



## Another look at pupils' pieces of writing: evaluating differently

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### ► To cite this version:

Dominique Bucheton, Jean-Charles Chabanne. Another look at pupils' pieces of writing: evaluating differently. *Repères : Recherche en didactiques du français langue maternel*, ENS Lyon, 2013, Hors série, pp.6. <hal-01193082>

**HAL Id: hal-01193082**

**<https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01193082>**

Submitted on 4 Sep 2015

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### Référence électronique

Dominique Bucheton et Jean-Charles Chabanne, « Another look at pupils' pieces of writing: evaluating differently », *Repères* [En ligne], Hors-série | 2013, mis en ligne le 12 septembre 2013, consulté le 04 septembre 2015. URL : <http://reperes.revues.org/502>

Éditeur : Éditions de l'École normale supérieure de Lyon

<http://reperes.revues.org>

<http://www.revues.org>

Document accessible en ligne sur :

<http://reperes.revues.org/502>

Document généré automatiquement le 04 septembre 2015. La pagination ne correspond pas à la pagination de l'édition papier.

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1 But this model cannot be applied to what we have called interim and reflexive writings. These types of writing that cannot be connected to a social model are above all writings of personal work meant to launch, support and spur reflection during academic tasks. As a result, the aim of evaluation of that type of writing is not to have the text corrected but indeed to interpret the rationale of writing and give it a new impetus.

2 What will be presented here is a suggested model of evaluation of that type of writing with a view to helping teachers to give a different look at curricular writings. Three questions seem crucial to us:

- What are pupils' approaches to writing?
- What is the text about and what is at stake (its values)?
- How are norms taken into account and how do they evolve?

3 We will observe a few language indicators in the texts produced. The purpose is not to measure writing skills but to identify the cognitive, language and psychoaffective obstacles to the development of writing (from the perspective of ideas, forms of expression and emotions). Have these obstacles got something to do with the relation between individuals and writing: their identity as writing subjects, their knowledge of the functioning of writing and of the written language? Or are they related to their schooling: their desire to learn, their understanding of what is done at school or what is requested from them? We are seeking to help pupils with learning difficulties to think and act for themselves in the school context, be active, inventive and providers of innovative solutions and ultimately able to use more elaborate language solutions.

4 Nowadays, a number of achievements or shortcomings can be accurately evaluated against linguistic – phrasal, discursive or textual – norms. It is the role of institutional evaluations, especially those in *CE2* (8/9 year olds) and *6e* (11/12 year olds) to evaluate the common knowledge to be taught.

5 The positive evaluation of pupils' achievements, the singularity of their writing, their inventiveness, their cognitive and cultural development and their familiarity with writing is far less common. Apart from macro sociological and sociolinguistic approaches (Bernstein<sup>2</sup>, Bourdieu, Lahire<sup>3</sup>, Bautier<sup>4</sup>, Dabène<sup>5</sup>) which sought to examine the reasons behind learning gaps, we know little how a number of pupils oppose or resist the academic knowledge taught. The analysis of the psycho socio linguistic processes through which learning gaps develop, especially in the school environment – where writing is mostly taught and learnt – remains to be carried out. This is the task we set ourselves as part of a research and study group at the *IUFM* (a teacher training college) of Montpellier. Initially, the main purpose of our work was to design a tool to observe and report pupils' writing difficulties in *ZEP* (education priority areas) but also to think of possible solutions.

6 The evaluation of writing that we suggest is not a formative tool for pupils but an aid for teachers to help them *observe pupils' activity*, the forms of their involvement, how they develop or not skills during the writing tasks they have to complete. The main objective is to identify the obstacles to the development of writing.

7 After an overview of the various theoretical and didactical perspectives on pupils' pieces of writing, we will present three sets of indicators to examine the cognitive, cultural, language and psycho affective shifts that pupils make when they are exposed to writing assignments over a quite long period of time.

### 1. Understanding the origin of pupils' difficulties

8 **The main hypotheses available**

9 There is no neutral and universal evaluation that would reveal the nature of things. How the procedure is viewed underpins how evaluations are performed. An evaluation is linked to a representation of the school world and its priorities and to the action that one considers necessary to take. Evaluations are a choice of values and the implicit assumption of theoretical principles before being a purely technical operation.

10 The types of evaluation of writing explicitly refer to a conception of texts, language and more tacitly to a certain conception of pupils and their learning difficulties. Evaluation, teaching, remedial approaches are closely linked.

11 We will briefly investigate the approaches to the evaluation of writing before offering an alternative to these approaches.

### 1.1. The hypothesis of knowledge and cognitive clarity deficit

12 This is the hypothesis that underlies the cognitive and textual models of criteria-based evaluation (the French institutional model of current national evaluations in *CE2* and *6e* is largely inspired by Groupe EVA's criteria-based evaluation model<sup>6</sup>).

13 The lack of proficiency in normed forms is evaluated in terms of **shortcomings**: lack of vocabulary, textual models, grammatical knowledge, in a word of knowledge, procedures and cognitive clarity. Remediation consists in "solving these shortcomings" through re-teaching what was not adequately learnt, going back to basics, asking pupils to make corrections based on criteria objectivised and identified by lessons.

14 While these shortcomings are often real, their identification does not explain their origin for pupils who received the same teaching as other pupils or their persistence despite the support provided.

15 The criticism of these models of evaluation and remedial mechanisms is ancient (Bucheton 1995, Garcia-Debanc 1999). Here is a reminder of this criticism because of the overriding presence of the model in the whole educational institution, especially at primary school level.

1. The main objection is that the model of criteria-based evaluation leads to focus attention on textual forms and puts the writer's activity, its effects on individual development and what impedes it on the sidelines.
2. One of the limitations<sup>7</sup> is linked to "cognitive clarity": the model of criteria-based evaluation is based on the assumption that the rules behind writing processes can be objectivised and expressed in terms of "verbal rules of action" or at least of "principles of verbalisable actions". Hence the verbalising of the knowledge and abilities necessary to perform this task and the design of recapitulative tools (what "criteria lists" very often are). But the features of textual types that can be used in written expression are not all identified or even identifiable. Clarifying the writing processes is not always easy especially because it is necessary to get pupils to work on support tools. Sometimes a lot of time is wasted on the identification of rules that are not always operational. In addition, these very "rules" or "criteria" or "instructions" prove unused by those who would need them most<sup>8</sup>.
3. It is also doubtful that all acquisition necessarily takes the form of a shift to explicit writing. In what is at stake in learning to write, it is not easy to resolve "what is developing, what is taught, what is learnt"<sup>9</sup>. Is action knowledge usefully explainable and must rational description always support learning?
4. There is a risk of transforming writing in the eyes of pupils into a series of "mechanical and punctual activities"<sup>10</sup> and confining pupils in ineffective representations of tasks.

16 The model of criteria-based evaluation was a major step forward because the types of writing suggested and support procedures were largely diversified. But we are now aware that this very technicist and abstract model provides little support to pupils with learning difficulties and is beneficial to better-achieving pupils<sup>11</sup>, thus increasing gaps.

17 The major obstacle that teachers face with pupils with learning difficulties is simply to engage them in writing, to see to it that they are sufficiently involved to accept the hard work required by a writing project and subsequent revisions of their initial text. The very effort of writing

a draft consumes the whole energy available and many teachers realise how difficult it is to *get pupils to rewrite* and especially the pupils who would need it the most. But what seems to define pupils with learning difficulties is that they are far from the step when revising becomes necessary. They are still developing their relation to language that would contribute to their appropriation of writing to think, learn and grow. Actually, these pupils are not outside norms, they are outside writing in its curricular practices<sup>12</sup>. At best they accept *doing exercises* but basically these tasks do not concern them. They do not learn anything from them except that it comforts their representation of writing as an activity deprived of meaning *to them*. Technical knowledge – that targeted by textual models – is useless to these pupils.

## 1.2. The psycho-socio-language hypothesis: resistance instead of shortcomings

18 According to this hypothesis, what accounts for some behaviours of pupils with learning difficulties in French and other subjects is not shortcomings but the **resistance** they show to writing itself. It is deeply rooted in their conscious or unconscious behaviours towards writing and their writing postures as the components of their **relation to language**<sup>13</sup> (*“rapport au langage” in french*, a concept coined by socio-psychological approaches of children with learning difficulties). Writing difficulties result from socially and academically built representations and values that prevent pupils from using language as requested by the school system. Several closely related phenomena can explain this resistance.

### 1.2.1. Relation to language, identity development and curricular writing

19 Sociological and sociolinguistic research has long emphasised the importance of language in the identity development of individuals and in the construction of strong social relations to knowledge and school. What role do curricular writing practices play in these processes?

20 Indeed the relation to language like the relation to the world and to others is consubstantial to individuals. It is not simply constructed by individuals but in turn it constructs them. From this perspective, reading and writing cannot be defined just as skills-tools detached from the self. They are the self<sup>14</sup>. The development of knowledge, including basic knowledge, goes hand in hand with the development of identity that implies the engagement of a particular individual.

21 This relation to language cannot be directly taught. *It is developed in language practices* (E. Bautier)<sup>15</sup> that combine written and oral language behaviours and forms of *action* set in *contexts* in which sense is being made. These language practices first take place in the family (discussions with parents and brothers/sisters), then in society (in the streets, shops and playgrounds) and finally at school where they will diversify and complexify. Indeed school is the place where the most demanding language practices – especially writing – are introduced. Commenting a map of geography, writing a report on one’s experience or a group work, defining or explaining a historic notion that has just been studied, writing a scary adventure require more complex language and cognitive handling than saluting, talking or negotiating with family or friends.

22 For some pupils, the already developed relation to language and the identity positioning relative to it prevent them from giving a sense to curricular writing assignments. They do not expect any benefits except in the strict school environment. As pupils are extraneous to the knowledge taught, they do not appropriate or use them as tools to think, learn and develop. Their representations of written work and curricular or extra-curricular writing practices are obstacles to writing. Pupils do not think or get involved and stick to the instructions given by their teacher simply because they do not exist as singular individuals or when they do exist, it is as underachievers who are stigmatised by ranking indicators they can perfectly interpret.

23 But if we examine the specific use of language in curricular practices, we realise that it quite often runs counter to the ordinary social practices of writing or to some private practices. This might be the reason why the shift to a curricular use of writing might prove difficult for some pupils. This shift can be characterised as follows:

- The capacity to take language as a subject and play with it artificially like in grammar, literary comment or writing activities;

- The capacity to use language in situations with no direct relation to action, to apply writing *school genres* (compositions, reports, specification sheets) clearly distinct from social genres;
- The capacity to accept and understand the social and school norms of writing;
- The capacity to give sense to assignments, interpret instructions effectively, clarify the teacher-pupil pact, including when this pact is implicit;
- The capacity to learn through writing, to re-elaborate knowledge, experience, language forms, reasoning models, etc. in and through writing;
- The capacity to use language and cultural forms to write a *personal* text (with a new and specific meaning).

### 1.2.2. A more or less flexible use of language: the variety of writing postures

24 Evaluating pupils, especially the most underachieving, involves measuring their appropriation of this relation to written language necessary to the intellectual work required by the school system. The first approaches to differentiation that we conducted led us to describe how pupils get involved in writing in terms of *postures*. For example, a number of pupils with learning difficulties contented themselves with ineffective postures for writing tasks:

- They jot down what has just emerged at cognitive level (raw thoughts) without any reviewing;
- Or they rest on available speech fragments without revising them (thinking-writing with the words of the others);
- They do not try to be creative but seek primarily to conform literally to instructions and to norms<sup>16</sup> while others will turn instructions to their advantage and explore questions, think about their writing and even play with language.

25 Each one of us has their own “repertoire” of writing (and reading) behaviours that is more or less diversified and open, more or less appropriate to the variety of writing situations they are faced with. These are these configurations characteristic of cognitive and language routines that we refer to as *postures* (Bucheton, Bautier 1997<sup>17</sup>, Bucheton 1999<sup>18</sup>), a sort of reservoir of strategies adopted to solve writing problems. This *personal* reservoir of ready-made solutions indicates the particular relation of individuals to writing assignments.

26 It has been noticed that 1) pupils with learning difficulties often use a limited number of postures, which distinguishes them from better-achieving pupils who easily use a great variety of writing postures; that 2) these postures cannot be hierarchised: they are all used by expert writers according to assignments or progress in writing; 3) that unlike pupils with writing difficulties<sup>19</sup>, expert writers move easily from one posture to the other, which enables them to fully use writing as a *cognitive tool*.

27 The purpose is now to identify the places and difficult problems where some of these inadequate or inflexible positions crystallise.

## 2. Evaluating differently: three sets of indicators in "interm texts"

### 28 The hypothesis of difficult “stages” during which differentiation sets in

29 We explored another hypothesis, that of particularly complex cognitive and language operations specific to the development of writing competences. This hypothesis completes and explains the first two. From this perspective, all the shortcomings and gaps observed in language behaviours do not have the same power to block the development of competences because writing individuals are not involved in the same way. We sought to identify these pivotal *places* where significant thought and language *movements* are observable and the *involvement* of individuals in the writing tasks to be completed.

30 Generally speaking, for some children who easily think and communicate orally, one of the difficulties of written production lies in the fact that they cannot connect the different enunciative and semantic dimensions to the pragmatic contexts specific to writing<sup>20</sup>. It is the point of articulation that is problematic. When they speak, the embedding and structuring of these various dimensions use other codes they are more familiar with: gestures, gesticulations,

self-corrections, adjustments of the tone, flow, silences, etc. Above all, thought changes and becomes more complex resting on speech and the presence of the other. This reflexive activity in writing is internal to writing itself.

31 We carried out longitudinal observations of series of “interim” texts to examine the linguistic and reflexive activity of writers and their mental blocks. Writing instructions about the same topic were successively given. We called them *interim*<sup>21</sup> in the sense that they play for each other a role of *linguistic, cognitive and affective mediators*. This study was essential to identify sets of indicators of the signs towards resolving increasingly complex writing problems. They form three dimensions that we isolated for didactical purposes but they are actually closely related. As our objective is to develop a *user-friendly* and concretely usable tool to manage a class in ordinary evaluation situations, we only kept the most discriminating indicators among these three dimensions.

32 Below is a table summarising our evaluation proposals. We will comment them drawing on examples taken in the classes that we observed.

33 **Evaluation tool of pupils' activity in interim pieces of writing: synthetic table**

Evaluated dimensions	Possible indicators
1. The enunciative and pragmatic dimension	<i>Enunciation</i>
1.1. The selection of a voice 1.2. The narrator's management of the voices of the others: creating polyphony in texts 1.3. Pupils' involvement through developing a particular perspective and taking the other into account (pragmatic dimension)	- Main enunciative choices: in “I”, “He”, “We”...; hesitations in the use of deictics and temporal coherence From transcribed raw oral speech to the differentiation of “speeches” (narrator, dialogue); Evolution of punctuation usage, indented lines... - Development of modalisation, assertive verbs expressing viewpoints - Development of heterogeneous speeches and language acts - Diversification of writing postures
2. The semantic and symbolic dimension	<i>Contents and stakes</i>
2.1. The main question to be answered is: what is the text about? What is emerging and will develop?	The lexicon conveys the selection, relevance, and variety of “materials” investigated: topics, environments, concepts, symbolic figures or not, values, human problems addressed?
2.2. How does the writer introduce forms of textual or conceptual structuring? How do these forms develop?	- Semantic fields - System of relations between characters in the narrative, conventional narrative schemes... - Forms of reasoning and of cognitive operations on contents: naming, ranking, comparing, prioritising, categorising, etc.
3. The development of a relation to the norm	<i>Control and reinvestment indicators</i>
3.1. The development of a relation to basic norms 3.2. The thickening of the text and the development by trial and error of complex norms 3.3. Borrowings and their transformations 3.4. Risk-taking, linguistic, fictional or intellectual inventiveness	- Spelling, layout, segmentation of the text, degree of spelling control - Anaphoric recalling - Approaches to time representation - Increasing the complexity of sentences How stereotypes, quotations, anaphors added by the teacher or pupils are addressed Mistakes caused by risk taking, spelling inventions, deviation to stereotypes, conceptual or narrative complexity that is difficult to handle

34 **A number of pupils' pieces of writing will be used to introduce this tool. All the indicators mentioned above will not be detailed.**

## 2.1. Pupils' relations to their writing: the enunciative and pragmatic dimension

35 First and foremost, writing is an act that both mobilises individuals and builds them. They are not only mobilised because they are required to use linguistic resources, collect their thoughts, order and express them. The difficulty to think in writing is coupled with a real difficulty to think as particular individuals at the origin of reasoning or necessarily singular experiences.

As a result, many problems arise: where are authors in writing? In the form of an I, a We, a S/he? Are they more or less detached from other voices, those of characters, contradictors, etc.? How do potential readers fit in, what languages acts are oriented towards them? What writing postures should be adopted (what position towards instructions)?

### 2.1.1. *The choice of a narrator and of multiple necessary linguistic adjustments*

36 The purpose is to determine the origin of the voice in charge of the text (what is called the *narrative instance* in narratives). The difficulty emerges as of the first compositions and is repeated for each new text genre.

37 *Noémie wrote the following text at the end of CP (first year of primary education in France):*

Lara et Marion vien cher moi demin matin.et maman veus bien mais à une condition que je neitoi ma chambre.et je dit oui àmaman et aussi elle me dit c'est vous qui alais faire à manger oui je veux bien, et le lendemain matin elles font la fête avec les amis.avec la musique très forte et avec des garçons on fait la fête juste au lendemin matin

Lara and Marion will come home tomorrow morning. and mum agrees but I had to clean up my room . and I said Ok tomum and she also says you will prepare lunch yes OK. and the following morning they have a party with friends. With a music playing very loudly and with boys we have a party until the following morning

38 *In class of 6<sup>ème</sup>22*

39 As part of a project in French and biology, pupils visited a natural reserve. The class was split in two and each half-class visited a different part – the zoo or the botanical garden. When they returned, they were given the followng instruction: ***Describe a plant/an animal, tell what you saw and learnt to a friend of the other group.***

40 *Frédéric's text*

Le lynx

La tête du lynx ressemble à un chat les oreilles sont pointue et poilu il était confortablement couchet, sa fourrure est tout à fait remarquable et son camoufla extraordinaire, quant on passe devant, il faut bien regarder pour le voir il a des pâtes de tigre la fourrure a une couleur blanche et marron il a des taches marron et noirs

The lynx

The head of the lynx looks like a cat the ears are pointed and hairy he was comfortably lying, his fur is outstanding and his camouflage extraordinary, when you walk past him, you have to look carefully to see him he has tiger-like paws the fur is white and brown with black and brown marks

41 *Jamy's text*

Fenouil

Cette plante sans bon, je l'ai senti, le fenouil était sec, de couleurs jaune. Elle a une grande tige. Le fenouil à des feuilles divisées en fines lanières. Cet plante mesure au moins un mètre

[dessin]

On mange le bulbe en salad.

Les graines servent pour la cuisine. Le fenouil n'est pas un arbuste. C'est la plus haute plantes de la plaine.

Fennel

This plant smells good, I smelt it, fennel was dry and yellow. It has a long stem. Its leaves are divided into thin strips. This plant is one meter long at least.

[drawing]

The bulb is eaten in salad.

Seeds are used for cooking. Fennel is not a shrub.

This is the highest plant of the plain.

42 *Lise's text*

Le cyprès chauve

Les branches portent des fruits ronds et verts : ce sont des cônes.

Le tronc est de grande taille. Les racines sortent du sol en forme de bosse.

Il s'appelle cyprès mais il est de la famille des séquoïas. Il exige beaucoup d'humidité et de lumière. Il perd ses feuilles en hiver.

Il fut introduit vers 1640 en Europe.

[ici une photo + légende :]

racines qui sortent pour aller chercher de l'air. Elles mesurent



entre 15 et 20 cms

The bald cypress

Branches bear round and green fruits: these are cones.

The trunk is large. Roots stick out of the ground in the form of a bump.

It is a cypress and it belongs to the family of sequoias. It needs a lot of water and light. It sheds its leaves in winter.

It was introduced around 1640 in Europe.

[here a photo + caption:]

Roots sticking out to take some fresh air. They are about 6 to 8 inches long.

- 43 Both Frédéric and Jamy hesitate, confuse enunciative positions and perform the task differently. Lise complies with the interpersonal position expected by the teacher and read on the signposts of the park. We notice that these three pupils do not share the same approach and did not interpret the task in the same way, which disturbs their enunciative choices. Lise took an exterior posture while Frédéric and Jamy do not really know what distance they should take with their experience, knowledge, the described subject, and the school context. Are they in a French or biology class? They do not manage either to conform to the models of the signposts found everywhere in the park. In fact, they may not have read them because they preferred smelling or looking around.

### 2.1.2. Handling the voices of the others: from oral to written enunciation

- 44 The variety of voices is part and parcel of speech. Written enunciation involves learning how to distinguish or skilfully mix the voices within speech and orchestrate these various voices: marking of direct and indirect speech; use of quotations and repeated discourse, etc. In the case of narratives, it is not only necessary to give a voice to characters but also thoughts. In the case of argumentative or documentary texts, it is necessary to quote to confront viewpoints and mention sources.

45 *Example in CE1*<sup>23</sup>

- 46 Extracts from Khamel's workbook: text n° 1 (12 September, instruction: **Write the story of Little Zebra as if he were a child.**)

il a trouvé un bon ami gentil Stanley a dit : bonjour est-ce que tu peux jouer avec toi oh oui si on jouait à touche-touche d'accord et ils s'amuse bien et après ils ont joué à cache-cache

he found a nice friend Stanley said:hello will you play with me oh yes what about playing hide and seek and they are having a good time and then they played hide and seek

- 47 Text n° 2 (September 15, instruction: **Invent and write the meeting with a character that you will choose**)

l'enfant rencontre un copain pour l'aider à faire un robot qui il est habillé de toute les couleurs et il sortait jamais dehors il s'appelle bob et il parie trop avec son ami et à l'école il pariait trop à l'école et

the child meets a friend to help him build a robot he is dressed in multicoloured clothes and he was never going out his name is bob and he bets too much with his friend and at school he bet too much at school and

- 48 Text n° 3 (September 24, instruction: a photo by Doisneau [two children in tears]: **what happened and what will happen?**)

l'enfant pleure parce qu'il n'a pas d'ami il est triste à la cour de récréation il y en avait un autre qui pleurait mais les deux enfants au couloir pleuraient encore mais quand ils sont entrés en classe la maitresse a dit : pourquoi vous pleurez vous deux parce qu'on n'a pas d'amis mais à la récré avec qui vous avez joué on n'est pas sorti dehors on est resté dans le couloir en train de pleurer bien vous sortirez jamais mais ils pleurent encore

the child is crying because he has no friend he is sad in the playground another boy was crying but both children were still crying in the corridor but when they came into the classroom the female teacher asked: why are you crying because we have no friends but during the break who did you play with we didn't go out we stayed in the corridor crying Ok you'll never go out but they're still crying

- 49 Text n° 4 (October 5, instruction: **one day you've helped someone: tell your experience**)

Il y avait un enfant qui n'avait pas d'ami mais hier il y avait quel-qu'un qui s'appelait Ibrahim il frappait tout le monde et il voulait plus partir à l'école il voulait rester à la maison et ce qu'il aimait le plus c'est les jeux vidéo de « street fighter » mais le mardi il voulait aller à l'école parce qu'il y avait un anniversaire de thomas.

There was a child who had no friend but yesterday there was someone called Ibrahim he was hitting everyone and he did not want to go to school he wanted to stay home and what he liked best was video games of "street fighter" but on Tuesday he wanted to go to school but it was Thomas' birthday.

50 Text n° 5 (October 6, instruction: write on the same synopsis as *Little Zebra*)

parce qu'il a les habits pauvres et les autres se moquent de lui et disent : et le pauvre tu as même pas vingt centimes et regarde ces habits on dirait une momie et le maitre dit : et vous deux vous êtes punis pourquoi parce que vous vous moquez de lui et en plus il vient d'un pays très lointain qui s'appelle l'égypte allez maintenant chez la directrice bon d'accord attendez maitre oui mais comment je vais l'aider à faire le travail ah oui bonne question mais attention je vous préviens si vous l'aidez pas vous allez chez la directrice d'accord promis aller maintenant vous avez fini le travail oui maintenant aidez le mais pourquoi vous l'avez promis.

because he is dressed in tatters and the others laugh at him and say: poor guy you don't even have a penny and look at these clothes they look like a mummy and the teacher said: both of you are punished because you're laughing at him and on top of that he comes from a distant country called Egypt go to the principal's office OK but how will I help him do his work that's a good question but be listen to me carefully if you don' help him you go to the principal's office OK now you've finished help him why you've promised

51 Khamel quickly shifted to an oral transcript. It is therefore evidence that he has still not developed a narrative instance. Characters spoke with the teacher as an aid and the re-emergence of *strange clothes* justified by the foreign origin. The teacher proposed to include it through school work, which was apparently not taken for granted.

52 Text n° 6 (November 19, instruction: **write the whole story of the little child. You must complete the story**)

Le petit enfant est malheureux parce qu'il n'est pas comme les autres et cet enfant s'appelle paul il a six ans et il n'aime pas qu'on se moque de lui. le lendemain il y a des enfants et ils lui disent : eh toi là-bas tu ne sais pas lire non je ne sais pas lire et les gars il ne sait pas lire ils disent tous qu'ils ne sait pas lire venez on va le dire à tout le monde mais comment on prend beaucoup de feuilles et on écrit mais qu'est-ce qu'on écrit on écrit que paul no sait pas lire bonne idée quoi j'ai dit bonne idée allez ne perdons pas de temps sinon il appelle sa mère merci de mo l'avoir dit eh vous là-bas vous n'avez pas honte, c'était son copain, il vient et il dit : tirez-vous de là sinon je le dis à votre mère, mais en rentrant à la maison il voyait beaucoup de jouets et il dit merci.

The little child is unhappy because he is different from the others and his name is Paul he is six-years-old and he doesn't like to be laughed at. the following morning there are children and they tell him: eh you can't you read no I can't read eh guys he can't read they all say he can't read come over here we'll tell everybody but let's take many pieces of paper and we write but what do we write we write that Paul can't read good idea what I said good idea come on there's no time to be wasted otherwise he'll call his mother thanks for telling me eh you over there aren't you ashamed he was your friend he comes and says: get out of here or I'll tell your mother but on his way back he saw many toys and he says thank you.

53 Text n° 6 shows a tentative narrative organised by a narrative instance followed by a "narrative of direct speech" that is difficult to understand if it is not read orally. The narrator is totally absent. In fact, it is mostly an oral transcript, a posture in which writing is reduced to "raw speech". In many texts, pupils with learning difficulties until *6ème* make do with oral transcripts. They juxtapose pieces of speech and quotations. Training these pupils to write dialogues in direct speech (common practice) without inserting them in narratives is not necessarily the right solution.

54 When writing, the different speeches that develop in spontaneous enunciation diverge, are hierarchised and eventually take conventional linguistic forms. The problem to solve in written narratives is to distinguish the voices of characters, the voice of the narrator that can him/herself be duplicated into a commentator, an evaluator, etc. In argumentative speech, the difficulty lies in differentiating the level of questions, that of assertions in answers, the different

voices of contradictors, etc. The orchestration of these voices and various perspectives is one of the particularly sensitive developmental stages.

### 2.1.3. The development of a singular perspective

55 Writing also involves fitting one's voice into a **community**, thinking singularly, appropriating the pieces of writing of the others and customising them with one's own style to transform them. It means developing proper **action** within this community. This is a slow and gradual process. Commentaries, evaluations come on top of the purely factual texts of the beginning (characters *take action*, and possibly *speak*). Texts are gradually laden with values that are implicitly or explicitly expressed.

56 This more elaborate enunciative position is concurrently developed in an implicit dialogue with potential readers that must be lured, convinced and seduced. The *pragmatic* dimension is developed in parallel. The pragmatic intention materialises in the fact that writing engages desire, the will to convince the others, seduce them and help them understand, which accordingly requires more elaborate writing strategies.

57 Finally, distanciation emerges from prescribed tasks: pupils decide to engage in them or not and to draw on the text for self-development. They distance themselves from other people's words that will be repeated and reformulated, from their own experience and own imagination. Pupils take an active approach to the task and appropriate it. Then pupils develop various writing strategies as evidence of their involvement in their writings:

- Diversified writing postures: pupils try various strategies;
- The development of modal markers: adverbs, evaluative adjectives, comparisons, examples, etc.;
- The temporary presence of opinion verbs (*I think that...I am sure that...*) in explanations, commentaries, evaluations;
- The development and diversification of language acts towards cooperation with readers through anticipation of their reactions (hence the development of argumentation, justifications).

58 The diversification and relevance of language acts suggest the entry in the pragmatic written dimension of language and indicate: a) the aims of the author about the speech topic: exploring it, telling it, summarising it, commenting it, evaluating it, explaining it, memorising it, illustrating it... b) the aims on the audience: raising questions, informing, seeking to be emotional, involving, provoking, ordering, mitigating, etc.

## 2.2. Contents and symbolic challenges

59 Writing involves far more than just making sentences without making mistakes. First, it means putting a symbolic content into play that cannot be separated from a language form to act in a given situation. This symbolic content is simply the *story* that is told, the *ideas* that are listed and connected through reasoning, the *concepts* developed, assembled, illustrated, the *affects* that are named and represented, the *percepts* organised in reports or descriptions, etc. Finally, the values at the heart of any writing project justify this very project in the eyes of writers themselves: what are the ends and motives behind writing? Why writing and what for?

60 Pupils learn to write because they have something to write that can only materialise in writing. This *something* is not necessarily accessible before being written. Writing it might reveal it, although core sense is probably beyond anybody's reach indefinitely: this is what is precisely called the symbolic. What is told and what is at stake is the driving force of engagement in one's own narrative, the condition for the development of language skills. Hence the crucial importance for engagement in writing of the guarantee of a demanding but benevolent reading. It is necessary to learn how to read pupils' texts as full-fledged texts<sup>24</sup>.

61 All pupils have the right to be listened for what makes them proportionately *authors*: individuals in writing.

### 2.2.1. Key indicators

- **Thematic richness** is the first indicator: what is the text about? Here the selection, relevance, quantity, and variety of *semantic and symbolic materials* are under scrutiny:

number of topics mentioned, anthropological problems raised, richness and originality of the fictional worlds created. [NB The purpose is not to evaluate lexical richness, the extent of the vocabulary used but the referents of the text, whatever its means].

- Another indicator is the **degree of structuring** of these materials: from mere juxtaposition to various forms of structuring: isotopies, repetitions, gradations, parallels and oppositions, internal echoes, hierarchisation, etc. What does the text do with socially constructed structures (types, schemes, scripts, stereotypes, etc.)?
- Another indicator might be the number and relevance of **semantic and cognitive operations** made or represented by the text: the text names, categorises, classifies, analyses, hierarchises, synthesises, conceptualises, makes connections, introduces shades of meaning, deduces, induces, etc. In particular, attention might be paid to the presence of **semantic closure**: can readers summarise the text or take paraphrasable or symbolic meaning out of it?

62 *Texts taken as examples for analysis*

63 They all come from the same class of *6ème* in a *ZEP* (education priority area) and were written at the beginning and end of the school year. In the first case, the instruction given was to write a tale, in the second to write a legend that would occur in a reserve that the class visited several times with a few imperatives: the use of a number of words and of the "I".

64 *Jamy*

65 **Narrative 1**

Il était une fois un homme qui s'appelait Freddy le tueur. Cet homme habitait dans une forêt qui se situait à Montpellier dans la garrigue. Autrefois personne ne savait fabriquer des armes pour le tuer. Cet homme n'avait peur de personne. Il était très fort, il aimait tuer les gens.

Il habitait dans une cabane faite en paille à côté d'un petit lac en haut d'un arbre recouvert de feuille personne ne savait où se trouver sa cabane. Freddy le tueur allait là où habitaient tous les gens du village et celui où celle qu'il attrapait il les tuaient. Mes les gens quand il le voyaient, ils s'enfermaient chez eux.

C'est la que un ours arriva et lui dit : « Tu na pas honte de tataquer aux plus petits que toi. Freddy le tueur lui dit : « j'attaque rien que cela qui crois que je suis méchant et aussi cequi fabrique des armes pour me tuer ». L'ours lui dit : « tu as raison » l'ours prit son chemin et partit. Freddy le tueur avait rien que peur de l'ours. Or un jour, tous les gens du village avaient fabriqué des armes pour le tuer alors ces là que Freddy le tueur prit peur, il appela l'ours pour l'aidait. L'ours gentil comme tous parlait avec les gens du village, les gens du village ne voulait rien savoir, ils voulaient le faire partir. Freddy le tueur partit tout triste, deux où trois jours après Freddy le tueur revenut tous les gens armés voulaient le tuer. Ils s'approchèrent un peu d'eux, et lui dit en pleurant, je m'exuse d'avoir fait tous ces dégâts au village est-ce que je peus revenir au village je rese-rais gentils. Les gens du village eurent peine et Imui accordèrent à une condition, À peine tu fait du mal à quelqu'un ont tetuent Freddy le tueur dit oui. Quelque temps après c'était le meilleur amis de tous le monde ils l'appelaient Freddy tous court sans tueur.

Voilà que Freddy eut de bon amis et le village vivaient heureux.

Once upon a time there was a man whose name was Freddy the killer. This man lived in a forest located in the scrubland of Montpellier. In the past nobody could make weapons to kill him. This man was afraid of no one. He was very strong, he liked killing people.

He lived in a hut made of straw next to a small lake at the top of a tree covered with leaf nobody knew where his hut was. Freddy the killer was going where all the people of the village lived and those he caught he killed them. But when people saw, they locked themselves in.

That's when a bear arrived and told him: "Aren't you ashamed of attacking those smaller than you. Freddy the killer told him: "I attack only those who think I'm mean and also those who make weapons to kill me". The bear told him: "you're right" the bear went his way and left. Freddy the killer was very afraid of the bear. But one day, the people of the village had made weapons to kill him that's when Freddy the killer got scared and called the bear to help him. The very kind bear talked with the people of the village. The people of the village still wanted to make him go. Freddy the killer felt sad and left, a couple of days later Freddy the killer came back all the people carrying weapons wanted to kill him. They came closer to him, and he said crying I apologise for causing all this damage to the village can I coma back to the village I'll be kind again. The people of the village felt pity and said OK on the condition that you don't hurt anyone or we'll kill you Freddy said OK. Some time later he was everybody's best friend they called him just Freddy without killer.

Then Freddy made friends and the village lived happily.

66 **Narrative 2**

Voilà trois jours qu'il pleut à la réserve de Lunaret à la Valette. Moi élève de 6ème Athènes Me trouve à la réserve inondée depuis 3 jours. Les rivières débordés, le moulin écrasé par terre, les falaises tombais. Comme la réserve est inondée j'ai pris une grosse pierre je l'ai jetée sur un arbre ; l'arbre est tombé je suis monté dessus. Je m'endormis, le lendemain matin, je me réveille je me retrouve dans une grotte. Tout étonnant je marche, je ne vois rien. Je continue à marcher sans manger ni boire je continue à marcher, pendant 1 jour entier dans manger ni boire. 1 jour de plus en train de marcher je vois de la lumière, je m'approche encore un petit plus je vois une sortie tous content je sors je ne vois personne le tempête s'arrête. Tous les arbres arrachés tout en bordel je partis chez moi rejoindre mes parents et mes soeurs...

It has rained for three days in the reserve of Lunaret in la Valette. I a pupil in 6e have been flooded in the reserve for three days. The rivers overflowed, the mill crushed to the ground, the cliffs down. As the reserve is under water I took a big stone and threw it at a tree; the tree fell and I went over it. I fell asleep, the following morning, I wake up I find myself in a cave. I walk amazed, I don't see anything. I keep walking without eating or drinking I keep walking, for 1 full day without eating or drinking. 1 more day walking I see light, I come even closer I see a way out I happily go out I don't see anybody the storm stopped. All the trees uprooted in a complete mess I went home to meet my parents and my sisters

67 **Lise**68 **Narrative1**

Il y avait autrefois, près de la mer méditerranée, un pêcheur appelé Clad. Il vivait avec sa femme et ses 2 enfants. Depuis des décennies sa famille était une famille de pêcheurs, il n'avait peur de rien, il était très courageux, il sauvait parfois des enfants en danger. Tous les soirs il revenait avec son filet rempli de poissons à la main. Sa femme l'attendait dans la chaumière en préparant le dîner. Clad n'était pas très riche mais n'hésitait pas à aider ses amis dans le besoin.

Un jour en allant pêcher il découvrit sur la place, une bouteille en verre qui bougeait Comme il n'était pas peureux il prit la bouteille et essaya de trouver un endroit pour s'asseoir. Il ouvrit la bouteille et vit une étrange fumée blanche en sortir. Il vit une tête sortir de la fumée blanche. Il comprit alors que c'était un génie.

Le génie sortie entièrement de la fumée et dit au pêcheur.

- Bonjour, je suis le génie de la méditerranée. C'est toi qui m'a réveillé
- Oui, réussit à articuler Clad
- Si c'est toi qui m'a réveillé c'est donc toi qui a la bouteille en verre. Montre -la- moi !
- Tiens, la voilà, répondit le pêcheur
- Ca va, si c'est toi qui a la bouteille, c'est donc à toi que je dois obéir.
- Comment ça ?
- Ben, je dois exaucer un de tes vœux »

N'en revenant pas, Clad resta toute la journée sur la plage.

Revenant chez lui bredouille, il fit part de sa trouvaille à personne. Le lendemain, dès que le soleil se leva, il prit la bouteille et partit sur la plage et dit au génie :

- Une guerre va éclater et je voudrais qu'elle n'est pas lieu
  - Le génie surprit, eut ensuite un large sourire
  - Je ne m'attendais pas du tout à ce vœu mais je suis content que tu n'est pas comme tous les autres.
  - Je suis content que tu m'apprécies mais tu dois te dépêcher
  - Mais pourquoi veut-tu vraiment que j'empêche cette guerre ?
  - Si la guerre éclate la mer sera un lieu de pêche, réserver aux riches Il faudra payer pour pêcher alors que moi je pêche pour me nourrir.
  - Je comprends. Comme tu ne m'a pas demandé la richesse absolue, je vais exaucer ton v et je vais permettre à toi et à ta famille de vivre pendant deux cents ans sans être malade...
- C'est ainsi que Clad et sa famille vivèrent plus de 200 ans heureux grâce à un génie « le génie de la Méditerranée ». Le génie surveillait en secret la famille de Clad qui continuait à être une famille de pêcheurs.

In the past there was a fisherman named Clad near the Mediterranean sea. He lived with his wife and two children. His family had lived on fishing for decades, nothing scared him, he was very brave, he sometimes saved children in danger. Every evening, he came home with his net full of fish in his hand. His wife expected him in the cottage preparing dinner. Clad was not very rich but did not hesitate to help his friends in need.

One day, while he was going fishing he found in the square a glass bottle that was moving As he was not scared he took the bottle and tried to find a place to sit down. He opened the bottle

and saw a strange white smoke coming out of it. He saw a head coming out of the white smoke. He understood that it was a genius. The genius came completely out of the smoke and told the fisherman. Hello, I'm the genius of the Mediterranean sea. You woke me up. Yes, Clad managed to say. If you are the one who woke me up, you are the one who has the glass bottle. Show it to me! Here it is, the fisherman answered. OK if you have the bottle I have to obey you. What do you mean? I have to fulfil one of your wishes. Clad stayed the whole day on the beach, stupefied. He didn't tell anybody of his finding once he went back home. The following day, as soon as the sun rose, he took the bottle and went to the beach and told the genius: A war will break out and I would like it not to happen. The genius, who felt surprised, then smiled fully. I didn't expect this wish at all but I'm happy you're different from the others. I'm happy you like me but you must hurry up. But why do you really want me to prevent this war? If the war breaks out the sea will be a fishing spot reserved to the rich. You will have to pay to fish whereas I go fishing to feed my family. I see. As you did not ask for absolute wealth, I will fulfil your wish and will enable you and your family to live healthily for two hundred years... That's how Clad and his family lived happily more than 200 years thanks to a genius "the genius of the Mediterranean sea". The genius secretly watched Clad's family who kept being a family of fishermen.

## 69 Narrative 2

C'est en 1999. Je suis seule depuis une semaine dans la réserve. Je me nourris de quelques plantes que produisent les arbres de la réserve. Tout cela aurait pu continuer longtemps mais il pleuvait beaucoup depuis hier. Ce n'était pas une pluie ordinaire. C'est une averse. Elle a commencé comme ça sans prévenir personne. La rivière commençait à inonder la plaine. Seul une chose blanche dépassait. Je voulais aller voir ce que c'était, mais il faisait déjà nuit alors je suis allée dormir dans une grotte. Le lendemain je décide d'aller voir la plaine. L'eau avait presque tout recouvert. Seul une bosse blanche avec quelque chose d'écrit dessus dépassait : « Voici le champignon de la mort. Sautez dessus, cela vous sauvera ». Ça était difficile parce que l'eau m'arrive aux genoux. Mais j'y arrive quand même. Je saute et soudain il y a eu un tremblement et le champignon a grossi, grossi, grossi tellement que je dépassai les nuages. Soudain je m'évanouis. Je me réveille. Je vois une personne en blanc qui s'occupe de moi. Elle s'approche et me dit : - Il est temps de retourner chez toi maintenant que le déluge est fini. La dernière chose que je me suis souvenue c'est d'être à l'hôpital avec mes parents.

1999. I have been alone in the reserve for a week. I feed on a few plants from the trees of the reserve. It could have continued for a long time but it had been raining a lot since yesterday. It was not an ordinary rain. It's a shower. It started without warning anybody. The river started flooding the plain. A white thing was just sticking out. I wanted to go and see what it was but it was already dark so I went to sleep in a cave. The following day, I decide to go and see the plain. The water had almost covered everything. Just a white bump with something written on it was sticking out: 'Here is the deadly mushroom. Jump on it, it will save you'. It was difficult because I am knee high in water. But still I pulled through. I jump and suddenly there was a quake and the mushroom got so much bigger that I was above the clouds. I suddenly faint. I wake up. I see a person in white who takes care of me. She comes closer and tells me: - It's time for you to go back home now that the flood is over. The last thing that I remembered is that I was in hospital with my parents.

### 2.2.2. Narratives 1: topics, worlds, and values

70 In terms of quantity of exploited materials, many topics are intertwined in Lise's narrative: wealth, poverty, mutual aid, war, sea, family, work and courage. These topics reflect various fictional and real worlds – that of poor fishermen who live among themselves, that of war and economic conflicts which must be avoided and the environmental disasters they cause but also the imaginary world of tales in which everything is possible.

71 These topics are structured into a system of values that are themselves staged in the relations between characters. The hero – Clad – is courageous, industrious, generous, modest and expresses reasonable wishes. He deserves to live a happy life.

72 The marvellous tale is used as a basic narrative model limited to the gift of the magical object (the bottle is handed in “for free”). There is no opponent apart from the modesty of Clad who makes a purposeful decision. The obstacle is unconventional because the fisherman is eager to prevent war. Dialogues take considerable space – there is a lot of reflection and discussion for the sake of everybody!

73 Jamy’s world is that of violence and fear. The topics are structured into strong binary oppositions – killing/surviving, mean/kind, happy/sad, scare/being scared, threaten/being threatened. The recognised value is that of the strongest. Characters are kind or mean and they share simple but violent relations. This pitiless world is probably connected with his own life, environment and the *stories* (films, local news, etc.) that are experienced. What Jamy’s text reveals is his own reductive, entrapping system of values, references, and socially constructed figures of sense. It is his vision of the world and society that needs questioning. He is the one who most needs the contributions of readings, fictional or real stories to enrich his imaginary. What he needs most is *cultural mediation*. However, it involves the activity of writing in which a full-fledged symbolic work is necessary, especially through the use of narrative pieces (places, events, characters, attitudes, behaviours, etc.) whose appropriation is the concrete form of this mediation.

74 This is what we sought to observe in the narratives written at the end of the school year.

### *2.2.3. Narratives 2: how readings, experiences, subjectivity and writing materialise and make sense*

75 In the instruction (*Write a legend that would happen in the reserve*), pupils were requested to tell how a hero “I” facing a very serious problem (flood) pulled through on his own. The focus was placed on how pupils reused the cultural contributions of the school year, their experience, and their budding writing skills to write a completely specific text which figured a symbolic universe of structured meanings.

76 **Reformulation** is probably the most meaningful indicator of the work of the text on itself. The reuse and modification of elements according to various degrees of transformation from copying out to original assembling are indeed the concrete forms that the learning of language and its resources takes through assimilation-incorporation of existing solutions among available discourses. Observing how pupils reformulate is thus a strong indicator of the construction of a positive relation to language in all its dimensions, especially its social dimension. The **integration in compositions of borrowed elements** and how much these elements – stereotypes, elements drawn from previously read or heard texts, reuse and transformation of cultural units (characters, stereotypes, scenario, discursive and narrative fragments, and mythical elements) are assimilated is essential to evaluation.

77 Lise imagined a sort of cosmic cataclysm from which the female hero miraculously escaped after much risk-taking. She sought to return to her family, a protective society (the hospital). Once again, she showed talent to stage various worlds and topics that she mixed in a probably less effective way than in her first narrative. She integrated the cultural elements taught in class in her own imagination and also drew on her cultural references. The topic of water is used extensively: it rained a lot, not an ordinary rain, a shower, the river overflowed, I was knee high in water, the flood (*il pleuvait beaucoup, pas une pluie ordinaire, une averse, la rivière inondait, l'eau, l'eau m'arrive au genou, le déluge*). The quite realistic initial world gradually turned fantastic: a hidden threat this is no ordinary rain (*ce n'est pas une pluie ordinaire*), then the gradual rise of water: started flooding (*commençait à inonder...*) almost covered everything (*presque tout recouvert...*) the organisation of the text is very dramatized: gradual deterioration of the hero’s situation, risk-taking and reversal through a dramatic turn of events.

78 In Jamy’s narrative, the hero weathered a storm, resisted and stepped forward blindly. At the end of the tunnel, he found the world “in a mess” and his family. He names the places that he now knows. He mentioned the mill, the cave, the cliff and even the long walk (pupils strained to walk in the reserve and trees in a complete mess (*tout en bordel*) strongly referred to TV

images. The metaphor of the walk in the cave and that of fast is a cultural stereotype that Jamy came across probably unconsciously.

79 Pupils have a lot to say (or write) and obviously have a lot of resources – many semantic germs deposited and developed during visits to the reserve of Lunaret through readings (the biblical topics under study are present). They can structure these germs into singular meanings and fictitious worlds. The long-term work on the project on the reserve is obvious: places can be used as imaginary matrixes (mill, cliff, cave, trees) and visual or even corporal sensations fill out narratives: I kept walking (*j'ai marché, marché...*)

### 3. The development of a relation to the norm

80 This third model was investigated in institutional and EVA models. We suggest another perspective assuming that complying with norms is both an *attitude* and a *competence*. More precisely, the competence is built only if the attitude contributes to it. What we seek to know is whether pupils build a *positive*, dynamic and conscious *relation* to the norm or whether they are subjected to it or deny it. Accepting norms is tantamount to belonging to a community and its values. That's why we assume that the development of a relation to the norm is always socially constructed. It is then essential to trace this evolution in the development of a positive relation to norms and in what circumstances or conditions it fades. Taking the process and not only the outcome (the final text) into account implies focusing on **correction behaviours**, for example on the dynamic of deletions and regrets<sup>25</sup>. How do pupils behave when they spontaneously revise their texts or when they are requested to do so? How do they cooperate with peer pupils in these situations? What use do they make of available tools? We will focus both on behaviours and on the statistical measure of mistakes in final compositions.

#### 3.1. Selection of key indicators

- How do pupils address the constraints of “basic” grammatical norms: layout of the text, punctuation and capital letters, elementary syntax of the sentence, lexical spelling, nominal and verbal morphology? Are mistakes a sign of a concern for norms or random control? This first series of very formal indicators corresponds to the control of “gesture”, space and elementary codes.
- How can “text enriching” through rewriting bring about either disruptions or complex but risky writing processes?
- How are the constraints of “basic” discursive norms addressed? We will more particularly focus on the characteristic phenomena of the genres mentioned – for example, the processing of anaphora and the relations between characters, the ways to represent time, and discursive heterogeneity.

81 The first indicators will be little scrutinised as they are very familiar to teachers and easily identifiable. We will only make a few comments based on the compositions of pupils in *6e*.

#### 3.2. Irregular, chaotic development in the various fields observed

82 Pupils in difficulty struggle to control basic norms when they are fully engaged in a task of a higher degree of semantic and symbolic complexity.

83 If we focus on how right and wrong forms are distributed, the set of texts 1 and 2 shows a very staid level for Lise. On the other hand, the mastery of punctuation and spelling gets worse in Jamy's second text in which he cannot solve the enunciative perspective or the abundance of semantic and symbolic contents. His control procedures clearly deteriorate when other fields of meaning are at work. Both pupils seek to dramatize the situation through description: selection of specific lexicon and repetitions for Lisa (*le champignon grossit, grossit, grossit*) and literary ternary rhythm for Jamy (*les rivières débordées, le Moulin écrasé par terre, les falaises tombées*) but his creativity is not without mistakes: shifting to the stage of writing processes<sup>26</sup> cannot be mistake-free.



### 3.3. Time rendering: writing processes that are never evaluated

84 Giving the illusion of passing time is one of the challenges of fictional narratives and proof of entry into written narrative behaviours. Have the two pupils under scrutiny developed new competences?

85 In addition to the temporal identification through verb tenses, Lisa used a large variety of procedures in her first text to mark chronology, simultaneity, duration, distant past, near future, punctual dimension, the beginning, the end and how characters experience time: in the past (*autrefois...*) for decades (*depuis des décennies...*) one day (*un jour...*) his wife expected him (*sa femme l'attendait...*) then (*alors...*) he stayed the whole day (*il resta toute la journée...*) the following day (*le lendemain...*) as soon as the sun rose (*dès que le soleil se leva...*) a war will break out (*une guerre va éclater...*) more than 200 years (*plus de 200 ans...*) Clad kept (*Clad continuait à...*). In her second text, each sentence provides an even more modalised and elaborate time marker: *Tout cela aurait pu continuer longtemps*. She can also narrate simply juxtaposed actions to accelerate rhythm.

86 Jamy has made considerable progress. In his first composition, he simply marked chronology while in the second he managed to render the beginning, duration, succession and the end to dramatize the event: three days ago (*voilà trois jours...*) for three days (*depuis trois jours...*) I keep walking (*je continue de marcher...*) for a whole day (*pendant 1 jour entière...*) one more day (*un jour de plus...*) once again (*encore...*) the storm stopped (*la tempête s'arrêta...*) I set off to meet my parents (*je parties rejoindre mes parents*)

### 3.4. Text enriching and the construction of complex norms by trial and error

87 When rewriting is not limited to revising, the text is enriched. It consists in a deep qualitative transformation<sup>27</sup> that involves linguistic uses and the implementation of increasingly complex phrastic or textual norms. When looking back on text 6, we realise Khamel has indeed completed this process: he lengthened the passing of time, added characters, gave more details about the relations between characters and more explicit topics and values. However linguistic difficulties should not be overlooked. Overall, while some tasks (modalizing, comparing, adding adjectives) do not cause major linguistic problems, others require proceeding by trial and error and therefore cause transitory mistakes. These **risky zones** also differ according to text genres.

88 That's why an analysis of mistakes is required to work as much as possible in the right direction and on the right subjects. In some cases, it is necessary to give fiction the time to unfold in rewritings before starting specific work on technical competences (for example, punctuation, connectors, and substitutes).

## Conclusion

89 Our evaluation model is not focused on the skills shown in completed texts but on indicators of the development of pupils as singular subjects who write and learn. It allows to have access to what is taught and learnt through multiple factors.

90 Such a model involves raising differently the question of reviewing texts: what follow-up to a draft text can be envisaged, what detours should be taken to put pupils back to work on their texts? It takes significant and difficult breaks with a number of professional gestures anchored in didactical doxa and professional deontology.

91 **1.** Is it necessary to correct everything, nothing or simply read pupils' texts to identify how they handle these challenging stages and then invent a new writing instruction that will compel them to change posture, modify their engagement in the task towards solving writing problems of a higher degree of complexity? Is it necessary to read to simply listen to what they are saying or read to find what new cultural contributions, what other experiences should be introduced to modify their texts?

92 Is it possible to leave a text aside and consider it a mere working text to be used as a matrix for following texts? This text would raise key issues and topics around to which cultural outputs, meetings and the texts of others will contribute. Therefore it is urgent to ask pupils to write

texts and not make corrections. The analysis of the workbooks that include pupils' daily written texts shows a significant development of the relation to norms among many pupils regardless of the progress of notions worked during "grammar lessons"<sup>28</sup>.

93 **2.** Should pupils be requested to review and correct their texts with a view to appropriating formal norms or should pupils' singularity, creativity be developed? In the first case, the focus is on knowledge and models. In the second, what is sought is sense making for individuals who are helped to become authors. How then is it possible to combine these two conflicting challenges – learning and applying socially and historically designed norms on the one hand and the singular appropriation of these practices and knowledge on the other hand? In the first case, the focus is on reducing or eliminating the gaps against norms while in the second, emerging or approximative knowledge such as enunciative or temporal problems for example are considered positive.

94 Therefore the dilemma is to determine when it is necessary to impose norms.

95 What is sure is that language develops only if it is in connection with ideas, imagination, knowledge, speakers. But at the same time, reflexivity and language creativity need some routinisation of control procedures (thesis of cognitive overload).

96 **3.** Another dilemma is to know how to dissociate the work on language from the development of subjects, their thoughts, affects when everything is in motion simultaneously?

97 The texts studied clearly show that sense-making for pupils is closely connected with their relations to norms and their degree of subjective and pragmatic involvement in the situation. As these elements are neither foreseeable nor linear, then what is the right procedure to untangle the knot?

98 Dissociating these problems or fields as it is done in step by step approaches is really fruitful only for good pupils who can recompose or integrate them in the following writing assignments. In other words, the didactical paradox we are faced with is that evaluation involves dissociating these different levels of reflexivity to which language contributes<sup>29</sup> and bearing in mind that their development requires their association. What is advised is to reconfigure them cleverly through series of successive instructions.

99 Finally, we and teachers in educational priority areas sought to promote a few simple (and not always original) didactical principles that proved effective:

1. First principle: pupils make progress only if they are invited to excel through new, non-repetitive and highly demanding work. They go one step further only if they have material to work on.
2. Second principle: *review* and *gradual changes* take time, continuity and a space of shared dialogue to make progress
3. Third principle: the significant contribution of culture and knowledge to spur the intelligence, emotion, imagination, cognitive and psycho-affective involvement of pupils and equip them with language and cultural resources to be reused. It is the very role of debates, outings, readings and lessons.
4. Fourth principle: bringing pupils to engage and disengage in their work towards building a distanced and objectivised relation to studied topics, their contexts and various school knowledge and languages.

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### Notes

- 1 Originally published in *Repères*, 26/27, 2002-2003, 123-148
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- 20 Writing is indeed a highly complex cognitive task because of the multiple – linguistic, enunciative, pragmatic and cultural – codes at play and the various semantic and cognitive operations. This complexity cannot be denied. Initiation to writing means developing new cognitive and language abilities. Children do not learn to write words, then sentences and finally texts. Children are immediately confronted with the complexity of thinking and communicating in writing, which is quite different from speaking. However, all these writing operations are of a varying degree of difficulty and do not raise the same problems.
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### **Pour citer cet article**

#### Référence électronique

Dominique Bucheton et Jean-Charles Chabanne, « Another look at pupils' pieces of writing: evaluating differently », *Repères* [En ligne], Hors-série | 2013, mis en ligne le 12 septembre 2013, consulté le 04 septembre 2015. URL : <http://reperes.revues.org/502>

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### **Résumé**

The most common tools for the evaluation of writing today are designed to give pupils the means to measure the degree of conformity or deviancy of their writings against various graphic, phrasal, textual, and discursive norms. In this regard, the markers are given by

reference social practices, whether they are those from the extra-curricular or the curricular environments. It is a precise and efficient tool for revising and normalising texts intended to be disseminated.