



Transactional Writing: Explanation

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

Why Do Shadows Happen?

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

The teacher had been developing the writing of explanations for three weeks. Initially the class brainstormed and discussed a range of topics: “I wonder why bread goes hard in the toaster”, “I wonder how night and day happen”, and “I wonder why we wash our hair”. Students were encouraged to explain and give reasons, using words like “because”, “when”, and “so”.

During the first week the teacher also read simple texts to her class from the “Sails – Explanations” series and from the Junior Journal - “How Flies Walk Upside Down” (1. 84). The emphasis in discussion was on the reasons for phenomena occurring.

Writing began in the second week. They chose topics related to their own experiences, such as “Why do we wash our hands before meals?”

To explore why shadows happen, they went outside and in pairs observed, discussed, and drew the outlines of their shadows. In the classroom they observed the sun shining through the windows and looked to see where shadows were made. The teacher asked her students to explain to each other, in pairs, why shadows happen, before asking them to write an explanation, including a reason and using words like “because” or “then” to join their ideas.

While the students wrote, the teacher roved about, prompting them and providing feedback. After the writing she discussed and clarified some scientific information concerning the position of the sun, and the density and transparency of objects.

Teacher-student conversations

The teacher talked with Jessica to get her thinking about reasons behind the phenomena.

Teacher: Why can't the sun get through our bodies?

Jessica: Because our bodies are thick. But the sun can get through windows because they're thin.

Teacher: I wonder why that is? You might like to think some more about that.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

Opportunities should be sought in classroom reading programmes for students to respond to written and visual texts, identifying how processes or phenomena can be explained. Exposure to transactional texts will be essential. The “reading to” programme, using picture books, will provide opportunities for discussing specific vocabulary, language features and diagrams, which may be transferred to student writing and drawing.

WHERE TO NEXT?

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

Ideas

- supporting ideas or reasons with some simple details or comments.

Sentences

- using a range of simple, compound and complex sentences.

Vocabulary

- extending the use of topic-related words.

The teacher could develop these skills within a rich language environment where reading and writing are supported by discussion. Specific teaching of skills will occur during guided and shared reading sessions, modelled and shared writing sessions, and conferencing. The teacher could use prompts to provide Jessica with specific feedback to help her achieve the next learning point.

CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 4: Writing Functions

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

Levels 3 and 4: 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

REFERENCE

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



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WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: Jessica explains the phenomenon of shadows clearly in terms of her own experience and observations.

Student's first draft

Deeper features

Impact

Explains a phenomenon with some clarity.

Ideas

Includes ideas and reasons that are mostly subjective.

Structure

Uses simple cause-and-effect words to join ideas.

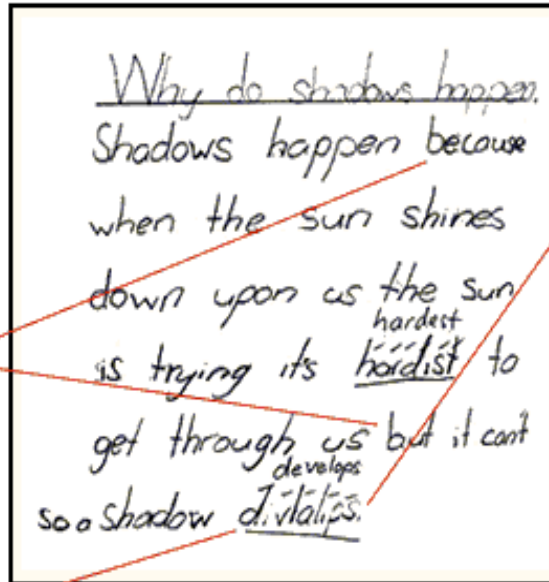
Sentences

Attempts a complex sentence.

Vocabulary

Uses some topic-appropriate and high-frequency words.

Beginning to take risks with vocabulary.



Surface features

Spelling

Spells high-frequency words correctly.

Records dominant sounds in order.

Punctuation

Understands and uses capital letters and full stops with support.

[Why do shadows happen?
Shadows happen because when the sun
shines down upon us the sun is trying its
hardest to get through us but it can't so
a shadow develops.]



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Why Do Shadows Happen?

Student's first draft

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