National Education Monitoring Project
Probe Study

An Analysis of the
Planning, Writing and Editing Skills
used in a NEMP Three Stage Writing Task
by year 4 and year 8 students.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this study

The national monitoring task frameworks developed by the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) have two key purposes. They provide a guideline structure for the development and selection of tasks which are then used as the basis for the analyses of students' knowledge, understandings and skills.

Constructing and communicating meaning in written forms for various purposes and audiences is the central organising theme of the NEMP writing framework. The *understanding* aspect of the framework summarises important ideas about writing; the *purposes* aspect identifies why we write – to inform, to entertain and to persuade; the *skills* aspect lists necessary planning, composing, editing and presenting skills required to write; and the *motivation* aspect highlights the importance of motivation and attitude to writing.

The Writing Framework identifies several understandings relevant to the 1998 "My Place" task analysed, and the subsequent Trend tasks in 2002 and 2006:
- Writing is a process of thinking, drafting and reworking
- Conventions of writing are required for effective communication
- Writing is enriched by personal experience, knowledge and insights

The Framework also identifies the specific skills required by the task :
- Planning
- Composing
- Editing

The purpose of this probe study was to re-analyse a sample of the 1998 NEMP 'My Place' Writing Assessment data to examine students' ability to plan, compose and edit their writing. What evidence was there of student ability to implement these specific writing skills? How did the results differ between year 4 students and year 8 students? Was there evidence of gender differences in the use of these skills? Were different skills used by different ability groupings at each level?

The 1998 NEMP analysis was on the content of work – the vividness of language, relevance to the topic, clarity and detail, and personal feeling. Editing was considered only to the extension, insertion, re-ordering and exclusion of content. Proofreading was limited to punctuation and the use of paragraphs.

The 'English in the New Zealand Curriculum' highlights the importance of developing explicit knowledge of planning and editing steps involved in writing:

> In writing, they (the students) should develop an explicit knowledge of the steps in the writing process, such as forming intentions (planning), composing, drafting, correcting and publishing. They should learn to understand and use accurately the conventions of written language, especially in formal contexts, and to write confidently, clearly and appropriately, in a range of styles and for a variety of purposes. (Ministry of Education, 1994, p.33)

The author of this report believed that the data available from the 1998 Writing Assessment offered the opportunity to further analyse children's writing, particularly their ability to plan, write, and edit their work.

Background: Writing Assessment Results 1998
Flockton and Crooks (1999) summarised the following main findings from the writing assessment:

> The spelling and punctuation results revealed considerable scope for improvement at both age levels: few students made the most of the changes required, and some made very few correct changes along with several inappropriate ones. (Flockton & Crooks, 1999, p 5)

> Most students managed a relevant piece of writing, with about 25% more year 8 students than year 4 students gaining high scores for vividness, detail and communication of personal feeling. With no teacher feedback, comparatively little editing was done, except for punctuation. Spelling was not marked for this task, but attention to spelling paralleled attention to punctuation. (Flockton & Crooks, 1999, p 15)

The *Forum Comment* is published annually after the release of assessment results. A national forum of curriculum and assessment specialists, principals, teachers, advisors and representatives of national educational organisations reviewed the three reports on the 1998 assessment results. Their comments highlight what students are generally doing well, and those areas where improvements are desirable.

The following points were made in *Forum Comment (1999)*.

Many students were able to engage quickly in a writing task without preliminary motivation and guidance from a class teacher. Their independent writing under these conditions was considered impressive. There was evidence of considerable improvement in functional writing and spelling between year 4 and year 8. A fresh personal voice was apparent in numerous examples of children's writing.

Tasks that were clearly prescriptive of what children were to write were handled well. Where students saw a clear purpose or structure for their writing, they achieved better than in more open-ended writing tasks.

The *Forum Comment (1999) also* expressed a number of concerns. When students were provided with the opportunity to edit, there was a low frequency of self-correction in both meaning (sense) and surface features (punctuation and spelling). Boys were not achieving as well as girls in the majority of writing tasks, and there was a very wide range of writing ability. There were still concerns for the level of spelling ability at both levels, but more particularly at year 4.

The *Forum Comment (1999)* identified the following priorities for progress:
- Editing: Schools need to further develop teaching practices on such matters as error identification, self-correction of errors, vocabulary enrichment, development of a spelling conscience from an early age, and engaging in shared writing to provide good models.
- Developing a Sense of Audience: Students need more practice at sharing their writing with others in order to develop a sense of audience and clarity of communication.
- Gender Gap: We need to continue to encourage boys to take a more positive attitude towards writing. This could be done by investigating and choosing types of writing tasks boys find most engaging, inviting male writers to visit schools, and considering the kind of reading materials available to boys.
- Frequency of Writing: Students need more frequent practice at all forms of writing. The benefits of shared and guided writing should be recognised.

The 'My Place' Task

The task, 'My Place', required the students to produce a piece of personal writing. They were asked to plan and write a true story about a place that was special to them. Following the planning time on Day One and the spontaneous writing session on Day Two, the children were asked to check and correct their work on Day 3. It was at this stage that an understanding of the conventions of writing, such as spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and overall sense, would be used to proof and edit their work. It is their use of writing conventions that is the focus of this study. (See Appendix 2 for a detailed description of the 'My Place' task.)

The 'My Place' task focused on expressive writing in which the children were encouraged to write inventively within clear task guidelines.

> Characteristics sought included the ability to write coherently, to communicate personal feeling, to communicate stories or ideas vividly, and to follow conventions associated with particular forms of writing.

> (Flockton & Crooks, 1999, p 14).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research questions
The research questions that guided this study related to the students' ability to plan, write and edit a piece of personal writing over three days. The main research questions were supplemented with sub-questions.

Research questions	Sub-questions
Part 1 Effective Planning What planning strategies were used by year 4 and year 8 students for expressive writing tasks?	Was there a strategy? What was it?
Part 2 Linkage to Writing Was the planning process reflected in and used to structure the writing exercise?	Was the Day 1 planning used? Was there any evidence of editing and proof reading during the Day Two writing?
How much writing was completed in the time available?	Was the 'My Place' topic maintained? Was the content factual?
Part 3 Editing and Proof Reading What evidence was there of editing and proof reading?	What changes did students make in spelling; punctuation; grammar and making sense?
What was the accuracy of editing and proof reading?	What proportion of the editing and proof reading corrections (that should have been made) were correctly identified by students?
Part 4 Completion of the Task To what extent were the students able to complete the planning, writing and editing tasks in the time available?	Was the task completed in the time available?

Materials for analysis

The Educational Assessment Research Unit (EARU) at the University of Otago and the Unit for Studies in Educational Assessment (USEE) at the University of Canterbury supplied the following materials for this study.

- The task instructions;
- The marking schedule;
- A copy of the video depicting a collection of 'special places' that was shown prior to the planning session;
- Six random scripts: one from each ability grouping at each year level; and
- 171 scripts (92 year 4 and 79 year 8 students).

Defining the ability groups

All archived student responses retained from the first cycle of NEMP (1995-1998) were available for analysis in this study. This represented a randomly selected 25% sample of the original NEMP sample.

Three ability groups of students (low, medium and high) were established. The achievement status of each 'My Place' task response had been calculated by EARU. The content of work had been marked on four criteria – vividness of language (description/imagery); relevance to topic; amount of detail; and communication of feeling. Each criterion was marked using a 4 point scale, for example, as follows:

Vividness (use of language, imagery)

4 - Extremely rich and vivid description
3 - Good vivid description
2 - Some elements well described
1 - No or very little description

The total mark across all criteria was calculated and formed the basis for grouping students into three ability groups (low, medium and high) at each year level. The groups were defined as follows:

Year 4   Low (0-3)   Medium (4-5)   High (6-11)
Year 8   Low (0-4)   Medium (5-7)   High (8-12)

Examples of students' writing in each of these ability groupings is in **Appendix 1**.

Characteristics of the sample

The characteristics of the 171 students used in this study are described in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1: The gender of students at year 4 and year 8

	year 4	year 8
Males	34	50
Females	45	42
Total	79	92

Table 2: The number of students in each ability grouping

	year 4	year 8
Low	34	26
Medium	21	38
High	24	28
Total	79	92

Marking and coding the scripts

NEMP assessed the extent and type of editing using three options – none, some, substantial. The aspects of editing assessed were – extension (continuation of storyline); insertion (adding to the content); reorganization (re-ordering the content); deletion (removal of content); paragraphing; (non-specified) punctuation; and proof reading changes.

A comprehensive coding sheet was prepared to capture the information required to answer the research questions. It included the scores for the above NEMP aspects of writing, in addition to a number of other criteria (Table 3).

Marking criteria

The following criteria and coding categories were developed for marking students' work.

Table 3: Marking criteria and coding categories

Criterion	Coding categories		

Part 1: Planning

Criterion			
Evidence of a planning strategy	None	Some	Substantial
Type of planning strategy employed	Brainstorm First Draft	Mind map Other	List

Part 2: Writing

Use of planning from day 1	Nil	Some	Substantial
Number of words written			
Evidence of proofing and editing	Yes	No	
Following instructions of task by:			
Keeping to topic	Yes	Partially	No
Fact and not fiction	Yes	Partially	No
Completion of tasks	Barely started Partially completed (began well) Nearly completed (needed conclusion) Completed (adequate) Well completed (planning evident, expressive, grammatical, conclusion)		

Part 3: Writing accuracy

Spelling	All mistakes and corrections were recorded		
Punctuation	Poor (>20 mistakes, little or no use of basic punctuation) Satisfactory (10-20 mistakes, basic understanding and moderate use) Appropriate (<10 mistakes, understanding and use mostly evident)		
Evidence of proofing			
Spelling	None	Some	Substantial
Punctuation	None	Some	Substantial
Sense	None	Some	Substantial
Sentence structure			
Simple sentence usage	Poor	Satisfactory	Appropriate
Compound sentence usage	Poor	Satisfactory	Appropriate
Use of non-sentences	Substantial	Some	Nil
Length of sentences	Inappropriate	Satisfactory	Appropriate

The coding categories were trialled with a sample of six scripts. A reliability check with a colleague after the initial six samples were coded led to several changes and refinements to the coding categories before progressing on to the remainder of the scripts. A separate punctuation sheet was the result of several more changes once coding began.

Cross-marking was also undertaken at the mid-point with six samples from year 4 and six from year 8. Two were selected from each ability group at each year level. One was a

random selection and the other was perceived as 'difficult to code'. A colleague undertook the cross-marking, subsequent discussion and consensus of opinion.

Data entry
Once the students' writing was coded, two students from the University of Canterbury entered the data for computer analysis.

RESULTS

The main findings of the study have been structured into three sections: Part A: Year 4 and year 8 comparisons; Part B: gender comparisons at year 4 and year 8; and Part C: comparisons of student ability at year 4 and year 8. Each of these parts of the report considers the planning, composing/drafting, and writing accuracy of the "My Place' writing task.

Part A: Comparisons between Year 4 and Year 8 students' writing

1. Planning

The first day of the NEMP writing assessment (Day One – 5 minutes) involved students thinking and planning. A black and white video was shown to set the focus for the concept of 'special places'. Its intention was to encourage the students to think about places that were special to them. After viewing the video, the students were asked to plan their ideas, noting down their thoughts but not to start writing.

Themes: Most students planned to write about their immediate or home environment i.e. what they knew best or were familiar with. Given that the writing was to be 'true, not make-believe', this was possibly inevitable. Forty-five percent of year 4 students planned to write about their own room or house, compared with 37% of year 8 students. Nearly 40% of year 8 students planned to write about a combination of special places, while 26% of the year 4 sample used a combination of places in their planning. In both year groups, the other topics were all under 10%. They ranged from 6% (leisure) to 3% (relative or friend's house and holidays) at year 4, and 8% (outdoors) to 1% (relative or friend's house) at year 8.

Planning Strategy: The vast majority of students at both levels employed some form of strategy in the planning stage. There was only slightly less evidence of some form of strategy used at year 4 (95%) than at year 8 (99%).

Table 4: Percentage of students using a planning strategy by year group

	year 4	year 8
No Strategy	5	1
Some	60	50
Substantial	35	49

Type of Planning: The list method of planning dominated at both levels and may have been influenced by the instructions on Day One. After viewing the video, the students were asked to 'make a <u>list</u> of some of the ideas that you might write about' on the first page of their booklets. The second most popular form of planning at both levels brainstorming.

Table 5: Percentage of students using specific planning strategies by year group

	year 4	year 8
Brainstorm	22	36
Mind Map	8	7
List	42	41
First Draft	19	10
Other/Combination	9	6

2. Composing/Drafting

On the second day (Day Two – 20 minutes) the students were asked to write for twenty minutes about their special place, using the planning from Day One. The instructions clearly stated that the writing was to be true, not 'make-believe'. Hence, it was implied that they were to use their own first-hand experiences and knowledge of a special location for their writing.

Evidence of planning on Day Two: A high degree of planning was evident on Day Two, with 89% of year 4 and 98% of year 8 students showing some or substantial planning in their writing.

Table 6: Percentage of students' use of planning evident on Day Two by year group

	year 4	year 8
No Use	11	2
Some	55	68
Substantial	34	30

Amount of writing: Year 8 students wrote almost twice as much as year 4 students. The number of words written by year 4 students ranged from 25 words to 283 words, with a mean of 111 words. Year 8 students on the other hand wrote between 49 to 476 words, with a mean of 218 words.

Evidence of Proofing: In their Day Two writing 76% of year 8 students compared to 57% of year 4 students showed some evidence of proofing as they wrote on Day 2. Twenty-four percent of year 8 students and 43% of year 4 students showed no evidence of proofing their work.

Keeping to the Topic: Year 8 students were more consistent in keeping to their topic (88%). The remaining 12% kept partially to the topic and none wrote entirely off the topic. The year 4 students' writing was less focused, with 72% keeping to their topic, 7% partially on topic, and the remaining 21% not keeping to their topic.

Table 7: Percentage of students keeping to the topic by year group

	year 4	year 8
Yes	72	88
Partially	7	12
No	21	0

Factual content: The students were told that their writing 'should be true, not make-believe', and were reminded of this on Day Two. The writing was determined to be untrue when it was clearly fanciful. Ninety-two percent of the year 4 students and 94% of the year 8 students followed the instruction and wrote factual stories. The remainder of students at each level either did partially (year 4 – 3% and year 8 – 4%), or didn't at all (year 4 – 5% and year 8 – 2%).

Completion of the Task in the Time Available: All the year 8 students 'nearly completed', 'completed' or 'completed their writing to a high standard' compared to 93% of the year 4 students.

Table 8: Completion of the task in the available time (percent by year group)

	year 4	year 8
Barely Started	2	0
Partially Completed	5	0
Nearly Completed	23	11
Completed	51	56
Well Completed	19	33

Relationship between planning and writing themes: Fifty-eight percent of the year 4 students wrote about their own room/home. The other topics were all under 10% of the sample, ranging from 1% who wrote about the NEMP video to 10% who used a combination of themes. The spread of themes was more varied at year 8. Forty-six percent wrote about their home environment. The spread of other topics was from 2% (school) to 16% (outdoors).

As Table 9 illustrates, there was some divergence at both year 4 and year 8, from what had been planned. Although 39% of year 4 students planned to write about their own house and environs, 52% actually wrote about this theme. Twenty-six percent of year 4 students planned to write about a combination of themes, but only ten percent actually completed this. The biggest change with year 8 students was also with the combination of themes; although 40% planned, only 10% completed writing about a combination of themes. It is possible that students used their planning day to canvas a range of ideas from which one was chosen for writing about on the subsequent day.

Table 9: Relationship between planning and writing (percent by year group)

	year 4		year 8	
THEME	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Own Room	6	6	11	16
Own House/Environs	39	52	26	30
Relative/Friend's House	3	5	1	4
Outdoors	5	8	8	16
Farm	5	5	2	3
Holidays	3	4	7	9
Leisure/Sport/Entertainment/Retail	6	6	5	10
Combination	26	10	40	10
NEMP Video Reference	4	1	0	0
School	0	0	0	2
No Record	3	3	0	0

3. Writing accuracy

The third day (Day Three – 10 minutes) was for the students to take time to check their work and make changes or improvements. A dictionary was supplied.

Spelling: All spelling mistakes and student corrections were noted and then counted to achieve the figures presented below. A detailed analysis of spelling records from the task could be a worthwhile extension to this study.

Table 10: Average number of spelling errors and corrections by year group

	year 4	year 8
Day 2 Writing		
Numbers of Errors at the end of Day 2	9.5	7.2
Day 3 Proofing		
Missed Errors	8.5	6.4
Corrections	2.3	2.9
Incorrect Corrections	1.1	.7

Punctuation: The checking of basic punctuation appropriate to the 'My Place' task was limited to the use of capital letters, full stops, commas and apostrophes. Given the topic instructions, the use of direct and indirect speech and question marks was not anticipated.

For coding purposes the following punctuation guidelines, sourced from *English Basics* by Tania Roxburgh & Jenny Thomas (1999), were adhered to:

Capital Letters are used at the beginning of a sentence; as the first letter of a proper noun; in abbreviations and acronyms and for the word 'I'.

Full stops are used to show the end of a sentence. This is done so that the reader can assimilate what the sentence has conveyed, and to separate sentences so they make sense.

Commas are used to mark a short pause in reading to help make a sentence make sense, to divide items in a sentence and to insert information into a sentence. They are also used to separate items in a list.

Apostrophes have two main purposes. One is to show ownership or possession where an apostrophe is used to replace 'of ' e.g. the shoes of the man– the man's shoes. The other is to show where one or more letters have been omitted in a contraction e.g. have not – haven't.

Overall year 4 students performed better in their use of punctuation than year 8 students. Eighty-seven percent of the year 4 students used punctuation of a satisfactory or better standard. Disappointingly, this slipped to 77% at year 8 where one would have hoped for a more assured usage of the simple punctuation assessed.

Table 11: Student punctuation (percent by year group)

	year 4	year 8
Appropriate	41	24
Satisfactory	46	53
Poor	13	23

A combination of the amount of writing completed, the mistake tally and professional judgement was used to code punctuation usage. 'Appropriate' generally had less than 10 mistakes and displayed a sound understanding of punctuation; 'satisfactory' had between

10 and 20 mistakes and a basic understanding; and 'poor' over 20 mistakes and weak or little understanding of punctuation usage.

Sentence Structure: This section of the study highlighted that there was considerable scope for teaching the basics of sentence structure at both levels. The art of 'building a sentence' correctly appears to have been lost, or never learnt, by more than half the children assessed.

Both simple and compound sentences were analysed using the following descriptions:

> Simple Sentences: A group of words, including a subject, object and verb, that makes sense on their own.

> Compound Sentences: Two or more simple sentences joined together with a conjunction.

Some fifty years ago, H.D. Bradbury wrote the following in his school text *Standard English*, *Second Series, Book Two:*

> …some sentences are short and simple; others are long and involved. Both have their special uses, and we should be wise to practice the use of both in our writing. (Bradbury, 1954, p 7)

> In a short simple sentence, the proper order of the words usually presents little difficulty. A long sentence, however, made up of many phrases and clauses, may easily become loose and clumsy in structure if care is not taken to arrange its various parts in the best way. (Bradbury, 1954, p 42)

As the table 12 below shows, at year 4 level, 68% of the students were able to construct simple sentences satisfactorily, but 32% showed a poor understanding of a simple sentence. However, by year 8, 81% of students were able to demonstrate either appropriate or satisfactory usage of simple sentences.

Table 12: Student use of simple sentences (percent by year group)

	year 4	year 8
Appropriate	17	40
Satisfactory	51	41
Poor	32	19

Although just over half the year 4 students demonstrated a satisfactory use of compound sentences, just 8% were able to use compound sentences appropriately. At the year 8 level, 44% showed adequate usage, but 28% demonstrated that they were able to use a more complex sentence structure appropriately.

Table 13: Student use of compound sentences (percent by year group)

	year 4	year 8
Appropriate	8	28
Satisfactory	51	44
Poor	41	28

Non-Sentences: A sentence is more than a collection of words that begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop. It must include an understandable sequence of words. Generally, this means including a subject (a person or thing doing an action), a verb (some action) and, sometimes, an object (predicate) (someone or something reacting against the action).

e.g. The boy (subject) sang (verb).

The boy (subject) sang (verb) a song (object).

A non-sentence, for the purpose of this study, is a collection of words that do not adhere to this description, or simply does not make sense.

Non-sentences occurred at both levels in significant numbers with slightly more at year 8 level (see table 14). Sixty-nine percent of the year 4 students and 72% of the year 8 students used some non-sentences in their writing which indicates a limited understanding of correct sentence structure.

Table 14: Student use of non-sentences (percent by year group)

	year 4	year 8
Nil	31	28
Some	51	60
Substantial	18	12

Sentence Length: There was a low percentage of appropriate sentence length at both levels, with only 13% of year 4, and 30% of year 8 students mastering this. Excessive sentence length was linked closely with non-sentence usage. A general lack of understanding of basic sentence structure was shown by the high percentage of students using inappropriate, and usually lengthy sentences and non-sentences.

Table 15: Student use of sentence length (percent by year group)

	year 4	year 8
Appropriate	13	30
Satisfactory	52	48
Inappropriate	35	22

Do children recognize correct sentence structure? If they do, these results also indicate a lack of proofing for sense (reading over their work to see if it 'sounds right'). The study has highlighted a need for sentence structure to be taught, understood and modelled at all levels.

Proofing for Sense: Initially, this section was coded globally under the headings of nil, some and substantial evidence of proofing for sense. It was found that almost all students proofed for global sense with 93% in year 4 and 95% in year 8.

Table 16: Student use of proofing for sense (percent by year group)

	year 4	year 8
Nil	7	5
Some	82	86
Substantial	11	9

However, it quickly became apparent that three types of proofing were being utilized – sense, spelling and punctuation – and that it was necessary to note which was being used in each script (sometimes one, two or all).

At year 4, 25% of the sample proofed for **sense**, 85% for **spelling** and 32% for **punctuation.** At year 8, 52% of the sample proofed for **sense**, 72% for **spelling** and 54% for **punctuation.**

Spelling was the most common, and possibly the easiest, proofing mechanism used at both levels.

Summary:

Harry Hood (1997) in *Left to Write Too – Developing Effective Written Language Programmes for Young Learners* emphasises the importance of proofing, revision, or self-correction as a writing strategy.

> What do readers do when they lose meaning? …they re-read (re-run) and self-correct…these same strategies are equally important during writing…good writers re-run and self-correct when they lose meaning. This self-correction is called revision. Why do some children not use self-correction? – The meaning is obvious to them; they are not considering the reader; they are not asking questions of their text; they don't know how to go about it; it has not been part of their instruction, therefore it has not become a matter of routine; some teachers encourage the use of revision, others are not interested. (p11-12)

The majority of students at both levels used some form of planning strategy (95% at year 4 and 99% at year 8). Lists, followed by brainstorming, were the types most commonly used.

The actual use of a planning strategy to structure a writing task increased from year 4 to year 8 (89% to 98%). The amount of writing (word count) also increased considerably from year 4 to year 8.

A general lack of self-correction during the Day Two writing process was evident with 43% at year 4 and 24% at year 8 appearing to make no effort to proof and edit their work.

Spelling was the most common proofing method used at both levels.The average number of spelling errors were similar (9.5 at year 4 and 7.2 at year 8).

The year 4 sample showed greater attention in their use of basic punctuation. Disappointingly, there was 10% drop from year 4 to year 8 in appropriate punctuation usage.

There is considerable scope for improvement in the ability to construct sentences.. The use of non-sentences was significant at both levels with slightly higher usage at year 8 level. Inappropriate sentence length was also evident at both levels with only 13% of year 4's and 30% of year 8's writing appropriately.

Part B: Gender comparisons of year 4 and year 8 students' writing

One of the concerns mentioned in the *Forum Comment July 1999* was that boys are not achieving as well as girls in the majority of (writing) tasks and their attitudes to writing are not as positive and that these gaps need to be addressed in schools and in research.'

This study reanalysed the 1998 data of student writing about 'My Place' with a focus on student planning, writing and editing. The finding of this report, analysing the data by gender, confirmed the results of the 1998 study that year 4 and year 8 girls performed, on average, higher than boys at both levels.

1. Planning

Themes: The majority of boys and girls at both levels planned to write about their own homes, or were considering a number of themes (a combination).

Planning Strategy: Most students, both boys and girls, used some form of strategy in planning their writing.

Table 17: Percentage of students using a planning strategy by gender

	year 4 boys	year 4 girls	year 8 boys	year 8 girls
No Strategy	6	5	0	2
Some	73	50	60	37
Substantial	21	45	40	61

Type of Planning: Making a list dominated the planning of both genders at year 4. This was repeated at year 8 for boys and was the second most popular planning strategy, after brainstorming, used by girls. Eighty percent of year 8 boys and 70% of year 4 boys used either lists or brainstorming as their strategies of choice. Although girls also used these strategies, a higher percentage of girls than boys used their first drafts as a planning tool for their writing.

Table 18: Percentage of students using specific planning strategies by gender

	year 4 boys	year 4 girls	year 8 boys	year 8 girls
List	43	41	46	34
Brainstorm	27	18	34	39
First Draft	15	23	6	15
Mind Map	9	7	6	7
Other	6	11	8	5

2. Composing and Drafting

Use of Planning: At both levels, girls used their planning slightly more than boys. The effective use of planning improved markedly by year 8 with girls (100%) and boys (96%) making some or substantial use of their planning from Day One.

Table19: Percentage of student's planning evident on Day Two by gender

	year 4 boys	year 4 girls	year 8 boys	year 8 girls
No Use	12	11	4	0
Some Use	59	51	70	66
Substantial	29	38	26	34

Amount of Writing: On average, girls wrote more than boys at both levels, marginally more at year 4 level, but considerably more so at year 8.

Year 4 boys   Minimum: 25 words   Maximum: 232 words   Mean: 108 words
Year 4 girls   Minimum: 32 words   Maximum: 283 words   Mean: 113 words

Year 8 boys   Minimum: 49 words   Maximum: 476 words   Mean: 188 words
Year 8 girls   Minimum: 83 words   Maximum: 454 words   Mean: 256 words

Evidence of Proofing: During Day Two of the writing task, there was evidence that more girls proofed their work at year 4 level, but more year 8 level boys than girls proofed their work.   Proofing during the initial writing process improved by nearly 30% for boys between year 4 and year 8, whereas girls only improved by 10%.

Table 20: Percentage of evidence of proofing during the writing process by gender

	year 4 boys	year 4 girls	year 8 boys	year 8 girls
Yes	52	61	80	71
No	48	39	20	29

Keeping to the Topic: Both genders remained well focused on their topic at year 8. At year 4, both girls (30%) and boys (27%) deviated markedly, either partially or completely, from their chosen theme.

Table 21: Percentage of students keeping to the topic by gender

	year 4 boys	year 4 girls	year 8 boys	year 8 girls
Yes	73	70	88	88
Partially	24	18	12	12
No	3	12	0	0

Factual Content: A high percentage of students wrote true accounts of their special place. The instructions were very clear, on both Day One and Day Two, that their writing should be true not make-believe, and most followed those instructions

Table 22: Percentage of students maintaining factual content by gender

	year 4 boys	year 4 girls	year 8 boys	year 8 girls
Yes	91	93	92	95
Partially	6	2	4	5
No	3	5	4	0

Completion of Task in the Time Available: All year 8 students nearly completed, completed or completed their writing well. The completion rate was slightly lower at year 4 with boys (91%) and girls (94%).

Table 23: Completion of the task in the time available (percent by gender)

	year 4 boys	year 4 girls	year 8 boys	year 8 girls
Barely Started/Partially completed	9	6	0	0
Nearly Completed	20	25	18	2
Completed/Well Completed	71	69	82	98

Relationship between planning and writing themes: The table shows the movement from contemplating a number of themes during the planning stage on Day 1 (planned) to a definite writing theme (actual) on Day Two. There was evidence that more boys than girls reduced their writing to a single theme once ideas formulated.

Table 24: Relationship between planning and writing (percent by gender)

		year 4				year 8		
	boys		girls		boys		girls	
THEMES	plan	act	plan	act	plan	act	plan	act
Own Room	3	0	9	11	10	18	12	12
Own House	38	56	40	49	24	23	29	40
Relative/Friend's House	6	9	0	2	0	2	2	7
Outdoors	3	3	7	11	10	18	5	12
Farm	8	9	2	2	4	6	0	0
Holidays	3	3	2	5	8	10	5	7
Leisure/Sport/Entertain/Retail	9	12	5	2	6	13	5	7
Combination	24	2	28	11	38	8	42	12
NEMP Video Ref.	0	0	7	2	0	0	0	0
School	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
No Record	6	0	0	6	0	0	0	0

3. Writing accuracy

Spelling: As table 25 shows, the number of corrections made on Day 3 of the exercise were similar for girls and boys, although year 8 girls missed fewer errors than the boys.

Table 25: Average number of spelling errors and corrections by gender

	year 4	year 4	year 8	year 8
	boys	girls	boys	girls
Day 2 Writing				
Numbers of Errors	9.5	9.4	8.0	6.0
Day 3 Proofing				
Missed Errors	8.7	8.1	7.3	5.4
Corrections	2.3	2.2	2.8	3.2
Incorrect Corrections	.8	1.3	.8	.7

Punctuation: The evaluation of punctuation focused on four areas of basic punctuation usage – capital letters, full stops, commas and apostrophes as outlined previously. It is surprising to find that more boys at year 4 than year 8 were using appropriate punctuation; 49% compared to 26%. The writing was coded to have been punctuated 'appropriately', 'satisfactorily' or 'poorly' depending on the number of mistakes prior to proofing and editing on Day 3.

Table 26: Student punctuation (percent by gender)

	year 4	year 4	year 8	year 8
	boys	girls	boys	girls
Appropriate	49	33	26	22
Satisfactory	31	56	48	59
Poor	20	11	26	19

Sentence Structure: Twenty percent of the boys and 18% of the girls in the sample at year 8 are showed little or no evidence of consistently using simple sentences in their writing.

Table 27: Student use of simple sentences (percent by gender)

	year 4	year 4	Year 8	year 8
	boys	girls	boys	girls
Appropriate	18	16	38	41
Satisfactory	44	57	49	41
Poor	38	27	20	18

The correct usage of compound sentences was limited at Year 4 with 53% of boys and 62% of girls demonstrating that they were capable of formulating them to an appropriate or satisfactory level. Forty-seven percent of boys and 38% of girls at year 4 were either not able to construct a compound sentence, or constructed them incorrectly.

At the year 8 level, 70% of boys and 73% of girls were able to construct a compound sentence. Nevertheless, it is still concerning that 29% of boys and 27% of girls at this level recorded a poor understanding of how to write compound sentences.

Table 28: Student use of compound sentences (percent by gender)

		year 4		year 8
	boys	girls	boys	girls
Appropriate	14	2	31	24
Satisfactory	39	60	39	49
Poor	47	38	29	27

Non-Sentences: There was a high percentage (around 70%) of 'some' or 'substantial use' of non-sentences by both genders and at both levels. At year 4, 68% of boys and 72% of girls were using inappropriate sentence structure in their writing. At year 8, 73% of boys and 71% of girls were doing this, which raises the questions of whether students recognize correct sentence structure and are proofing written work to see if it makes sense.

Table 29: Student use of non-sentences (percent by gender)

	year 4	year 4	year 8	year 8
	boys	girls	boys	girls
Nil	32	28	27	29
Some	53	51	61	59
Substantial	15	21	12	12

Sentence Length: The use of excessively long sentences was noted at the year 4 level; by boys (39%) and girls (34%). Fewer year 8 students used excessively long sentences, but this practice was more common in boys' writing - 26% compared to 17% of girls writing.

Table 30: Student use of sentence length (percent by gender)

	year 4	year 4	year 8	year 8
	boys	girls	boys	girls
Appropriate	14	13	31	29
Satisfactory	47	53	43	54
Inappropriate	39	34	26	17

Proofing for Sense: The samples of writing were examined for evidence of overall or global proofing for spelling mistakes, missing or extra punctuation and whether or not the writing 'made sense'. As Table 31 shows, there was little difference in the global proofing between genders at either level.

Table 31: Students proofing for sense (percent by gender)

	year 4 boys	year 4 girls	year 8 boys	year 8 girls
None	5	5	3	6
Some	86	82	80	83
Substantial	9	13	17	11

A further analysis of the writing was done to examine how often each method of proofing was used. Overall, there was little difference in types of proofing between genders, but at year 8 girls proofed for punctuation at a higher rate than boys – 69% compared to 46%.

Table 32 Percentage of types of proofing used by gender

	year 4 boys	year 4 girls		year 8 boys	year 8 girls
Sense	25%	23%		52%	56%
Spelling	92%	81%		70%	79%
Punctuation	33%	28%		46%	69%

Spelling was the most common form of proofing used by both levels. The low level of proofing for sense continues to be highlighted as a concern.

Summary

Both genders used some form of planning strategy for their writing. Boys showed strength in planning their writing, particularly in using lists. Once planning was completed, girls used planning strategies more consistently than the boys.

Girls wrote marginally more at year 4 (Mean 113-girls; 108-boys) but considerably more at year 8 (Mean 256 –girls; boys-188).

There was a bigger improvement from year 4 to year 8 in boys overall proofing methods during the Day Two Writing (52% to 80%) compared to girls (61% to 71%). At year 4 the boys' level of proofing on Day 3 was higher than that of year 4 girls. However, the significant drop in appropriate use of punctuation between year 4 and year 8 boys is a concern (49% to26%).

Girls displayed a better understanding of sentence construction than boys at year 4 but the year 8 results were similar. At year 8, 20% of the boys and 18% of the girls showed little or no evidence of consistently using simple sentences in their writing. It is concerning that 29% of boys and 27% of girls at this level also recorded a poor understanding of how to write compound sentences.

There was a high percentage of non-sentence usage by both genders at both levels. (68% of boys and 72% of girls at year 4. 73% of boys and 71% of girls at year 8) indicating a lack of understanding of sentence structure and proofing for sense.

Part C: Comparisons of writing ability between year 4 and year 8 students

This study used the same ability groups as the initial NEMP 1999 study. The criteria used to place the scripts into the three ability groups (low, medium and high) is outlined under 'Defining the Ability Groups' on Page 7.

1. Planning

Themes: At year 4, the main themes each group planned to write about were their own home environment (L-42%, M-35%, H-37%) or a combination of several special places (L-24%, M-25%, H-29%). Leisure and sport featured with the mid group (15%) and the outdoors with the high group (12%). In their actual writing around half of the sample wrote about their own home (L-53%, M- 52%, H-50%) while the rest were spread over each of the remaining themes. The high achieving group chose to write about the outdoors in significant numbers (17%).

Year 8 planning was similar, with 'own home' (L-28%, M-29%, H-21%) and a combination (L-24%, M-53%, H-36%) scoring highly. In the low ability group 20% planned to write about their own room, while the high ability group indicated that 14% would write about their own room and 14% about the outdoors. In their actual writing, 48% of the low ability group wrote about their room or house, and 24% about a combination of places. In the mid ability group 43% wrote about their room or home, and 21% about the outdoors. In the high ability group, 48% wrote about their own room or home, followed by 19% writing about the outdoors.

Planning Strategy: Most students of all ability groupings showed evidence of using a planning strategy in their writing.

Table 32: Percentage of students using a planning strategy by ability group

	year 4				year 8		
	low	mid	high		low	mid	high
No Strategy	6	5	4		0	0	3
Some	76	65	33		72	45	36
Substantial	18	30	63		28	55	61

Type of Planning: At year 4, lists dominated the low and mid ability groupings while there was an even spread of brainstorming, lists and first drafts with the high ability group. The high ability group was more likely to use a first draft for planning. However, by year 8 fewer high ability students used a first draft for planning; they were more likely to use brainstorming and lists for planning.

Table 33: Percentage of students using specific planning strategies by ability group

	year 4				year 8		
	low	medium	high		low	medium	high
Brainstorm	18	20	30		28	42	36
Mind Map	3	15	9		4	8	7
List	44	50	31		44	37	43
First Draft	20	5	30		12	8	11
Other	15	10	0		12	5	3

2. Composing and Drafting

Evidence of Planning on Day Two: Planning was used to some extent or substantially by all ability groups at both levels.

Table 34: Percentage of students' planning evident on Day Two by ability group

		year 4			year 8	
	low	mid	high	low	mid	high
No Use	12	14	8	4	3	0
Some Use	65	43	50	76	74	54
Substantial	23	43	42	20	23	46

Amount of Writing: As could be expected, the high ability groups at both levels wrote more than their peers in other ability groupings. The one area of note is at year 4 where the mid ability sample wrote considerably less than the low ability group.

year 4 **low** Minimum: 25 words Maximum: 232 words Mean: 108 words
mid Minimum: 32 words Maximum: 167 words Mean: 99 words
high Minimum: 50 words Maximum: 283 words Mean: 125 words

year 8 **low** Minimum: 49 words Maximum: 290 words Mean: 150 words
mid Minimum: 87 words Maximum: 454 words Mean: 214 words
high Minimum:168 words Maximum: 476 words Mean: 285 words

Evidence of Proofing: During the Day Two writing process there was evidence of proofing in the majority of ability groupings. Year 8 students of all ability groups were more likely to proof their work than were any of the year 4 ability groupings.

Table 35: Percentage of evidence of proofing by ability group

		year 4			year 8	
	low	mid	high	low	mid	high
Yes	47	63	67	76	68	86
No	53	37	33	24	32	14

Keeping to the Topic The year 8 sample all kept to their chosen topic, either completely as in the case of the high ability group, or a combination of completely or partially with the other two groups. The high and mid groups in the year 4 sample were able to maintain their chosen topic, but the lower group experienced some difficulties with this.

Table 36: Percentage of students keeping to the topic by ability group

		year 4			year 8	
	low	mid	high	low	mid	high
Yes	47	85	96	80	84	100
Partially	35	15	4	20	16	0
No	18	0	0	0	0	0

Factual Content: The instruction that the writing should be 'true, not make-believe' on Day One and Day Two was very clear. This was followed 100% by the mid ability group at Year 4 and the high ability group at Year 8.

Table 37: Percentage of students maintaining factual content by ability group

		year 4				year 8	
	low	mid	high		low	mid	high
Yes	89	100	92		92	90	100
Partially	8	0	4		8	5	0
No	3	0	4		0	5	0

Completion of the Task in the Time Available: It is interesting to note in Table 38, that the mid ability group were the highest group for completion of the task at both levels.

Table 38: Completion of task in time available (percent by ability group)

		year 4				year 8	
	low	medium	high		low	medium	high
Barely Started	6	0	0		0	0	0
Partially Completed	9	5	0		0	0	0
Nearly Completed	15	14	42		16	8	11
Completed	56	52	42		60	61	46
Well Completed	14	29	16		24	31	43
Completion of Task	70%	81%	58%		84%	92%	89%

Relationship between planning and writing themes:

Table 39: Relationship between planning and writing (percent by ability group)

year 4	low	low	mid	mid	high	high
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	actual
THEME						
Own Room	6	3	10	10	4	8
Own House	42	52	35	52	38	50
Relative/Friend's House	6	6	0	10	0	0
Outdoors	3	6	0	0	13	17
Farm	6	6	10	10	0	0
Holidays	0	0	0	4	8	8
Leisure/Sport/Entertain/Retail	3	6	15	10	4	4
Combination	24	12	25	4	29	13
NEMP Video Ref.	10	3	0	0	0	0
School	0	0	0	0	0	0
No Record	0	6	5	0	4	0

year 8	low	low	mid	mid	high	high
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	actual
THEME						
Own Room	20	24	3	11	14	15
Own House	28	24	28	32	21	33
Relative/Friend's House	0	0	0	5	4	7
Outdoors	8	4	3	21	14	19
Farm	4	4	3	5	0	0
Holidays	8	12	8	5	4	11
Leisure/Sport/Entertain/Retail	8	4	3	13	7	11
Combination	24	24	52	8	36	0
NEMP Video Ref.	0	0	0	0	0	0
School	0	4	0	0	0	4
No Record	0	0	0	0	0	0

3. Writing accuracy

Spelling: Table 40 highlights the increased frequency of the high ability grouping of year 8 students to identify and correct spelling mistakes.

Table 40: Average number of spelling errors and corrections by ability group

	year 4					year 8	
	low	mid	high		low	mid	high
Day 2 Writing							
Numbers of Errors	10.0	10.5	8.0		9.1	6.9	5.8
Day 3 Proofing							
Missed Errors	8.8	9.7	7.0		8.4	6.2	5.0
Corrections	2.4	2.0	2.6		2.0	3.0	3.8
Incorrect Corrections	1.3	0.9	1.0		0.8	0.8	0.7

Punctuation: The difference in appropriate or satisfactory usage of simple punctuation when divided into ability groups is notable. At year 4 the low ability group performs particularly well (100%), but this drops away markedly at year 8 (64%). The mid ability group also decreased from year 4 (81%) to 76% at year 8. At year 4, the high ability group performed worst in their use of punctuation. Overall fewer students at year 8 achieved appropriate use of punctuation, than those at year 4 level.

Table 41: Student punctuation (percent by ability group)

	year 4					year 8	
	low	mid	high		low	mid	high
Appropriate	48	48	25		16	26	28
Satisfactory	52	33	50		48	50	61
Poor	0	19	25		36	24	11

Sentence Structure: The students' writing showed a steady increase between ability groups and year levels for composing simple sentences

Table 42: Student use of simple sentences (percent by ability group)

	year 4					year 8	
	low	mid	high		low	mid	high
Appropriate	9	19	27		20	42	57
Satisfactory	53	48	50		40	42	39
Poor	38	33	23		40	16	4
Appropriate/ Satisfactory	62%	67%	77%		60%	84%	96%

Table 43, below, reveals a surprise with the year 4 mid ability group dropping below the low ability group in their appropriate or satisfactory use of compound sentences and creating a wide gap between the mid and high ability groups (28%).

Table 43: Student use of compound sentences (percent by ability group)

	year 4					year 8	
	low	mid	high		low	mid	high
Appropriate	6	10	9		16	33	36
Satisfactory	47	38	68		36	43	50
Poor	47	52	23		48	24	14

Appropriate/ Satisfactory	53%	48%	77%		52%	76%	86%

Non-Sentences: The use of non-sentences was high across all ability groupings. This use of non-sentences is disappointing, particularly when the definition of a sentence – an understandable sequence of words - is adhered to. It links closely to limited proof reading at both levels and at every ability level.

Table 44: Student use of non-sentences(percent by ability group)

		year 4				year 8	
	low	mid	high		low	mid	high
Nil	36	25	29		20	35	25
Some	39	55	63		60	51	71
Substantial	25	20	8		20	14	4
Nil Use of Non-Sentences	36%	25%	29%		20%	35%	25%
Some/Substantial Use of Non-Sentences	64%	75%	71%		80%	65%	75%

Sentence Length: Table 45 highlights the year 4 mid ability group, with only 57% writing appropriate or satisfactory sentences.

Table 45: Student use of sentence length (percent by ability group)

		year 4				year 8	
	low	mid	high		low	mid	high
Appropriate	15	5	17		16	30	43
Satisfactory	50	52	54		44	51	46
Poor	35	43	29		40	19	11
Appropriate/ Satisfactory	65%	57%	71%		60%	81%	89%

Proofing for Sense: Spelling was the most commonly used method of proofing at each level and ability grouping. It is notable that the year 4 low ability group and the year 8 middle ability group were the most diligent overall with proofing their work. The relatively low levels of proofing for sense at every level, but particularly with the high ability groups, is a concern.

Table 46: Student proofing for sense(percent by ability group)

		year 4				year 8	
	low	mid	high		low	mid	high
Nil	3	5	8		0	8	7
Some	79	81	83		92	84	82
Substantial	18	14	9		8	8	11

Table 47: Percentage of types of proofing by ability group

		year 4				year 8	
	low	mid	high		low	mid	high
Sense	32%	24%	17%		58%	54%	54%
Spelling	85%	81%	87%		68%	84%	68%
Punctuation	35%	29%	21%		52%	62%	54%

Summary

The difference in appropriate or satisfactory usage of simple punctuation when divided into ability groups is notable. Overall fewer students at year 8 achieved appropriate use of punctuation, than those at year 4 level.

Spelling was the most commonly used method of proofing at each level and ability grouping. It is notable that the year 4 low ability group and the year 8 middle ability group were the most diligent overall with proofing their work. The relatively low levels of proofing for sense at every level, but particularly with the high ability groups, is a concern.

The use of non-sentences was also high across all ability groupings. This use of non-sentences is disappointing, particularly when the definition of a sentence (an understandable sequence of words) is adhered to, and can be linked to limited proof reading at both levels and at every ability level.

In the low ability grouping, students' use of lists dominated planning at both levels. Although the low ability group rated highly (100%) in their use of punctuation at year 4 level, it dropped to 64% at year 8. Students in the low ability year 4 and year 8 had difficulty in keeping to a topic.

In the mid ability grouping most students at year 4 used lists for planning, and either lists or brainstorming at year 8. Both levels were the highest in completing the task competently in the time available but it is notable that compared to the other groups the year 4 mid ability group completed the least amount of writing. The mid ability group's use of appropriate punctuation decreased from 81% at year 4 to 76% at year 8. They also achieved a lower rating for appropriate sentence construction than their peers in the low ability group with only 57% writing appropriate or satisfactory sentences.

The high ability groupings used more planning strategies and were more competent in sentence structure at both year 4 and year 8 levels. They wrote significantly more than the other two groups. However, at year 4, the high ability group performed worst in their use of punctuation.

DISCUSSION

1998: Planning, composing and editing

An analysis of the 1998 'My Place' task revealed that almost all students used some form of planning strategy (95% at year 4 and 99% at year 8). Lists, followed by brainstorming, were the strategies most commonly used, but girls used planning strategies more consistently than the boys did. A general lack of self-correction during the Day Two writing process was evident with 43% at year 4 and 24% at year 8 students making no effort to proof and edit their work. The number of spelling errors were similar in the writing samples of year 4 and year 8 students. The year 4 students', particularly those in the low ability group, showed greater attention in their use of basic punctuation, than the year 8 students, indicating perhaps a greater focus by these students on surface features of writing. High ability students, on the other hand demonstrated good use of a range of planning strategies, and a higher competence in sentence structure. The author of this report believes that there was considerable scope for improvement in planning composing and editing at both levels.

2002: Planning, composing and editing

In 2002, the fourth year of the second cycle of national monitoring, the writing, listening and viewing components of the English Curriculum were assessed for the second time. In each of the cycles there has been a similar expressive writing task over three days. In 1998 it was 'My Place', in 2002 a Link Task and in 2006 'A Day I'll Never Forget'. This allows for the comparison of data between 1998, 2002 and 2006.

The most outstanding result involved gender comparisons. Although the proportion of tasks where year 4 boys performed worse than year 4 girls decreased from 79% in 1998 to 39% in 2002, girls out-performed boys on 88% of the year 8 tasks. At both levels, girls also showed a more positive attitude towards writing.

The Forum Comment July 2003 noted
- It will help to build students' knowledge of writing conventions and formats if a broad range of writing experiences are offered to them.
- Ensuring that students have adequate background knowledge to support their writing, and a specific focus or purpose for a particular piece of writing.
- To encourage the incremental improvement of important writing skills, students need to be provided with regular modelling and oral feedback.
- Students will benefit from the strengthening of teachers' personal skills and understanding of written English and its conventions.

2006: Planning, composing and editing

In 2006, the twelfth year of national monitoring, and the third cycle of assessment of writing, listening and viewing component of the English curriculum was undertaken. One of the Trend Tasks in 2006, "A Day I'll Never Forget" was the equivalent of the 1998 task "My Place". It was independent in approach with a focus on planning, composing and editing a true story over three days about a personal event.

A trend analysis of expressive writing showed a substantial improvement since 2002 for year 4 students and a modest improvement for year 8 students. Although this result is satisfying, the following comment from the report identifies a more pressing need –

> The New Zealand English curriculum reminds us that effective writing involves the development of an explicit knowledge of the steps of the writing process, such as forming intentions, composing, drafting, correcting and publishing. Students should learn to understand and use accurately the conventions of written language, especially in formal contexts, and to write clearly and appropriately, in a range of styles and for a variety of purposes. (Crooks, Flockton & White, 2007, p10)

The *Forum Comment July 2007*, stated that writing stories was the most popular writing activity for both year 4 and year 8 students, but boys continued to achieve at lower levels in writing than girls. Although there were overall gains in writing, there was no improvement in the use of writing conventions (spelling, punctuation and grammar). When requested to edit writing, spelling and punctuation were more likely to be altered than paragraphing, reorganizing or extending work.

The *Forum Comment July 2007* recommended the following priorities for progress in writing:

- By clarifying the purpose and appropriate style for writing, student engagement in an activity will be heightened
- The importance of the planning phase in writing has to be emphasized and a variety of different methods learnt.
- A focus on the learning and accurate use of writing conventions is desirable.
- The principles of proofreading and editing need to be encouraged and understood.
- Models, instruction, practice and feedback in using correct formats for functional writing would lift achievement gains.
- By providing opportunities and encouraging the use of technology that connects with social and cultural interests, more positive attitudes towards writing may emerge.

In 2002 and 2007, the Writing Survey results at both year levels showed that girls were more positive than boys about writing activities.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this probe study was to re-analyse a sample of the 1998 NEMP 'My Place' Writing Assessment data to examine students' ability to plan, compose and edit their writing. The study investigated the planning strategies used by year 4 and year 8 students and whether planning was reflected and used in writing. It also considered the use of proofing and editing aspects of spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence structure in particular.

The study found that a high percentage of students used some form of strategy to plan their writing (94% at year 4 and 98% at year 8). Generally, lists were the most common form of planning used, followed by brainstorming.

The amount of writing increased considerably from year 4 to year 8. Girls wrote marginally more than boys at year 4 but significantly more at year 8. As expected, the high ability group wrote the most but it is worth noting that the low group wrote more than the mid group.

Year 4 (21% of the sample) and the low ability group (18%) were less focused in keeping to the topic. The majority of all writing was factual with both genders recording similar results. The year 8 students all completed the task in the time available.

Spelling was the most common proofing method used by both year groups, genders and ability groups. There was a 10% drop in appropriate punctuation use from year 4 to year 8 and a significant drop for boys from year 4 to year 8 (49% to 26%). Boys (52% to 80%) overall proofing from year 4 to year 8 improved markedly more than girls (61% to 71%).The year 4 low ability and year 8 mid ability groups were the most diligent in proofing their work. The low level of proofing, particularly with the high ability groups, is a concern.

This study questioned whether children recognize correct sentence structure. If they do, the results of this study also indicates a lack of proofing for sense (reading over their work to see if it 'sounds right'). The study has highlighted a need for sentence structure to be taught, understood and modelled at all levels.

The use of non-sentences and inappropriate sentence length were significant at both year 4 and year 8, and for girls and boys. Girls showed a better understanding of sentence structure at year 4 but the year 8 results were similar. It is concerning that at year 8, 20% of boys and 18% of girls aren't using simple sentences in their writing. Twenty-nine percent of boys and 27% of girls at this level also showed a poor understanding of how to write compound sentences. Notably, the mid ability group at year 8 scored a lower rating than the low ability group.

Implications for Teaching and Learning

By clarifying the purpose and appropriate style for writing, student engagement in an activity will be heightened. The importance of the planning phase, teaching a variety of planning methods and ensuring adequate background knowledge need to be focused on to support the writing process.

Models, instruction, practice and feedback in using correct formats for writing would lift achievement gains. There is little evidence that students are learning 'sound' sentence construction which implies there is a need for it to be modelled, taught and understood at all levels. It would help to build students' knowledge of writing conventions and formats if a broad range of writing experiences are offered to them and the benefits of shared and guided writing are recognised. The skill set for writing needs to be in place for creativity to occur.

The principles of proofreading and editing must to be encouraged and understood. Self-correction during the writing process to ensure meaning should become a matter of routine.

Schools need to further develop teaching practices on such matters as error identification and self-correction, development of a spelling conscience from an early age, elementary punctuation, and engaging in shared writing to provide good modelling, particularly in sentence structure.

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Appendix 1: Samples of Writing

YEAR 4 ABILITY LEVEL EXAMPLES (Original Code by Teacher Markers)

Low

- My bedroom is <u>specal</u> to me because I can play with my toys and sleep in my bed.
- My home is specle special to me because I Live there here.
- My Nan house it's cool their because there are hese of pepele to play with and wegoto bed late.
- When we went to our cosins (we) hosue I was exskted e exksted excited and I ran into the hosu hosue house and sat donw in the liveing living room becau because of the play staion. Station.

Medium

- My favourite place is home because I have my Mum, and my Dad and my 2 two sisters.
- My Place is up on a hill and you cat see My Place becose it is beind trees. it is likie a casol becose ther is a refer a rand it.
- The speical place at my house is the backyard because I can play war with my next door nabor neighbour. and I can put up a tent and sleep in it, and play games out the back and play on my rollerblades. and I can play cricket and, soccer and Basketball.
- We whent to jaered plas and we did the laming I lick laming I get to jump on the lamss and I get to riod the ship it is reley fun becous they tack you a rand the paddick I hait whin I fall of. I tal you soume theing ous. I lik the smal of frest ear and you get to rin around the padick and I lick to pat the dog's.

High

- I think my house is special because I live there because I fell safe there, because I sleep and eat there, because my family are there and I think its great.
- I love the pack. Did you know that it is my best Place. I like it because you can do fun things there like swings, slids and other things like that.
- I like the contry because when I go to bed the trafic isn't loud and the next door neighbour is playing loud music. I also like the contry because you get to go to school on a bus and you don't have to walk.

YEAR 8 ABILITY LEVEL EXAMPLES (Original Code by Teacher Markers)

Low

- My place my place would be a spoting sporting ground because I love sport. It would be my place where I could play rugby cricket and basketball.
  My house, my house would be a place where I could ride the motor bike and feed the lambs.
  Austraila, Austraila would be a place because it is warm and fun and you can go to all the fun parks.
  Granparents house, because my Grandma and Grandad spoil me when I go to vistit them.
  Friends house, because we would play on the playstation and have heaps of fun. and I would stay the night as well.
  Shops because you can have a brouse or you can buy stuff, like food, clothes, sport equpment all sorts of stuff.

School, because all my friend a there I can learn have fun go swimming play sport take tests make things go on feild trips and camps.
Over seas, because I would meet new people visit new sights get new thing have new experiencses and have fun. (A good example of a combination of themes)

- My room is very special to me because nearly everything I own in in there….I feel kind of special when I'm in my room because it's a sort of a hideaway for me. I love it, when I feel like reading a book, I can go up to my room & know I won't be bothered by my sister or brother.
- My favorite place is in the Eire river bed where me and my friends ride motorbikes.
- My special place is Whitianga because I used to live their and I have got lots of friends their
- My House is my spechl place because I can wach T>V> and eat food all day.

Medium

- My place is a place were I go quite often it's a place were I have fun, and get a bit of exercise as well, it is at the bishopdale skate park.
- My place that is special to me is our house in Galatea. Because I have never lived anywhere else before, it has become very special to me. I remember all the times on the farm when we have done heaps of really fun things.
- My place? I think my place would have to on the Beach in Australla Australia on the Gold Coast. Soaking up all the sun surfing all day and crising the roads all day.
- My room is my favourite place because it is so peaceful and comfortable. I can sit in there and listen to music and feel relaxed.
- Kia ora I am B2. As you know I am writing about my place and let me tell you my place is AWESOME. My place is my marae.
- My secial place is the forsent, otherwise known as the redwoods. I like to run, jump and bike through the most amazing forrest in New Zealand. I like the way the trees sway in the soft brezze. I like the many types of birds you may find in the redwoods. I like to just rest and listen to the slience, broken only by the acasonil runner, walker or biker, and the songs of the birds.

High

- My room is the place where I go when I am happy; sad, tiered or full of life, when I am hungry or eaten. Sometimes when I am bored or busy but always sometime in the day. This place is special, my special place.
- My Special place is at my Nanas and Popa's when ever I go there they treat me like a priness princess.
- The navy blue water sparkling in the dying mango coloured sunlight, the smooth crashing sound of the shore breaking waves. The scenery is magnificent, something you would only find at my favourite place which if you haven't already figured out is the beach…
- My Special place is by my pool, surrounded by overhanging trees. Leaves fall gently to the pool's surface. If your in or beside the pool, you enjoy it.
- My place may sound weird when I tell you, but that's my place. My place is riding my horse…
- Faraway in the Coromandel Peninsula hidden amongst the trees, hides my special place. Just 2 minutes from the beach and 1 minute to the forestry, Is why its my special place.

Appendix 2: Research Tool 'My Place'

The task involved three phases of writing spread over three days. Within the constraints of the assessment programme, it was intended to follow recommended teaching practices.

The first day (Day One – 5 minutes) involved thinking and planning. A black and white video, which lasted for 1 minute and forty seconds, set the focus for the concept of 'special places'. Its intention was to encourage the students to think about places that were special to them.

A resume of video follows:
- Double story semi-detached houses with children playing outside and another group   further down the road.
- Old villa/student flat with four young men sitting outside.
- Timber house with a large extended family grouped outside.
- Marae with three women, a child, a bicycle and a dog.
- Holiday cottage/caravan with three women sunbathing and another working in the garden.
- Old derelict house, seemingly after a disaster.
- New suburban house with a furniture removal van unloading boxes.
- Timber bungalow with builders doing repair work on the house and children playing on the lawn in front.
- Multi-story 'little box' type apartment block resembling student accommodation.
- An aerial view of older style suburban houses.
- Modern farmhouse surrounded in trees and bush with children and animals in the foreground.

After viewing the video, the students were asked to plan their ideas, noting down their thoughts but not to start writing.

On the second day (Day Two – 20 minutes) the students were asked to write for twenty minutes about their special place, using the planning from Day One. The instructions clearly stated that the writing was to be true, not 'make-believe'. Hence, it was implied that they were to use their own first-hand experiences and knowledge of a special location for their writing.

The third day (Day 3 – 10 minutes) was for the students to take time to check their work and make changes or improvements. A dictionary was supplied.