



Transactional Writing: Explanation

LEVEL | 1i | 1ii | 1iii | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5

The Caterpillar

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

The class enjoyed a shared reading session, using the picture book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. This prompted class discussion on caterpillars and butterflies, which the students were able to add to from their observations of the life cycle of a monarch butterfly in the classroom. They were encouraged to talk about their personal observations. The book was read again and the students joined in with the repetition of the text.

The question was posed: “So how *does* a caterpillar turn into a butterfly?” The students turned “knee-to-knee” with a partner, and took it in turns to explain the life-cycle process, as they understood it.

After these discussions, they were expected to record their own explanations in their draft writing books, and were encouraged to use drawings to support these. They were expected to record a simple but clear explanation of the life cycle as they understood it.

Kelsi chose to illustrate her understanding of the life cycle with a diagram before writing. She also selected just one aspect of the process – eating – to record, and she wrote independently.

The teacher moved around the room during writing time, responding to both the conventions of writing the students were attempting, and the content being expressed. The teacher had continually modelled “writing down the main sounds you can hear, and moving on”.

Teacher-student conversations

As Kelsi worked on the diagram, the teacher asked her to explain what she had drawn.

Teacher: I can see that you have drawn the caterpillar here ... What is the next part?

Kelsi: That’s the cocoon. And then it’s a butterfly.

Teacher: That’s right! The caterpillar makes the cocoon first. I love the way you’ve drawn the arrows, to show what happens next.

After Kelsi had completed the writing, the teacher asked her to read it back for clarification of the explanation.

Kelsi: “The caterpillar eats to get into a butterfly.”

Teacher: It certainly does! What do you think most caterpillars eat?

Kelsi: Swan plant.

Teacher: Yes, the monarch caterpillar eats swan plant leaves. You don’t think that they eat salami and lollipops then?

Kelsi: [Laughs.] No! That’s just in the story!

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

Opportunities should be sought in classroom reading programmes for students to respond to written and visual text, identifying how processes or phenomena can be explained. Picture books with narrative text will be useful for this. Exposure to transactional texts will be essential. The “reading to” programme will give opportunity for discussing specific vocabulary, language features and diagrams, which may be transferred to student writing and drawing.

WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Kelsi towards the next learning step, the teacher might help her to focus on:

Ideas

- extending ideas with some simple detail or comments.

Spelling

- identifying more dominant sounds in words.

Punctuation

- using capital letters and full stops correctly.

This could be done by:

- ongoing class and individual discussions, prompting further detail through questioning
- modelling texts with examples of the language features of explanation
- conferencing and giving feedback, in reading and writing programmes.



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CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 1: Writing Functions

Transactional Writing: Students should write instructions and recount events in authentic contexts.

Levels 1 and 2: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring Language: Students should explore choices made by writers, and identify and use the common conventions of writing and organisation of text which affect understanding.

Thinking Critically: Students should identify and express meanings in written texts, drawing on personal background, knowledge and experience.

Processing Information: Students should identify, retrieve, record, and present coherent information, using more than one source and type of technology, and describing the process used.

English in the New Zealand Curriculum, pages 35-36

Te Whāriki

Pages 76-79

Strand 4, Communication

All of goals 2 and 3, and the associated learning outcomes for knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

REFERENCES

Carle, Eric (1970). *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. London: Hamilton, Picture Puffins.

Ministry of Education (1994). *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Ministry of Education (1996). *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa/Early Childhood Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.



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WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: Kelsi has attempted to explain a natural process, drawing on personal observation and classroom discussion.

Student's first draft

Deeper features

Ideas

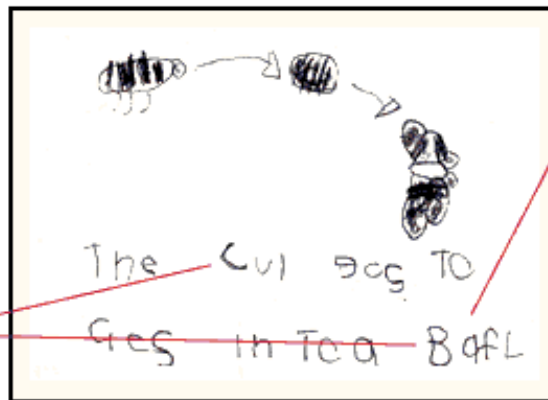
Forms and writes a simple idea as a response to a "How?" question.

Sentences

Attempts a simple sentence.

Vocabulary

Uses key topic-appropriate words and some high-frequency words.



The cul eos To Ges in To a BafL

[The caterpillar eats to get into a butterfly.]

Surface features

Spelling

Attempts to identify some letter sounds.

Spells some high-frequency words correctly.

Punctuation

Experiments with capital letters.

Layout

Leaves spaces between words.

Displays strong sense of directionality.



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Student's first draft

