the colours and could share them with the other mice to make them warm a better thing?* The discussion around this issue allowed the teacher to propose that maybe the story really wasn't about mice at all. She pointed out that the story was a fable and that the most important thing in a fable is the idea or lesson that it is giving us. If it was a lesson or an idea that was important, maybe it was telling us that there needs to be people who collect colours and tell other people about them in the world. Just like Leo Lionni who with his words painted the story about Frederick for the children.

In these discussions the teacher was trying to help the children reflect upon, not only the processes and strategies that an author uses to construct a text but also to bring to a conscious level a reflection on the reader response to writing - to make conscious and visible how the text was making them feel.

Over a number of concentrated encounter sessions using illustrations that had been prepared for them and using drawings they themselves had made, the children practised retelling the story until they could do it comfortably. Then they worked together with the teacher in a joint retelling of the story that used the same kind negotiation process that was discussed earlier for the procedural text on how to make yummy toast. The text was written relatively quickly with small groups of children reading the section that a previous group had written and then adding another section to the text. This was possible because of the level of common knowledge that was built up. The children's text was made up into a big book and used to teach reading and spelling. All of the children had no trouble engaging with reading on this text. The children's retelling text for the corresponding three page section of the original Frederick is printed below .

Frederick

*All around the Meadow where the Cows grazed
and the horses ran there was an old stone wall*

*In the stone wall there lived a chatty family of
field mice*

*Since the cold winter days were coming soon,
the field mice gathered corn and nuts and wheat
and straw. They worked day and night except
Frederick*

(The story continued for eleven more pages, each with at least the same amount of text as page three in the above example)

For the next concentrated encounter sequence the children divided into small groups to compose and write an original story about mice. In a sequence of lessons, the teacher organised the sequence of activities that took them through the task and acted as a sounding board for the children's ideas but the stories and the choice of wording came from the children. Below is a complete text of one of four group stories. It illustrates the effect that the developing awareness of the nature of narrative had on the composing capacity of the students.

Three Blind Mice

Once there were three little blind mice who lived in a Mouse hole in Mr and Mrs Brown's lounge room.

They had to be very careful when they came out of their hole to find some food.

They couldn't see the cat so they had to listen for his meow.

They couldn't see the mouse trap so they had to sniff for the cheese.

Life was very hard for the three little blind mice

One day a cousin from the country came to visit. He didn't know they were blind.

When the country cousin found out the three little mice were blind he took them to the mouse doctor

The little mice were very happy because they could see all the beautiful colours and things.

All of the texts produced across the class illustrated a similar level of competence.

The texts also demonstrate an intensive intertextuality with a high degree of references to other texts that they had studied about mice. From the three blind mice to the city mouse and the country mouse as well as Anatole (the mouse that belled the cat). They decided not to borrow the technique used to open the story of Frederick because they considered that life was not very peaceful for the three little blind mice - a point they added as a summary comment after they had provided two elaborations of the mice's problem. This elaboration strategy was a way writers use to intensify the effect of a problem (they had to be careful) and the children had encountered it in discussions about writing and retellings in past narrative writing they had explored. The reference to colours came from their work on colours as they discussed 'Frederick'.

The level of intertextuality also encompassed the unit on health centres they had worked on earlier in the year and where they had learned 'How to test eyes'. The illustration of the scene where the country cousin took the three blind mice to the mouse doctor is meticulously illustrated complete with eye charts in their finished book. This meticulous attention to illustration is, like the text itself, no accident. It is the product of sessions in concentrated encounter sequences that had focused on

discussing how illustrators construct their messages to readers.

This text and the other group stories were also used as class reading books.



It is a point of difference between the program developed at Traeger Park and much writing activity that takes place generally in early primary classrooms that the point of the Concentrated Encounter activity was not to produce text that was derived from the children without any mediation by the teacher. At this stage of their development, the children were capable of independent writing and were writing independently in the classroom. The point of the work in the Traeger Park concentrated encounter sessions described above was to support children to internalise the skills, strategies and understandings they required to become authors. That is, to help them internalise the process of thinking like an author. What is more class stories like Frederick and The Three Blind Mice were, because of their negotiation process, owned by all of the children. No children were marginalised as weak writers. All of the children could see they were authors and they lost no time telling anyone who would listen.

When the country cousin found out the three little mice were blind he took them to the mouse doctor

4: Concentrated encounters and the development of multiple texts

The development and implementation of concentrated encounter sequences around various themes became the basis for language and literacy development in the Language Unit and was extended into classroom programs. As the program became established at the school, a number of concentrated encounter sequences, each targeting a different text ran simultaneously in the one class. Thus, each theme unit typically produced or exploited a range of texts. Texts produced by the children (both jointly negotiated with the teacher and written individually as literacy skills progressed) were central programming for both oral language development and reading teaching. However, commercially available children's storybooks appropriate to the grade level were also used in all theme programs for reading teaching. In some instances, teachers and I wrote books for the program.

For example, in the theme unit on hatching chickens that was discussed earlier a number of other texts were developed and used by the teacher as readers in addition to the two books discussed earlier. The teacher and children worked through a sequence of concentrated encounter sessions to produce a jointly constructed version of the traditional children's tale 'Chicken Licken'. Their book was illustrated by a local artist, Noel Chandler. Another book that was used in the theme was (Rosie's Walk: Hutchins;

5 Concentrated encounters as role play

Often in early childhood settings 'role play' and 'drama' are seen as rather unstructured and spontaneous activities. While 'role play' in Traeger Park classrooms could appear totally spontaneous and unstructured on casual inspection, the reality was quite the reverse.

Role play was used for a variety of purposes within the language unit program. However, all role-play activity was structured around and incorporated the understanding and production of various kinds of text and involved considerable preparation. It drew heavily on resources, knowledge and skills specifically developed in related concentrated encounter work that had already taken place. That is, children learned "How to be a doctor" or "How to be a receptionist" or "How to do a certain task, for example, "How to take temperature" in intensive concentrated encounter sessions before they were incorporated in role play. Moreover, a role play session was generally preceded by what was termed a 'meeting' or 'training session'. This session was in effect an extension of the earlier concentrated encounter teaching sessions that recalled and discussed appropriate texts and materials which had been introduced and studied in earlier concentrated encounter sessions. The meeting also set the direction and tasks to be carried out in the role play.

With literary texts, role play consisted of more than simply acting out the story. If the text was simple and short this was often done. However, even then, the acting out was designed to focus children on specific aspects carried by either the illustrations or within the wording of the text, for example, the children and teacher discussed the meaning behind the way Rosie the hen walked and held her nose in the air (Rosie's walk: Pat Hutchins 1971) before they practised interpreting that particular trait - In this way the children built up a repertoire that could be incorporated into an acting out of the story. In doing this, the children were being led to engage with the subtext of meanings carried within the illustrations of children's storybooks.

When storybooks began to contain more complex imagery within the text itself, the children never acted out the whole story. They focused on interpreting particular writing choices they encountered in the text, for example, they explored how to interpret the change in the intonation involved as the working mice became more frustrated with Frederick (Frederick: Leo Lionni 1967) as Frederick continued to sit and dream while they worked. In doing this, the children were exploring the way the author chose to represent that change in his writing choices for words such as 'asked' and 'asked reproachfully'. They could even speculate on the appropriateness and meaning change if words like 'demanded' or 'shouted' had been chosen by the author. Both with Rosie and Frederick, the motivation behind the choices of the illustrator and the author were being discussed and made visible.