



Transactional Writing: Explanation

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

Why Do We Wear Our Seatbelt?

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

This teacher worked with her students for six weeks to develop their ability to write explanations. During this time they also had opportunities for personal experience writing. Ryan's piece about seatbelts was his second attempt at writing explanations in guided writing.

Initially, the teacher read the students explanations from the Junior Journals - "How Flies Walk Upside Down" (JJ1), "X-Ray Photographs" (JJ 23). Several sessions were spent reading and discussing these texts to scaffold understanding of the purpose and framework of explanation writing.

The children located and discussed the question being asked, found the parts in the text that told what was being explained, and discussed and located the parts that described what might happen if ...(cause and effect). As these sessions developed, the teacher recorded their developing understandings on large charts.

The next step was to discuss and jointly construct an explanation using a shared writing approach. The topic chosen was related to the school rules and one that the students well understood. Before writing, it was decided that the text should start with a question, state reasons, describe cause and effect with words like "if" and "because" ("What might happen if ..."), and end by saying why we do this.

Following this, the students brainstormed other topics they could write about - "Why don't we run up the slide?", and "Why do we need breakfast?" (related to their health unit). They practised explaining in pairs, using the same criteria they had applied to their jointly constructed text.

Using topics of their own choice, the students were now ready to begin guided writing. The teacher roved about as she had done during the oral explanations, asking them about their ideas and reasons, and encouraging them to explain clearly.

Ryan drafted his explanation and proofread it carefully. It was at this stage that he corrected words like "pulled" and "policeman".

Teacher-student conversations

During drafting, the teacher found that she had to talk with Ryan to move him beyond social reasons for wearing a seatbelt.

Teacher: What does your seatbelt actually do?

Ryan: It stops you getting hurt.

Teacher: How does it stop you getting hurt?

Ryan: It pulls you back.

Teacher: Good. Think about whether it's worth including that idea in your explanation.

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 Ryan toward the next learning step, the teacher might help him focus on:

Ideas

- expressing ideas with increasing clarity and becoming more objective in his thinking.

Structure

- sequencing and prioritising of ideas
- developing a conclusion.

This could be done by:

- reading and discussing a range of texts for specific purposes
- modelling and shared writing sessions
- setting specific criteria and goals for writing explanations, and monitoring progress against the criteria
- using effective conferencing techniques to provide specific feedback and discussing next steps.



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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: Ryan expresses strong personal reasons for wearing seatbelts. This is explained clearly in simple, precise language.

Deeper features

Impact

Explains a personally significant occurrence with some clarity.

Ideas

Includes ideas and reasons, mostly subjective, and supported by some simple detail.

Sentences

Uses mainly simple sentences with variation in beginnings.

Structure

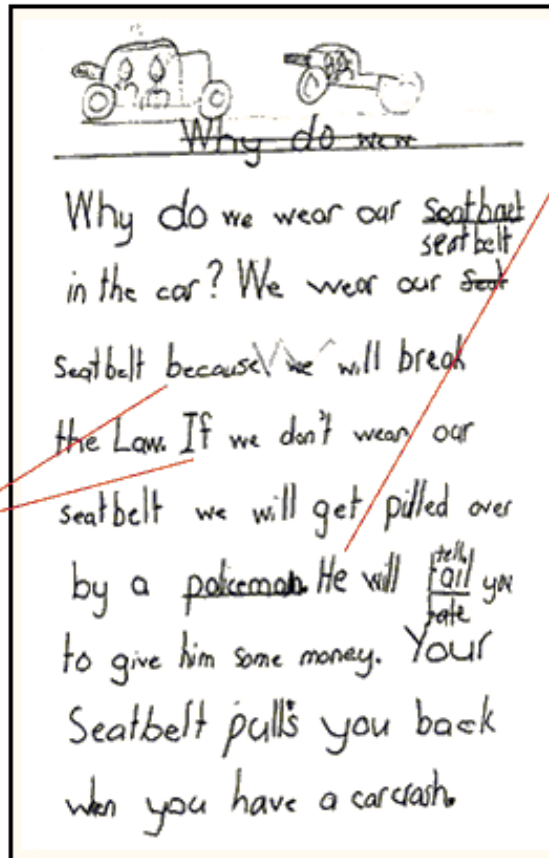
Defines topic through opening question and answer.

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

Vocabulary

Uses high-frequency words and some key content words

Student's second draft



Surface features

Grammar

Writes a simple sentence correctly.

Spelling

Shows good knowledge of basic spelling patterns.

Punctuation

Uses capital letters and full stops with some consistency.

Why do we wear our seatbelt in the car? We wear our seatbelt because we will break the Law. If we don't wear our seatbelt we will get pilled over by a policeman. He will tell you to give him some money. Your seatbelt pulls you back when you have a carcash.



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Student's second draft

